

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES:
A CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL DILEMMA

Lesly Forest Massey

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
University of Natal

1990

FOOTNOTE ABBREVIATIONS
FOR MULTI-VOLUME WORKS AND LIBRARIES

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| <u>ANF</u> | <u>Ante-Nicene Fathers.</u> |
| <u>BCL</u> | <u>Bohn's Classical Library.</u> |
| <u>DM</u> | <u>Herbert Danby's Mishnah.</u> |
| <u>EBT</u> | <u>Epstein's Babylonian Talmud.</u> |
| <u>ICC</u> | <u>International Critical Commentary.</u> |
| <u>IDB</u> | <u>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.</u> |
| <u>ISBE</u> | <u>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.</u> |
| <u>LCL</u> | <u>Loeb Classical Library.</u> |
| <u>LCC</u> | <u>Library of Christian Classics.</u> |
| <u>NBD</u> | <u>New Bible Dictionary.</u> |
| <u>NPNF</u> | <u>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.</u> |
| <u>NSHERK</u> | <u>New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge.</u> |
| <u>PG</u> | <u>Patrologia Graeca.</u> |
| <u>TDNT</u> | <u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.</u> |

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ABSTRACT

The dilemma faced by the Christian church concerning the status of women has become one of the most critical theological and ecclesiastical issues of our time. During the course of woman's elevation in the past two centuries many mainstream Protestant churches have recognized the contradiction between traditional patriarchy and the Gospel of Christ. Accordingly many have gradually revised their doctrine on the ordination of women, either by abandoning or radically modifying their interpretation of relevant biblical passages to accommodate inevitable social change. However, there are those who have adhered to the traditional interpretation of biblical passages, which for them serve as ample proof of the divine authority for male dominance and female subservience.

An essential aspect of this thesis is a careful examination of the historical background and cultural context of those biblical passages which have served as "proof texts" for female subjection in Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is argued that the attitude of Jesus toward women was remarkably different from that of his contemporaries, and from the subsequent doctrinal tradition which developed in the Christian church. Exegetical studies as well as analyses of historical backgrounds suggest that female subordination is a social ideology upheld by Judaism and by Christian tradition as a whole, but opposed in principle by the Gospel of Christ. Early Christian writers appear to have

constructed a body of doctrine based largely on Hebrew scripture which preserved and then perpetuated an ancient and complex system of patriarchy which Jesus essentially opposed.

Therefore it must be concluded that objections by modern feminists to traditional patriarchy are quite valid and there is no compelling reason for the church to perpetuate female subordination in any form. In the view of the present writer, there is no theological justification for debarring women from ordination, from any other office or ministry of the church, or from participation in any function in church assemblies traditionally reserved for men.

From both theological and sociological points of view the current debate on the status of women is clearly relevant to the credibility of the Christian message as a whole, demanding a reassessment of hermeneutical principles and relevant dogmas and doctrines. Failure to deal effectively with this issue in the near future by all Christians will undoubtedly have a deleterious effect on their ability to address genuine human needs in this rapidly changing and increasingly complex world.

Chapter One

ANCIENT HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Judaeo-Christian tradition is rooted in the Bible, which clearly did not arise in a vacuum. An appreciation of the dilemma of Christian churches today with regard to their traditional views of women must begin with an understanding of the historical milieu of biblical literature. The value of this aspect of the study is two fold: first to establish that New Testament statements concerning women reflect the general social attitudes of the day; second, the social traditions which have held women in subjection have been perpetuated from antiquity largely by means of religion, and are only now being supplanted by superior social and moral ideologies.

I. EARLY HUMAN SOCIETIES

As yet there is no certain clue as to where role distinctions between male and female arose or why. But it is clear that modern traditions can be traced to those of earlier generations and are of both social and religious heritage.

From the standpoint of social anthropology there seems to be a great paradox in the history of the status of women. Sociologists Rosoldo and Lamphere suggest that on the one hand women have always been important, powerful and influential as social entities, the symbols of fertility and the objects of male devotion, but on the other hand there occurs in every culture a distinct pattern of discrimination

against women, denying them recognition of or access to positions of meaningful authority. In fact, in most societies women have been treated as irrelevant and clearly inferior to men.¹ Even in primitive cultures where the matriarchate was common the prominence naturally assigned to women did not imply any real power, since they seem to have always been in the position of chattels.² Contrary to the contentions of de Moubray and his school, there never has been a true matriarchy or an Amazonian society.³ In fact, most of those cultures which might seem so were either matrilineal, meaning that descendents were traced through the mother's blood line, or matrilocal in which several generations of offspring resided around the home of a revered grandmother.⁴ In most tribal societies the connection of women with the earth as sources of fecundity gave feminine symbols and goddesses certain prominence in agricultural religions.⁵ But in all of these males have consistently maintained dominance.

¹Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds. Women, Culture and Society (Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 17.

²"Matriarchy," Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. XV (London: William Benton, 1964), p. 93.

³G. A. de Moubray, Matriarchy in the Malay Peninsula (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1931), p. 37.

⁴Carol R. and Melvin Ember, Cultural Anthropology (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973), pp. 185-209.

⁵Rosemary Ruether, Liberation Theology (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), pp. 95f.

II. EGYPT

It is difficult to know whether the status of women in New Testament times felt any influence from the Land of the Nile through Hebrew associations up to the time of the Exodus. From the time of the conquest of Canaan by Israel certain cultural intercourse is evident, especially through the importation of idols, concubinage, and such like.⁶

Egyptian history begins in the time of Manes, around 5700 B.C., and very early in the development of the dynasty the royal succession, as well as general inheritance became fixed in the female line.⁷ Marriage, setting up a household and raising children appear to have been among the typical ambitions of Egyptian men and women.⁸ Monogamy was the norm and marriages were typically arranged by household heads, contracts being legalized by the signing of documents. Although it seems that marriage was thought of as a noble institution, Egyptian literature reveals a great deal of infidelity and immorality and paints an unflattering picture of women. They were considered by some as "frivolous,

⁶Visit to Egypt by Abraham (Genesis 12:10ff.) has little significance. But the later residence in Goshen (Wadi Tumilat) by the "sons of Israel" (Genesis 44-50) and the subsequent period of Captivity (Exodus 1-2) no doubt left its mark in various ways.

⁷James Henry Breasted, A History of Egypt (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), p. 86.

⁸Pierre Montet, Everyday Life in Egypt, H. R. Maxwell-Hyslop and Margaret S. Drower, trans., (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1958), p. 45.

flirtatious and unreliable, incapable of keeping a secret, untruthful and spiteful as well as naturally unfaithful." The sage Ptahhotep, in discord with his recommendation of marriage, spoke of women in general as the epitome of sin and an endless source of mischief, while men were seen as faithful, affectionate and devoted.⁹ Adulterous women were punished by death. But men were not under such a threat, and at least the nobles were free to acquire concubines if their desires were not gratified through marriage and occasional affairs.

It does appear, however, that women enjoyed considerably more social freedom than might be assumed. They freely visited the markets, engaged in trade and invested their own resources in property at will.¹⁰ For the most part Egyptians were farmers, and the heavier types of labour, as well as carpentry, metal work and other trades, belonged to the men. Women did the weaving, basketmaking, and spinning, and were used also in harvesting and grinding.¹¹ Among pastoral tribes, like the Arabs of today, women also drew water, cooked, and tended livestock.¹²

Many women participated in religious observances in

⁹Montet, p. 51.

¹⁰J. Gardner Wilkinson, The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians, Vol. I (London: John Murray, 1878), p. 316.

¹¹Cyril Aldred, Tutankhamen's Egypt (London: Sir Joseph Causton, rep. 1972), p. 9; cf. Drower, p. 42.

¹²Wilkinson, p. 316.

ancient Egypt. Herodotus regarded the Egyptians to have been the most scrupulously religious people of all mankind.¹³ They had an amazingly large and curious diversity of gods, and they believed them to be the owners of the universe, aware of all human endeavors and capable of intervention in mortal affairs. Many of their deities were either female, or had only female devotees.¹⁴ There were also a variety of ways women participated in various rituals, including the honourable station of priestess and prophetess.

In general the status of women up to the rule of the Ptolemies seems to be that of charm and exultation, but after that through Greek and Roman influence their station was somewhat demoted. They actually lost many of their legal rights during the reign of Amans II (570-526 B. C.), and few had freedoms not enjoyed by women of other Mediterranean countries by the beginning of the Christian Era.¹⁵

III. BABYLONIA

The great pre-Semitic civilization arising in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley has been styled Sumerian, Akkadian, Chaldean and Babylonian by different scholars. This culture was contemporaneous with that of Egypt and displayed certain

¹³Herodotus, II, 37.

¹⁴Margaret A. Murray, The Splendour That Was Egypt (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1949), p. 181.

¹⁵E. A. Leonard, "Paul's View of Women," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XII (July, 1950), p. 311.

similarities in custom, laws, ethics and religion. It is here especially that customs relating to the status of women can be seen as influential upon the Hebrews, and in turn evident in early Christian literature.

Glasgow's claims of a matriarchate and extraordinary leadership by women as early as 3000 B.C. are extravagant and lacking in evidence.¹⁶ But Semiramis and Nitocris, notable queens from this era, can be credited with accomplishments which rival many ancient kings.¹⁷

The greatest amount of information concerning Babylonian culture, specifically the status of women in that society, comes from the Code of Hammurabi dated around 1750 B.C.¹⁸ This famous code is generally thought to be a compilation of amendments to existing laws which date much earlier.¹⁹ Old Testament legislation and custom reveals a remarkable degree of similarity to that of the Babylonians, no doubt transmitted through Abraham from the time of his migration from Ur.²⁰

Women in Babylonian society had a number of liberties

¹⁶Maude Glasgow, The Subjection of Women and the Traditions of Men (New York: Glasgow, 1940), p. 89.

¹⁷Herodotus, I, 185 (LCL, I, p. 229).

¹⁸James B. Pritchard, Archaeology and the Old Testament (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 206ff.

¹⁹G.R. Driver and J.C. Miles, The Babylonian Laws, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 41-5.

²⁰Genesis 12:1ff.

not afforded women of other cultures, including later Judaism. They could engage in business, either on their own or in partnership. They could appear in law courts as witnesses or plaintiffs, lend money for interest, buy and sell slaves at will.²¹

But contrary to suggestions by some feminists, women in Babylonia were very much the chattel of men.²² The matchmaker of Judaism appears to have originated here, and marriages were arranged by fathers who also collected the bride price called the tirhatu.²³ A significant part of the marriage contract was the bride's gift, or marriage settlement, called the nudunnu.²⁴ In the home the wife was the mistress of her dowry provided from her father's estate. But her husband was the ba'al of the wife as he was the ba'al of his slave, ox,

²¹S.A. Cook, The Laws of Moses and the Code of Hammurabi, Vol. I (London: John Murray, 1878), p. 71; E.A. Wallis Budge, Babylonian Life and History, Second edition (London: The Religious Tract society, rep. 1925), p. 165; Charles Seltman, Women in Antiquity (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), pp. 30-32.

²²Cf. Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant to Be (Waco: Word Books, 1974), p. 41.

²³The letters of Nimmuria to Dusratta and Kallima-Sin in the Tel-Amarna Tablets provide details. Cf. Morris Jastrow, The Civilization of Babylonia and Assyria (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1915), p. 346.

²⁴Cook, p. 78; A similar gift in later Hebrew culture was called the mohar, which Laban consumed incurring the anger of his daughters Leah and Rachel (Gen. 31:15). The Chaldee term also appears in the Hebrew vocabulary as nadin, a large gift presented to a harlot; Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, Samuel P. Trugelles, trans. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, rep. 1964), p. 535.

sheep, fields and grain.²⁵ Chastity was expected of a wife and generally morality was viewed with a bias in favour of men.²⁶ A wife could be divorced for virtually any grievance, but infidelity was dealt with harshly. It would seem then that the bias of Hebrew laws and customs in favour of men is traceable, at least in part, to Babylonia.²⁷

IV. GREECE

Euripides has spoken representatively for the male population of his era through the character of Iphigeneia: "worthier than ten thousand women one man is to look at light."²⁸ Aristophanes echoes these sentiments by describing women as "a plague, the source of all evils to man."²⁹ Sufficient writers of the classical period speak on the subject of the status of women to portray clearly the unfavourable attitudes which doubtless prevailed for several centuries in ancient Greece.

The island of Crete was the center of the Aegean

²⁵Cook, p. 77.

²⁶Budge, p. 165; Cook, p. 102.

²⁷Information from ancient Sumerian, Assyrian and Persian cultures presents essentially the same picture; Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, H. M. Parshley, ed. and trans. (New York: Bantam, 1961); Charles Seltman, Women in Antiquity (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956).

²⁸Euripides, Iphigeneia at Aulis, 1393 (LCL, I, p. 131).

²⁹Aristophanes, The Thesmophoriazusae, 786 (LCL, III, p. 199).

population from as early as 2000 B.C. long before its invasion by Greek tribes. Some have claimed that during this primitive era all the Aegean peoples, including the Pelasgians and Lydians, lived in matriarchal regimes and that women could choose numbers of husbands in succession, practice any profession of their choice and genuinely dominated communities. But there is very little supportive evidence for these claims.³⁰

The earliest information concerning Greek customs appears in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, dated around the ninth century B.C. The identity of Homer is still a mystery and there is much debate concerning the accuracy of his tales about Midas, Knossos and the Trojans. But in his poetry women are treated with respect and occupy positions of honour. In fact, women were virtually venerated in earliest Greece, although the honours related directly to their femininity. Their natural confinement to the home in rearing young, gathering medicinal plants, supervising the household, and training animals for leisure created an aura of respect, as if women were closer to nature than men. Nowhere in Homeric literature does there occur any rude or abusive treatment of women as a class. Single women felt free to mingle with young men in public places, to attend dances and banquets, and to meet their sweethearts for amorous play

³⁰Andre Bonnard, Greek Civilization, A.L. Sells, translator (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 20.

without fear of social reprimand. But it should be noted that most of the females in Homer's stories are wives and daughters of tribal chieftains, and do not fairly represent the status of women in general.³¹ And these women are the only supportive evidence offered for the Greek matriarchy, who in fact were merely a few highly respected females in a male dominated society.³² Nevertheless, women of Homeric Greece appear to have enjoyed a degree of honour not permitted to them in later times.³³

From the days of Homer to the classical age, a great change occurred in the status of Greek women. Several factors may have contributed to their rapid degradation. Initial changes in Greek polity were brought about by Solon, ruling in the eighth century B.C. From one standpoint the work of Solon made a positive contribution to the future of mankind, in that his concept of equality among citizens provided a basis for the development of democracy. But the two principal flaws in Solon's form of democracy were the division of society into slave and citizen classes, and the concept of inferiority of women.³⁴ A by-product of his

³¹Andromache and Hecuba in Iliad and Penelope in Odyssey.

³²George Toumbouros, "The Laws of Ancient Greece," Parallel Legislation, Vol. I (Munich: Suddeutscher Verlag Press, 1959), p. 41.

³³J. P. Mahaffy, Social Life in Greece (London: Macmillan, 1877), p. 146.

³⁴For an exhaustive discussion of slavery under Solon's polity, see Bonnard, pp. 115-126.

government was an increasing interest in warfare and conquest. Once the Greeks discovered and developed metal alloys and manufactured implements, they turned warfare into a profitable business. Dorians destroyed the remaining peaceful civilization of Aegean peoples and began exploits in surrounding areas. During this period the aged tribal chieftains, interested mainly in the defence of local properties which included their women, gave way to the young and vigorous warrior-politicians. Those who returned from exploits in Miletus and Sardis, having established contact with the Persians who had invaded Ionia, developed new views of the rights of women. It may be that men saw something advantageous in the Asiatic idea of the harem and began to liberate themselves to follow their own pleasures without criticism from mothers, sisters or wives. At any rate, the systems of matrilineal residence and matrilineal descent and inheritance were abolished in favour of monogamy, and the legitimate wife was reduced to an agent of procreation with other women as objects of pleasure and amusement.³⁵

Social Status

In classical Greece women were greatly restricted in social intercourse except within a limited circle of friends, and in general led an existence hardly acknowledged outside

³⁵Mahaffy, pp. 147-8. Although the origin of monogamy is controversial, Bonnard contends that among the Greeks it was adopted only in the early classical period, and was in fact an unfavourable trend contributing to the degradation of women in general; pp. 128-30.

the home. Some of the earliest classical writers, such as Hesiod of the eighth century B.C., tirelessly dilate on the cunning, coquetry and sensuality of women. Simonides of Amorgos divided women pedantically into ten categories, each represented by an animal and each intentionally degrading; for example, the daughter of a sow, the fox-woman, the busy bee, the proud mare, the daughter of a barking bitch, and such like.³⁶ It appears that within a single century Greek women as a class retreat into a defensive shell of ignorance, silence and inactivity.

It is certain that women in classical Greece married young, and throughout their lives had little contact with men other than their own husbands. Resultingly, each female judged the entire male population by the features and mannerisms of her husband. Plutarch relates that Hiero, a tyrant of Syracuse in the fifth century, was once rebuked by a friend for his foul breath. He in turn rebuked his wife for not informing him. She replied, "I supposed that all men smelled so."³⁷

Men were away from home more than not, and when at home they generally lived in quarters separate from their wives. Husbands and wives ate together, if there were no male guests, but respectable wives occupied themselves elsewhere during banquets and when the husband entertained

³⁶Bonnard, p. 127-8.

³⁷Plutarch, Moralia, 90B (LCL, II, p. 25-27).

visitors.³⁸

Woman's apartments, called the gynaecoonitis, were off limits to males. Simon incurred the wrath of Lysias for forcing his way into the ladies' apartments in a certain quarter of Athens. Lysias mentions that his niece and his sister had become so well ordered and conservative from life in the gynaecoonitis that they were ashamed to be seen even by their own kinsmen.³⁹

The Greeks regarded women to have been designed by eternal powers to remain indoors, while men were designed for outdoor life.⁴⁰ Both were bound to live according to nature's design, or bear the penalty. Therefore, a wife seldom left the house. If such an occasion became necessary the husband's permission was sought and she remained in the company of a female servant. Consequently, the men conducted most of the marketing along with other forms of business. Occasionally female slaves were sent on errands, but usually only hetaerae and freed-women of the lowest class appeared in the market place.⁴¹ The extremely secluded lives led by young girls naturally produced very modest and submissive

³⁸Herodotus, V, 18 (LCL, III, p. 19); Lysias, On the Murder of Eratosthenes, 23, 39-41 (LCL, p. 15, 23).

³⁹Lysias, Against Simon, 6f. (LCL, p. 75).

⁴⁰Xenophon, Oeconomicus, VII, 23-34 (LCL, pp 421-425).

⁴¹Wilhelm A. Becker, Characles; Illustrations of the Private Life of the Ancient Greeks, F. Metcalfe, trans. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1895), p. 462-98.

wives. Aristophanes indicates that among some classes even married women would shrink back and blush if seen at the window by a passing man.⁴²

However, Plutarch indicates that women did frequent the festivities associated with weddings and funerals, and had liberty to participate in religious devotions, even the mysteries.⁴³ And attitudes varied considerably with locality and time throughout Greek history. The shy Attic girls hardly compare with the forward "tom boys" of Sparta, the military state. Visiting Athenians were left goggle-eyed from the free association between Spartan boys and girls. Euripides reports that these brash young ladies wore clothes that exposed the thigh, took part in athletic events, and even wrestled with male competitors.⁴⁴ Lydia also had customs incongruous with the conservative standards of Attic Greece.⁴⁵ Strabo indicates in fact that both Lydian and Armenian girls typically spent a period of their early womanhood in cult prostitution.⁴⁶

Greek women knew nothing other than their secluded, stifled existence and therefore were happy with it. If

⁴²Aristophanes, The Thesmophoriazousae, 797 (LCL, III, p. 201).

⁴³Plutarch, Moralia, 775, D, E (LCL, X, p. 23).

⁴⁴Euripides, Andromache, 595-600 (LCL, II, p. 461).

⁴⁵Herodotus, I, 94 (LCL, I, p. 123).

⁴⁶Strabo, Geography, XI, 14, 16 (LCL, V, p. 341).

liberation had been afforded them most would not have been able to cope. Plato actually favoured communal meals for mixed groups, as suggested in his proposals for the ideal state, but he recognized that such would be difficult to impose on women so acclimated to subjection.⁴⁷ Little had changed four centuries later when Cornelius Nepos contrasted liberated Roman women with the shy and secluded Greeks.⁴⁸

Naturally, censorious regulations like those of Solon did not affect the entire culture, but were limited to upper classes and city dwellers. The poorer rural communities seem to have remained traditionally linked to the unrestrained Homeric days. Dio Chrysostom reports concerning a village in Euboea, in central Greece, that the women freely associated with the men, sat beside their husbands at meals, and freely talked and joked even with strangers.⁴⁹

Another matter of concern to Greek writers is whether women should be permitted any degree of free speech. Plutarch boldly expressed his opinion that a woman should be quiet, or at least express her opinions through the voice of her husband.⁵⁰ But it is evident

⁴⁷Plato, Laws, VI, 281C, D (LCL, IX p. 489).

⁴⁸Cornelius Nepos, On the Great Generals of Foreign Nations, "Preface," 1-8 (LCL, p. 369-70).

⁴⁹Dio Chrysostom, VII, 64-80 (LCL, I, p. 323-31).

⁵⁰Plutarch, Moralia, 142D (LCL, II, p. 321).

that several writers championed the cause of female elevation, in opposition to an almost violent defence of the status quo by their male contemporaries. Aristophanes, in a play entitled Ecclesiazusae, portrays the female sex as demanding, and certainly deserving, better social conditions.⁵¹ It might be that these and other spokesmen flourishing in the late fifth and early fourth centuries were awakened to the plight of women by the works of Euripides, less than half a century earlier (around 485-405 B.C.). Bonnard takes special note of how Euripides agitated the whole of Athens by his strong expression of sympathy for the tragic reality of female subjection:

In the eyes of his contemporaries Euripides paid a heavy price for not respecting Pericles' dictatorial instruction: "Silence regarding women, silence about their virtues, silence about their misfortune." Euripides felt too keenly for them to be silent.⁵²

The legal status of Greek women can be stated concisely. As a natural result of the social norms which held women to their lives of seclusion and dependence, the law regarded them as minors all their

⁵¹Also Plato in his Republic. See Mahaffy, pp. 274-5.

⁵²Bonnard, p. 130. See also G.W. Botsford and E.G. Sihler, editors, Hellenic Civilization (New York: Octagon, 1965), pp. 340-5 on a political demonstration by women in Athens sometime between 431 and 404 B.C.

lives with no more civil authority than children.⁵³ Every female was under the legal care of a guardian, and at the death of her husband a son assumed the role. No woman could conduct any kind of legal transaction, and anything done by a male upon the advice of a woman was legally invalid.⁵⁴

Macedonia seems to have been an exception due to the extraordinary influence of ancient queens. The result was a succession of proud and haughty princesses who had wealth, political power and social independence. Some of these Macedonian females are said to have led armies in battle and, equally revolting to Athenians, made proposals of marriage to men.⁵⁵ After the breakdown of barriers between Macedonia and Greece during the time of Philip of Macedon, women of the north retained their traditional social freedom and later Roman influence merely increased their liberties, extending into the early Christian era.⁵⁶ Evidence for this is seen in the

⁵³T. G. Tucker, Life in Ancient Athens (London: Macmillan and Company, 1907), p. 52.

⁵⁴Plutarch, Lives, "Solon," XXI (LCL, I, p. 463).

⁵⁵Mitchell Carroll, Greek Women (Philadelphia: Rittenhouse, 1908), p. 133.

⁵⁶E.M. Blaiklock, From Prison in Rome- Letters to the Philippians and Philemon (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), p. 47.

Lukan account of Paul's evangelism there.⁵⁷

Marriage and Home

The ancient Greeks considered procreation a duty to the gods, to the State and to their ancestors in order to produce a succession of worshippers, warrior-citizens and family heirs. The production of children, therefore, was the primary purpose of marriage and every man felt obliged to fulfill his obligation. Xenophon says, "We obviously select for wives the women who will bear us the best children, and then marry them to raise a family."⁵⁸ Paternal selection of a bride for the son was also the norm.⁵⁹ Xenophon indicates that some women were employed as professional matchmakers, which in fact amounted to the negotiation of business deals between families.⁶⁰

It is likely that even these customs varied with geography and social strata. Dio Chrysostom gives a picture of courtship among the respectable poor, and it seems that boys and girls had a freedom of association which could allow for the development of true love.⁶¹

⁵⁷Acts 16:13, 15; 17:4, 12.

⁵⁸Xenophon, Memorabilia, II, 2, 4 (LCL, p. 107).

⁵⁹Plutarch, Moralia, 13F (LCL, I, p. 65ff.).

⁶⁰Xenophon, Memorabilia, II, 6, 36 (LCL, p. 145).

⁶¹Dio Chrysostom, VII, 80 (LCL, I, p. 331).

There is reason to believe also that efforts to maintain, or to enhance, social status through marriage served to destroy general appreciation for marital fidelity among Greek nobility. Such marriages were characterized by indifference, coldness and discontent. Xenophon said that in his day there was no one with whom a husband conversed less than his wife.⁴² Four centuries later Plutarch observed the failures in the Greek marriage system, and advocated a far more serious and solemn approach. In his "Advice to the Bride and Groom" Plutarch stated that marriage should be entered upon because of love, and he encouraged every couple to develop companionship in order to achieve the ideal marriage state.⁴³ He also encouraged wives to exercise the simple and common attributes which create a bond of love, such as conversation, character and companionship, for marriage should be an intimate union.

In spite of the appearance of Plutarch as an idealist and champion of woman's elevation, he clearly advocated traditional subordination of wives:

. . . if they subordinate themselves to their husbands, they are commended, but if they want to have control, they cut a sorrier figure than the subjects of their

⁴²Xenophon, Oeconomicus, II, 12 (LCL, pp. 387-9).

⁴³Ibid., 140-142 (LCL, II, pp. 309-325).

control. And control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman, not as the owner has control of a piece of property but, as the soul controls the body, by entering into her feelings and being knit to her by good will. As, therefore, it is possible to exercise care over the body without being a slave to its pleasures and desires, so it is possible to govern a wife, and at the same time to delight and gratify her.⁶⁴

Probably the most significant contribution the Greeks made to Christian tradition, as far as the status of women is concerned, was the Aristotelian political structure of rulers and subjects at every level of society from household to state.⁶⁵ This submission and domination ethos became a significant factor in Pauline theology in that it lent support to the Jewish concept of female subordination, and feminists today are inclined to see it as having crept into Christianity from Hellenistic sources.⁶⁶

The household duties of a wife in ancient Greece were the sort to be expected under the circumstances of her social status. The system theoretically demanded

⁶⁴Ibid., 140, A (LCL, II, p. 309).

⁶⁵Aristotle, Politics, I:1-13.

⁶⁶Elizabeth Shüssler Fiorenza, "Breaking the Silence- Becoming Visible," in "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology," Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds., Concilium: Religion in the Eighties (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), p. 5.

strict obedience to the husband as the head of the household.⁶⁷ The wife, as the principal ward of her husband, was placed in charge of all household management, including all moveable objects in the household, the servants and the children.⁶⁸ Although the Greeks recognized children as the offspring and the responsibility of both parents, the mothers were delegated the task of child supervision. The concept of "community of property" seems to have existed in some areas of Greece, but Plutarch says that the property should be thought to belong to the husband.⁶⁹ He recommended the pooling of all resources into a common fund, with the husband as the chief executive and the wife as general manager. Xenophon observed that there is probably no one to whom a husband would commit a greater number of significant affairs than to his wife.⁷⁰

In wealthy households the wife controlled a large force of servants, male and female, each responsible to her for instructions. In poorer communities, both urban and rural, the wife did her own chores assisted

⁶⁷Euripides, Iphigeneia at Aulis, 725 (LCL, I, p. 69).

⁶⁸Xenophon, Oeconomicus, VI-X (LCL, p. 443).

⁶⁹Plutarch, Moralia, 140, E (LCL, II, p. 311).

⁷⁰Xenophon, Oeconomicus, III, 12 (LCL, p. 385).

only by her children.

In spite of the dearth of love and fidelity in many marriages, the security of a home and husband was to most women a coveted possession. Married women were often torn between the desire for true love and companionship, and the need for security in marriage. For this reason, they took great care to avoid separation and divorce. The two primary causes for divorce in Greece were adultery and barrenness.⁷¹

Education

According to Xenophon, young girls in Greece were encouraged to see, hear, and say as little as possible. This is doubtless the practical result of various social restrictions placed upon women by tradition, but there seems to be little to suggest that the Greeks officially opposed the education of women. Socrates is credited with saying:

It is apparent that the talent of women is not at all inferior to that of men though they are wanting in bodily vigour and strength, so that whosoever of you has a wife, let him teach her with confidence whatsoever he would wish her to know.⁷²

Throughout Greek history there were certain

⁷¹Dio Chrysostom, VII, 143-51 (LCL, I, pp. 369-73).

⁷²Xenophon, The Banquet, II, 9 (J. S. Watson, trans. Xenophon's Minor Works, p. 156).

advocates of higher education for women, including Cleobulus, of the seventh century, Pythagoras, of the sixth century, and Plato, of the fourth century B.C., although the latter is often credited with the notion that women were intellectually and spiritually inferior.⁷³ Plutarch, representing the first Christian century, also supported female education though he encouraged husbands to carry out the instruction. In fact he thought it rather noble for a woman to consider her husband her guide, philosopher, and teacher. While relatively few women attained any degree of scholarship, Plutarch recognized that educational advancement of women was to the advantage of the entire society.⁷⁴

Religion

In spite of the strict seclusion and modesty which characterized Greek women, they were permitted throughout recorded history to take part in religious activities uninhibited, and unveiled. Around 250 B.C. Herondas described the activities of two women who visited the temple of Asclepius, the god of healing, to make an offering. They do not appear at all timid as

⁷³See Carroll, p. 299: Plato, Laws, VII, 804, E (LCL, X, p. 57).

⁷⁴Plutarch, Moralia, 145, E (LCL, II, p. 341).

they wait at the gate among a crowd of visitors and walk about the grounds admiring the artwork. They converse freely with one another and the priest, and pray aloud to a number of gods.⁷⁵ However, the activities and forms of participation were consistently such that reflected an inferior status on the part of women, even when female deities were the objects of devotion and where women served as priestesses.

These national religions virtually disappeared soon after Alexander the Great, and attention became fixed on philosophies or turned to the great variety of mystery cults, the most noted being the Eleusian, Orphic and Dionysiac mysteries. This new kind of religion was attractive for a number of reasons. First, the mysteries were almost totally foreign in origin, and thus held an exotic appeal in an atmosphere of world travel and conquest. Second, they were secretive and operated on private membership, focussing attention on the individual rather than the state. Third, they included certain ecstatic and enthusiastic elements which appealed to a nation which had become disillusioned with the dull anthropomorphism of the national gods. Fourth, and of special concern to

⁷⁵Herondas, Mime IV; see also Pollux, Onomasticon I, 23.

women, there were in the mysteries positions of honour, power and leadership available to both sexes, and through this avenue females could find expression and escape from the stifling norms of Greek society.

Women were attracted to certain mysteries solely because of the opportunities for spiritual expression and leadership. The worship of Isis, for example, had a strong appeal to women because there was no discrimination against women even in the priesthood.⁷⁶ The same was true of the Eleusian cult. Mithraism, on the contrary, was exclusively for men and many scholars feel this to have been a serious handicap in competing with the other mysteries.⁷⁷

There were also certain mystery cults which appealed to women because of the bizarre nature of the rites, ranging from the truly spiritual to the licentious. It seems that those of the latter category were the most popular because of the deep psychological desire of many women to break free from social restraint.⁷⁸ This was particularly true of the Syrian

⁷⁶C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 91-100.

⁷⁷James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (New York: Harper, n.d.) p. 149.

⁷⁸Frederick C. Grant, Hellenistic Religions (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1953), p. 26; Barrett, p. 100.

Goddess Attargatis, described by Lucian.⁷⁹

Prostitution

An intriguing feature of the social status of women in ancient Greece is a concept of prostitution peculiar to that culture. Greek women were divided into two basic categories. The first comprised all respectable wives and maidens, and were classified legally as "citizenwomen." The second category included the various categories of prostitute, termed "courtesans," "mistresses," "companions," "harlots," and "hetaerae." As early as the sixth century B.C. prostitution came to be sanctioned both socially and religiously, and was regarded an essential and permanent institution in Greek society.⁸⁰

Several factors contributed to this phenomenon. First is the Greek appreciation for all manner of beauty, as perhaps evidenced by their art. The standards of seclusion enforced upon Greek wives and daughters naturally hampered any display of feminine beauty. Courtesans, therefore, came to serve as the acceptable avenue of displaying openly beauty and glamour. A second factor was the Greek attitude toward

⁷⁹Lucian, IV (LCL, pp. 339-411); cf. Grant, p. 117.

⁸⁰Thomas Egbert James, "Prostitution," Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. XVIII (London: William Benton, 1964), p. 597.

"strangers," or non-citizens.²¹ Citizens in Athens particularly were concerned for protecting the purity of Greek blood in every family lineage, and for this reason marriages with non-citizen women were outlawed. In Sparta such women were not allowed even residence within the city.

Third, and related to the above, there developed a paradoxical attitude among Greek men, in that while they insisted on confining their wives to the home they also enjoyed female company on walks, at banquets, in the markets and on business engagements. Since no social restraints were attached to the activities of "strangers," these women made ideal companions in all activities not suitable for wives. Men were willing to pay for this company, and as one would expect the relationships usually included sexual intimacy. This role was rather profitable, and offered some degree of security to those women not privileged to contract marriages with men of the citizen class.

Fourth, a religious sanction of prostitution came into Greek society through the cult of Aphrodite, the Goddess of Fertility. In this cult men engaged in sexual intercourse with temple harlots as an act of

²¹James Donaldson, Woman; Her Position and Influence in Ancient Greece and Rome, and Among Early Christians (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1907), p. 292.

religious devotion.⁸² Strabo reported that there were a thousand cult prostitutes in Corinth alone.⁸³

These four factors combined to create a complex system of prostitution almost as significant to Greek culture as the institution of marriage. There can be little doubt about the influence of this system upon the early church in the Gentile world, both in its definition of sexual immorality and its concept of marital fidelity. Several New Testament texts must be read against the backdrop of cult prostitution and relationships with hetaerae, particularly Paul's letters to Corinth.⁸⁴

In general the attitude toward prostitution in Greece was one of acceptance as an essential part of the culture. Plutarch advises the wife of an incontinent man to be tolerant if he engages in an occasional affair. But both Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom speak out strongly against immorality as if they recognized extra-marital intercourse to be a violation of higher principles.⁸⁵

⁸²Paul LaCroix, History of Prostitution, Samuel Putnam, trans. (Chicago: Pascal Covici, 1926), Vol. I, p. 239.

⁸³Strabo, Geography, VIII, 6:20 (LCL, IV, p. 189ff.).

⁸⁴I Corinthians 6:16-18; 7:2; II Corinthians 12:21.

⁸⁵Plutarch, Moralia, 140, B (LCL, II, p. 309); 144, B, D (LCL, II, p. 333f.); Dio Chrysostom, VIII, 133; 42 (LCL, I, p. 363-9).

V. ROME

The Ancient Roman Empire has been described as the "Goddess of the earth and of its people, without a peer or second."⁸⁶ Its history reveals the astonishing transition of a state of backward farming villages into a vast empire spreading outward from the central metropolis, Rome. The turning point seems to be the end of the second Punic War, 201 B.C., when armies returned home from foreign centers with immense luxuries and the Roman population began to develop a taste for the exotic.⁸⁷ Within a century Rome became an oligarchy of prosperous landowners and merchants with a lower class of proletarians. The result was an upheaval in social standards and cultural traits.

Social Status

Kiefer states that the greatest effect of these changes were seen in the lives of Roman women.⁸⁸ As usual, women were the principal beneficiaries of the luxurious life constructed by the Romans, and by the first Christian century their elevated status had

⁸⁶F. R. Cowell, Everyday Life in Ancient Rome (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1961), p. 13.

⁸⁷Livy, XXX, 26 (LCL, VIII, p. 457-9); XXXIX, 6 (LCL, XI, p. 235-6).

⁸⁸Otto Kiefer, Sexual Life in Ancient Rome. Gilbert and Helen Highet, trans. (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd. 1941), p. 43.

reached an advanced stage influencing women throughout the empire.

The status of the Roman matron was that of dignity, honour and independence. Unlike the Greeks, Roman women were free to walk or ride about at will.⁸⁹ Women could be found attending all forms of public entertainment, including theatrical performances, chariot races and the gladiatorial combats, and husbands welcomed the presence of their wives at banquets and celebrations.⁹⁰

Marriage and Home

By the first century A.D. Roman women were legally independent, the patria potestas having become virtually obsolete.⁹¹ A wife's personal property as well as any inheritance from her father remained in her control, completely independent of her husband. Only the dowry fell under his control and could be retained by him in the event of her disloyalty.⁹²

The Roman marriage contract was of two varieties.

⁸⁹Livy, V, 25 (LCL, III, p. 89).

⁹⁰Cornelius Nepos, Lives (LCL; preface, p. 26ff.); Cowell, pp. 170-178.

⁹¹Gaius, III, 17 on the patria potestas which code in earlier times protected the supreme power of the father of a family.

⁹²Gellius, XVII, 6 (LCL, III, pp. 223-25).

Under the old style the wife was technically under the authority of the husband by a legal stipulation of their contract called cum manu.⁷³ Although it was discouraged by Augustus, a second type of contract sine manu became very popular. Under this arrangement a marriage was socially acceptable but free of all legal responsibility. Even with this arrangement at first the wife had to be under the authority of some man, a ward or guardian chosen from among her relatives, but by the time of Hadrian this too passed away.⁷⁴ With the advancement of legislation fathers lost their right to marry daughters off for political, social or financial reasons without their consent.⁷⁵

Numerous marriage customs in the modern west can be traced to the Romans, including the giving of an engagement and wedding ring, which is probably a remnant of the older coemptio, or "earnest money"

⁷³This arrangement upheld the ancient system of tutelage under which all women fell, requiring that a bride pass from "under the hand" of her father to that of her husband. See T. G. Tucker, Life in the Roman World (New York: Macmillan, 1922), p. 289.

⁷⁴Gaius, I, 145; cf. Jerome Carcopino, Daily Life in Ancient Rome (New Haven: Yale University Press, rep. 1962), p. 76.

⁷⁵Plutarch, Lives, "Marcus Cato," XXIV, 2-4 (LCL, II, pp. 375-77); Pliny, Letters, I, 14 (LCL, I, pp. 49-53).

serving as a deposit on the bride.⁹⁶ The choice of the third finger of the left hand is also Roman, the reasons for which are explained by Aulus Gellius.⁹⁷ Plutarch provides a thorough treatment of the typical Roman wedding ceremony.⁹⁸

Social change was not easy for the Romans. Many feared the consequences of legal freedom for women. Livy says that women rioted over the restrictive laws enacted by Gaius Oppius, and virtually demanded representation in any legislation which concerned them.⁹⁹ Juvenal predicted with trepidation:

No present will you ever make if
your wife forbids; nothing will you
ever sell if she objects; nothing
will you buy without her
consent.¹⁰⁰

Juvenal also despised intellectualism among females.¹⁰¹ But Roman women were never intentionally restricted from education as were the Greeks. Whenever science, law, literature or philosophy came into a

⁹⁶Pliny, Natural History, XXXIII, 28 (LCL, IX, p. 25); Juvenal, VI, 25 (LCL, p. 85).

⁹⁷Gellius, X, 10; cf Carcopino, p. 81. Also the English word "matrimony" from the Latin matris munia, "duties of the mother."

⁹⁸Plutarch, The Roman Questions, XX, 101-8.

⁹⁹Livy, XXXIV, 1 (LCL, I, p. 413-4).

¹⁰⁰Juvenal, VI, 121-13 (LCL, p. 101).

¹⁰¹Juvenal, VI, 450f. (LCL, p. 121).

Roman home the wife was welcome to participate in it. Some suggest that by the first century B.C. schools for girls existed even among the common people.¹⁰²

Nonetheless, there arose a number of champions of feminism, such as Musonius and Rufus, claiming for women complete independence on grounds of moral and intellectual equality of the sexes.¹⁰³ But others like Juvenal viewed feminism with disdain, opposing every pursuit in which women ventured to compete with men.¹⁰⁴ Many were appalled by the unfeminine behaviour of some women in the attempt to prove themselves the equal of men.¹⁰⁵

The natural result of feminism in Rome was the disintegration of roles in the marriage union. Many women refused to have children, as part of their reproach of male oriented traditions, and it seems that for this reason alone numerous marriages at the end of the first and beginning of the second century were childless, including that of Trajan, Hadrian and Pliny.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰²Cowell, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰³Carcopino, p. 85.

¹⁰⁴Juvenal, VI, 398-456 (LCL, pp. 117-121).

¹⁰⁵Juvenal, VI, 246-64, 300-05 (LCL, pp. 103-7); Petronius, Satyricon 67, 70-76 (LCL, p. 126, 132-52).

¹⁰⁶Pliny the Younger, Letters IX, 36; Juvenal VI, 268; Petronius, 41, 77; cf. Carcopino, p. 90-91.

Tucker, expressing a view of most scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sees a principal cause of disintegration in Roman society in:

. . .the increasing demands of women, their increasing unwillingness to bear the natural responsibilities of matrimony, their extravagant expectations, and the impossibility of there being two masters in one house claiming equal authority.¹⁰⁷

It cannot be denied that Roman society suffered prolific immorality during the era in which Christianity was born. But it is interesting that writers of that time, like many today, blamed feminism for Roman decadence and were highly critical of women for immoral conduct which their society had reserved for men only.¹⁰⁸

As early as Augustus divorce was already becoming a serious problem and eventually would reach epidemic proportions. His Lex de ordinibus maritandis was intended to check the decline in birthrate by encouraging divorcees to remarry and to safeguard the wife's dowry.¹⁰⁹ But he allowed divorce for virtually

¹⁰⁷Tucker, p. 292.

¹⁰⁸Sallust, Conspiracy of Catiline, XIII (LCL, p. 23); Horace, Odes, III, 6 (LCL, p. 201-3); Ovid, The Amores, I, 8, 44 (LCL, p. 351); Tacitus, The Germans, 17-19 (LCL, I, p. 157-9); Juvenal, VI, 500 (LCL, p. 133).

¹⁰⁹Seutonius, The Lives of the Caesars, II, 34 (LCL, I, p. 177-9).

any cause, provided the intentions were announced publicly. By the time of Juvenal marital relationships among nobles were generally shallow, and many women were known to marry scores of men in succession as if collecting husbands had become a competitive sport.¹¹⁰

In spite of it there were many stable marriages, with wives displaying exemplary love and fidelity.¹¹¹ In particularly trying times when many nobles were placed on proscription lists, and were either exiled, executed or asked to commit suicide, great ladies of aristocracy stood out as hallmarks of devotion. Examples are Sextia, who chose to die with her husband Aemilius Scaurus, Paxaea wife of Pomponius Labeo and Paulina wife of philosopher Seneca.¹¹² Pliny also gives numerous examples of marital love and devotion.¹¹³

Carcopino expresses the opinion that the Roman woman of this era enjoyed a dignity and independence at least equal if not superior to those claimed by women

¹¹⁰Juvenal, VI, 1421 (LCL, p. 95); Seneca, On Benefits III, 16 (LCL, III, p. 157).

¹¹¹Appian, The Civil Wars, IV, 36 (LCL, IV, p. 203).

¹¹²Tacitus, Annals, VI, 29 (LCL, p. 203); XV, 62-4 (LCL, p. 317-9).

¹¹³Pliny, IV, 19 (LCL, I, p. 333); VIII, 5 (LCL, II, p. 103).

in the modern west.¹¹⁴ Various writers dilate at length on the daily routine of wealthy ladies in Roman society, applying make-up, trying on clothes and sitting amidst a troupe of attendants busy over an elaborate hair-do, all of which they found amusing.¹¹⁵ But it seems that a life of luxury and leisure was only enjoyed by women of the upper classes, since slaves and working class mothers continued to toil in the home and fields as if social change had passed them by.

Religion

As in other areas of life Roman women enjoyed freedom of religious expression, and frequently held positions of honour and authority. The Vestal Virgins, for example, were highly revered by the public.¹¹⁶ Roman religion was different from that of the Greeks, however, in that there was little place for emotional release or individual expression. Prayers were confined to fixed formulas, and ceremonies were usually solemn and sedate.¹¹⁷ But as it was with the Greeks, the

¹¹⁴Carcopino, p. 53.

¹¹⁵Juvenal, VI, 487-504 (LCL, p. 123-5); Martial, Epigrams, II, 66 (LCL, I, p. 147), IX, 37 (LCL, II, p. 97-9); Ovid, Ars Amatoria III, 211

¹¹⁶W. Warde Fowler, Social Life at Rome in the Age of Cicero (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), p. 18-19.

¹¹⁷Donaldson, p. 93.

Mystery Religions brought exotic elements to Rome and provided an avenue for expression. Livy gives a detailed description of such ceremonies in connection with the Syrian Mother Goddess, introduced to Rome as Cebele in 204 B.C.¹¹⁸ Both Plutarch and Juvenal comment at length on the sometimes orgiastic rituals to Bona Dea, which were very popular among women.¹¹⁹

VI. JUDAISM

The status of Jewish women during the period more closely related to the New Testament background is somewhat difficult to establish, for a number of reasons. First, the information obtained from the Old Testament covers too much time and the customs involved vary even within its pages. Secondly, the opinions of the rabbis, upon whom one must depend for information related to the fourth century B.C. onwards, differ widely regarding the place of women in the Jewish culture. Some maintained a very strict and severe attitude toward women, especially Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and Joshua ben Hananya, both dated around A.D. 80-120. A more tolerant and liberal view was held by Hillel and his followers during the first century, as well as

¹¹⁸Livy, XXXIX, 13-17 (LCL, XI, p. 251).

¹¹⁹Juvenal, VI, 515-541 (LCL, p. 125-7); Plutarch, Lives, "Caesar," XI, 3f. (LCL, VII, pp. 463-5).

Akiba and ben Azzai from a slightly later period.¹²⁰ A third difficulty, and one with which there is considerable disagreement, is the uncertainty about the age of views, regulations and customs recorded by the rabbis during and after the second Christian century. Since even rabbinical writings contain many anachronisms, care must be taken not to assign customs mistakenly from a late period to a more ancient one. Without extreme caution, rabbinical doctrines from as late as Constantine can be read back into the time of the Hasmonaeans. There were, in fact, significant changes in Jewish culture during that period from the Babylonian Exile down to the third Christian century. But in spite of these difficulties it is possible to reconstruct a reasonably accurate picture of the prevalent attitude toward women during this significant phase of history.

Early History

During the patriarchal age customs reflect a mixture of Babylonian and bedouin traits. Abraham was a wealthy nomad, and his exploits exposed his tribe to the customs of virtually every people from Ur to Egypt. Sarah is a good example of an early Hebrew wife, and is

¹²⁰Herbert Danby (trans.), The Mishnah (London: Oxford University Press, rep. 1974), pp. 799ff. Hereafter abbreviated DM.

idealized by the writer of I Peter in illustrating the virtues of a Christian woman.¹²¹ Her story reflects the shame of childlessness among Hebrew women, and that it was quite acceptable for a concubine to bear children on behalf of a legitimate wife.¹²²

A certain amount of information can be gleaned from the Genesis stories of Isaac and his son Jacob.¹²³ The former married Rebekkah, procured for him by a servant who journeyed to Haran searching among Abraham's own kinsmen for just the right young woman. Jacob married Leah and Rachel, daughters of a bedouin named Laban. Seven years of labour were required to cover the brideprice of each. It seems that among these early Hebrews a woman had no part in the selection of a husband, although she could refuse a marriage proposal. She was more or less the property of her father and dared not disobey him. As in other early cultures already discussed, women among these nomadic peoples were subordinate to men as a class, and were generally responsible for drawing water, tending sheep, cooking and caring for children. Polygyny was common.¹²⁴ Although one wife was regarded by the

¹²¹I Peter 3:6-7.

¹²²Genesis 21:9-10.

¹²³Genesis 29:9-35; 34:11-12.

¹²⁴Taking plural wives.

husband as his "beloved" she had to share his affection with other wives and concubines. Slavery also was an integral part of Hebrew life, and was theoretically permissible under the Law of Moses.¹²⁵ As was typical of bedouins of the Near and Middle East, each wife and maid had her own tent and her own possessions.

After the exodus from Egypt and the establishment of the Law of Moses, Hebrew customs began to take a form which was preserved till the Babylonian captivity, a period of approximately nine hundred years. During this period there lived a number of women who greatly influenced the history of Israel. Some of them are exceptional cases and reflect very little of the typical Hebrew woman. Examples include Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, a prophetess who led in worship and national triumph after the crossing of the Red Sea,¹²⁶ and Deborah, a prophetess who served as a military leader and judged Israel after the conquest of Canaan.¹²⁷

Other Old Testament stories portray the normative life of women in Israel. Ruth was a Moabite who entered Judah with Naomi, her mother-in-law, and the

¹²⁵Leviticus 25:44ff., Deuteronomy 15: 12-18; cf. K. A. Kitchen, "Slave, Slavery," NBD, pp. 1195-1198.

¹²⁶Exodus 15:20-21.

¹²⁷Judges 4:4ff.

book bearing her name gives insights into the gleanings customs of Palestinian farming communities, methods of matchmaking, the social manners of virtuous women of the era, and the contract of levirate marriages.¹²⁸ Hannah also seems to typify women of her culture. She is best known for her earnest prayers to God for a son, and her dedication in fulfilling the promise that he would be trained in the service of Yahweh.¹²⁹ From her brief story it can be learned that during the close of the rule of the judges polygyny was still common among Israelites, perhaps usually because of the barrenness of the first wife. It can be seen also that women were permitted to enter the holy shrines such as Shiloh to offer sacrifices and pray aloud.

Scattered details concerning the status of women in Israel appear throughout the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. Some passages speak of the admiration of a virtuous wife,¹³⁰ while others reflect general disdain for tyrant queens such as Jezebel and Athaliah, as well as prostitutes, witches, false prophetesses, adulteresses, and nagging wives.¹³¹

¹²⁸Ruth 1-4.

¹²⁹I Samuel 1:2-2:10.

¹³⁰Proverbs 18:22; 31:28; Ecclesiastes 25:9; 26:1-2.

¹³¹I Kings 18-21; Proverbs 7:6-23; I Samuel 28:7-25; Proverbs 19:13; Ezekiel 23:45.

Later Social and Legal Status

The best source for the traditions which survived the Babylonian captivity, and those which developed after that event, is the large collection of rabbinic literature produced from the first century A.D. onwards, and perhaps the Qumran texts and Apocryphal literature which date as early as the third century B.C. Much of Jewish tradition was transmitted orally for generations, being instructed by those regarded as learned in the Law and Prophets. By the time these regulations came to be written their origin and purpose had been forgotten, and a problem is created for modern scholars who wish to determine precisely what beliefs were predominant in the early and middle first century. Generally, the reports of all such witnesses are lumped together to produce a composite picture representing Judaism from 300 B.C. to 400 A.D., but it is evident that the Mishnah was compiled no earlier than 200 A.D. from the arguments of four generations of rabbis, and the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud grew out of the Mishnah and were compiled over a period from the third to fourth centuries, and from the fifth to sixth centuries, respectively.¹³²

¹³²Emil Schürer, A History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, G. Vermes and F. Millar (eds.), New English edition, Vol. I (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1973), pp. 76-9.

It appears that the Jews maintained practices similar to their Gentile contemporaries with regard to the confinement of their women to the home. The Jews generally felt that restriction to the house was one of the ten curses placed upon Eve for her part in the fall of mankind.¹³³ It is interesting that the same passage in the Torah was never so interpreted as to restrict all Jewish males to farm labour, which to some is indicative of male chauvinism in the heart of ancient Judaism.

In any case, in their subjected position Jewish women commanded unchallenged dignity, although their social activities were strictly controlled. Pious Jews avoided familiarity with married women so as not to arouse suspicion of wrong intentions. For this reason a man was to refrain from conversing with women in the street, even with his wife, daughter or sister, and women were to conduct themselves with modesty and sobriety at all times.¹³⁴ It must be noted, however, that the emergence of such puritanical norms very likely resulted from a period, or very long periods, of prolific adultery and unchastity, even on the part of religious leaders, so that ultimately any conversation

¹³³Babylonian Talmud, "Erubin" 100b (EBT, Mo'ed III, p. 697).

¹³⁴Babylonian Talmud, "Nedarim," 20a (EBT, "Nashim," Vol III, pp. 56-7).

with a woman in public was a valid cause of suspicion.

The financial and legal obligations assumed by a husband toward his wife were defined in a contract called the Ketubbah.¹³⁵ A woman living in Jewish Palestine had practically no means of independent support. She had to be either a wife, a daughter or a slave, and therefore was bound to a man as some type of legal dependent.¹³⁶ In the cities there were certain exceptions, but even there in order for a woman to be a shopkeeper she had to be set up in business and supervised by her husband.¹³⁷ Legally, a girl was under the control of her father till she was twelve and a half years old. During these years the father could take possession of anything the girl earned, found or was given.¹³⁸ This made each daughter a certain asset to a man's estate and a potential source of future income.

Jewish women had few areas of legal self assertion. A girl of more than twelve and a half years

¹³⁵Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, "Ketubah," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol X, p. 926; Mishnah, "ketuboth" 7:6 (DM, p. 255).

¹³⁶Louis Finkelstein, The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith, second edition (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1940), p. 47.

¹³⁷Mishnah, "Ketuboth" 9:4 (DM, p. 258).

¹³⁸Mishnah, "Niddah" 5:7 (DM, p. 751); "Masser Sheni" 4:4 (DM, p. 79); "Ketuboth" 4:1 (DM, p. 249).

had the right to give herself in marriage, as could a widow, if no one had made arrangements on her behalf. Beyond this the legal powers of women were virtually non-existent. In Palestine, women were not even recognized as legal witnesses in courts of law. In this vein Josephus says: "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of her sex."¹³⁷

Marriage

A very ancient belief in Judaism was that marriage as an institution was a divine concept, that marriage partners were arranged by divine providence and that each marriage was to be regarded as sacred because it consisted of a divine contract.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it appears that every person, no matter how insignificant in the social hierarchy, was thought to fulfill a significant role in the divine scheme of history simply by marrying and rearing children.

Like the Greeks and Romans, the Jewish rabbis favoured early marriages. One rabbi commented that a man who had not married by the age of twenty spent all

¹³⁷Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, IV, viii, 15, William Whiston (trans.), The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1967), p. 97.

¹⁴⁰Proverbs 19:14; Tobit 6:17; Babylonian Talmud, "Mo'ed Katan" 18b (EBT, Mo'ed, VIII, p. 118).

his days in sin, or at least in the thought of sin.¹⁴¹ Marriage was thought of as a natural law and the command "be fruitful and multiply" was understood to apply to every man.¹⁴² Such a command was not applied to women, but there were no careers which compared with marriage and motherhood.

Marriages were usually arranged by the parents or by an outside party known as a "matchmaker."¹⁴³ The father was expected to find his son a wife and his daughter a husband. When such a partner was found, agreement had to be given by both the prospective bride and groom. A woman whose marriage was contracted while she was minor might later exercise her right of refusal and be set free from the marriage without a bill of divorcement.

A girl could be given in betrothal while she was still in her girlhood (naarah), which ended at the age of twelve years six months and a day.¹⁴⁴ A man and woman were legally married with the formal act of betrothal, for at this point the projected marriage had been approved by all and the financial preliminaries

¹⁴¹Babylonian Talmud, "Kiddushin" 29b (EBT, "Nashim" VIII, p. 142).

¹⁴²Mishnah, "Yebamoth" 6:6 (DM, p. 227).

¹⁴³Mishnah, "Baba Bathra" 10:4 (DM, p. 380).

¹⁴⁴Mishnah, "Kiddushin" 2:1 (DM, p. 323).

had been settled by the families.¹⁴⁵ Sexual relations with another party during this period was considered adultery.¹⁴⁶

Virginity was expected in a bride, although such was not always the case.¹⁴⁷ The "tokens of virginity" were customarily returned to the father's house as evidence of satisfaction with her purity.¹⁴⁸ A woman who tried to pass for a virgin when she was not was considered to have "played the whore" and sinned against both her father's house and the nation.¹⁴⁹

The marriage contract among the Jews required a husband to work to support and provide for the needs of his wife. But the wife also had considerable responsibility in fulfilling the marriage contract. The ketubbah is vivid in its description of the domestic duties of the wife, varying with the number of

¹⁴⁵Hebrew arash; cf. Exodus 22:16, Deuteronomy 22:23-28. The English terms "betrothed" and "espoused" carry much the same idea.

¹⁴⁶Henri Daniel-Rops, Daily Life in the Time of Jesus, Patrick O'Brien trans. (New York: Hawthorn, 1962), p. 142.

¹⁴⁷The Hebrew bethula is a near equivalent to the English "virgin." Cf. Genesis 24:16.

¹⁴⁸Bedclothes spotted with blood from the breaking of the hymen upon the first occasion of intercourse. Unreliable but an ancient custom nonetheless. Cf. Deuteronomy 22:14-21.

¹⁴⁹Mishnah, "Ketuboth" 1:5-10 (DM, p. 246); David and Vera Mace, Marriage East and West (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960), pp. 43-4.

servants she brought with her.¹⁵⁰ Her duties as a wife were also defined in terms of sexual relations.¹⁵¹ With the exception of intercourse during menstruation a man could do with his wife whatever might please him.

Not all marriages were ideal, however, and numerous biblical passages reveal the intense unhappiness of husbands whose wives were contentious, ill tempered and ungodly.¹⁵² Jesus ben Sirach, in spite of his occasional positive comments concerning women, has been characterized a misogynist because of statements like:

A man will endure any wound but the heart's wound, and any malice but a woman's No head so venomous as a viper's, nor any anger like a woman's. Better share thy home with a lion and serpent both, than with an ill woman's company.¹⁵³

Concerning bigamy and polygamy both Mosaic and rabbinical laws present somewhat of a contradiction. Deuteronomy 21:15 suggests at least a tolerance of plural marriages, no doubt reflecting practices among the ancient patriarchs, while later Judaism and the whole of Tannaite literature presuppose a monogamous

¹⁵⁰Mishnah, "Ketuboth" 5:5 (DM, p. 252).

¹⁵¹Exodus 21:10; Babylonian Talmud, "Ketuboth," 47b (EBI, "Nashim," II, p. 273).

¹⁵²Proverbs 12:4; 19:13; 25:24.

¹⁵³Ecclesiasticus 25:13.

society. Deuteronomy 17:17, which opposes a king collecting wives, appears to have arisen in the time of David and Solomon. But nothing is ever said by the prophets of the day or by the court chroniclers against it. Moore suggests that the economic situation of the general population and the burden of the ketubbah acted as a natural check on plural marriages.¹⁵⁴ But other scholars maintain that mankind in general has become dissuaded from polygamy by higher moral principles.¹⁵⁵

Adultery

A problem which has persisted through the history of Judaism, as in virtually every culture, is that of adultery. In the Old Testament adultery is expressed by the term naaph, which is understood to be the illegitimate sexual intercourse of a man, whether married or single, with a married woman.¹⁵⁶ It was categorically prohibited by the Torah, was punishable by death even in the time of Christ, and was generally considered by the Jews to be a grave sin against God.

¹⁵⁴Cf. George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, Vol II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946-8), p. 122.

¹⁵⁵C. Caverno, "Polygamy," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, James Orr (ed.) Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 2416-7.

¹⁵⁶Samuel P. Tragelless (trans.), Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1964), p. 525.

Guilty persons were amenable to the extreme penalty only when taken in the very act of adultery, and even the rabbis indicate the difficulty of obtaining such legal evidence. In cases of suspicion on the part of the husband, the accused wife had to undergo an ordeal, taken from Numbers 5:11-31, to test her innocence. According to the Mishnah this practice was abolished by Johanan ben Zakkai sometime after A.D. 70, on the grounds that men who usually stood in judgment over accused women were themselves not above the suspicion of immorality.¹⁵⁷

Perhaps even this admission is an understatement, for unchastity among Jewish men seems common throughout ancient history. Such a double standard does appear to be consistent with the patriarchal system, however, and for this reason we might conclude that the form of adultery which they so soundly condemned is that involving a married woman, whereas sexual relations between a married man and an unmarried woman constituted an offence of a lesser category.¹⁵⁸ In this there is a gross discrimination against women which no doubt was regarded by Jewish males as perfectly fair and logical. According to David and Vera Mace, the primary reason for such a double standard was the

¹⁵⁷Mishnah, "Sotah," 9:9 (DM, p. 305).

¹⁵⁸Feldman, p. 363.

notion that the womb was sanctified soil for planting male seed. A wife who committed adultery betrayed her husband in the gravest possible manner, in that "the womb in which he planted his seed must not be contaminated by alien seed."¹⁵⁹ The man's situation, however, was entirely different in that he, being the bearer of the seed, could plant it wherever he chose, and he considered all his children to be legitimate regardless of the womb in which they were nurtured.

Divorce

Jewish divorce laws had their origin in Deuteronomy 24:1-2. Concerning this passage modern Jewish scholars feel that the practice of divorce is presupposed, there being no law commanding or instituting divorce in the Old Testament.¹⁶⁰ Other passages allude to the practice, but are unclear concerning the details.¹⁶¹ In later times it became necessary to obtain the wife's consent before a divorce could be secured, unless she had given extreme cause for the action, but during and prior to the first century A.D. such was unnecessary. The rule at

¹⁵⁹Mace, pp. 43-4.

¹⁶⁰J. H. Hertz, ed. The Pentateuch and the Haftorahs (London: Soncino Press, 1975), p. 850.

¹⁶¹Leviticus 21:7; 22:13; Numbers 30:10; Deuteronomy 22:19.

that time was: "The man that divorces is not like to the woman that is divorced; for a woman is put away with her consent or without it, but a husband can put away his wife with only his own consent."¹⁴² During certain periods of history divorce was effected simply by a verbal repudiation, but generally it was necessary to appear before the court to make the act truly legal.

During the first century there was considerable contention among the rabbis over the expression "unseemly thing" in Deuteronomy 24:1-2. The school of Shammai held that the only legitimate grounds for divorce was unchastity, a view possibly held by Jesus.¹⁴³ The school of Hillel, however, extended the phrase to include less serious faults, even the scorching of food. This view eventually became predominant. But in general the right of males to divorce their wives was taken for granted.¹⁴⁴

A woman was not allowed to divorce her husband under Jewish law, but could sue in the law courts and thus compel him to grant her a bill of divorcement even

¹⁴²Mishnah, "Yebamoth" 14:1 (DM, p. 240).

¹⁴³Mishnah, "Gittim" 9:10 (DM, p. 321); cf. Matthew 19:9 and below, p. 89.

¹⁴⁴B. Cohen, "Concerning Divorce in Jewish and Roman Law," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research XXI (1952), 3-34. A century later the school of R. Akiba allowed divorce even if the husband found someone more attractive.

against his will.¹⁴⁵ Jesus may have alluded to this practice, although the unique recording in Mark 10:12 could suggest a literary accommodation of Roman customs. There were occasions in Jewish history in which women sent their husbands bills of divorcement, although this violated tradition and the implications of law. Salome, sister of Herod the Great, so divorced Costobarus, and Herodias, the woman responsible for the death of John the Baptist, so divorced Philip the half brother of Herod Antipas whom she subsequently married. Both cases were denounced by Josephus as unlawful.¹⁴⁶

The strongest deterrent to divorce was the ketubbah, which included various clauses assuring the wife of financial benefits payable out of the husband's estate in the event of divorce.¹⁴⁷ However, certain types of misconduct on the part of the wife were considered just cause for nonpayment of the ketubbah, and for this reason Jewish males were very interested in technical definitions pertinent to divorce, realizing that frequent and unjustified divorce could prove extremely costly. This also helps explain why

¹⁴⁵Mishnah, "Nedarim," 11:12 (DM, p. 280); "Ketuboth," 5:5, 7:2-10 (DM, pp. 252-5).

¹⁴⁶Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, XV, vii, 10: XVIII (Whiston, pp. 462, 541); cf. Mark 6:17-19.

¹⁴⁷Schereschewsky, p. 927.

many Jews wanted to interpret the "unseemly thing" of Deuteronomy 24 to include much more than sexual infidelity. In so doing they were not only justifying the repudiation of an unwanted wife for trivial causes, but were also establishing legal defaults against payment of her support.

Education

In ancient Israel there was little concern for any kind of formal education other than religious, and up to the second century B.C. even this was limited to adults.¹⁴⁶ With the increasing influence of the Greeks and Romans the Jews became aware of the value of elementary education, and schools were established in the synagogues, both in and outside Palestine, for boys from the age of six.¹⁴⁷ Jesus ben Sirach, whose work began in the late third century B.C., is credited with introducing to Judaism tuition-free education, and in his day private study sessions were often conducted in the homes of more capable students. Toward the end of the second century Simeon ben Shetah inaugurated the first system of community supported public education,

¹⁴⁶W.O.E. Oesterly and Theodore H. Robinson, A History Of Israel, Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, rep. 1957), pp. 217-27; cf. Babylonian Talmud, "Kiddushin" 29a (EBT, "Nashim," III, p. 140.

¹⁴⁷Ecclesiasticus 39:1-3.

at which time the traditional wise man began to give way to the scholastic instructor, or rabbi.¹⁷⁰

From the earliest times the common opinion was that a woman had no need for formal education or technical instruction in the Torah. Her subordinate social and economic status required only the skills which could be learned from the mother through observation and imitation in the informal atmosphere of the home. Most girls were trained in weaving and cooking, midwifery, attending flocks, harvesting, singing, professional mourning, and the usual skills related to marriage and motherhood. Beyond this, instruction was limited to the oral traditions of Israel's religious heritage and the principles of monotheism. As time went on divergent opinions developed among the rabbis concerning the need for and the best approach to female education, which issues were hotly debated during the tannaic period. R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus is representative of the view which ultimately prevailed: "There is no wisdom in a woman except with the distaff." The same rabbi stated on one occasion, "If a man gives his daughter knowledge of the Law, it is as though he taught her lechery."¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰Aaron Demsky, "Education," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol VI, p. 386.

¹⁷¹Babylonian Talmud, "Yoma," 66b (EBT, Mo'ed V, p. 311; Mishnah, "Sofah" 3:4 (DM, p. 296).

Others, however, seemed very favourable toward the education of women, at least for those who displayed exceptional ability. Ben Azzai taught that a father had a responsibility to instruct his daughter in the Torah, and various statements in the Mishnah imply that many rabbis held a similar position.¹⁷²

Women were exempt from the command to study the Torah though some rabbis permitted them to do so, and consequently they had no authority to instruct their children in technical matters. This responsibility belonged exclusively to the fathers and rabbis.¹⁷³ Both women and unmarried men were excluded from formal teaching positions, and the Gamara explains that the restriction was "because of" the fathers and mothers. The meaning of this is unclear. It may be that since the children were conducted to school by their parents, this restriction was imposed to guard against immorality between parents and teachers. A more likely concern, however, is for the status of parenthood with regard to teaching. A single man was possibly regarded as less qualified, and less suitable in a sense, to instruct children than their own mothers. Another woman was less suitable than their own mothers and

¹⁷²Mishnah, "Nedarim" 4:3 (DM, p. 269).

¹⁷³Babylonian Talmud, "Kiddushin" 34a (EBT, "Nashim," VIII, pp. 140, 167).

certainly less than their fathers. But a married man who was also a scholar commanded both the respect and authority to serve in the stead of the parents as instructor of their children. Therefore, the rabbis concluded, no woman or single man could fill this role.

Although the education of women was viewed with increasing toleration by the first Christian century, advanced scholarship among females was rare. Learning to read was an initial complication, requiring a knowledge of ancient Hebrew and sufficient funds to obtain copies of the Scriptures. This limited higher education to the wealthy, and also discriminated against women. Among the few exceptions were the maid servants of the Patriarch Judah, around A.D. 165-200, who were well enough instructed in Biblical Hebrew to comment on even rare terms in Scripture.¹⁷⁴

Instruction of women in the Mishnah was even more rare, although by the second century A.D. it was at least acceptable in some rabbinic circles. Bereriah, wife of R. Meir and daughter of R. Hanina ben Teradion, is reported to have offered frequent correction in interpretation, as well as other opinions on literary questions, all of which were accepted without

¹⁷⁴Babylonian Talmud, "Megillah" 18a (EBI, "Nashim" VIII, p. 422).

hesitation by her husband and other rabbis.¹⁷⁵ One might conclude, therefore, that by the first century A.D. the doors of education were opening to Jewish women, although most rabbis considered female scholarship exceptional and not strictly in keeping with proper feminine roles.

Religion

The rites and devotions in ancient Judaism were always conducted by men. A general rule was that women observed all negative ordinances, regardless of time, and participated in the rituals of sacrificial worship. But women, slaves and minors were exempt from reciting the Shema, wearing phylacteries, and from all positions of religious leadership. In addition, women were excluded from every ordinance and ritual which depended upon a set time of year, month or day.¹⁷⁶

Maahs, who contends that the position of the Old Testament on the status of women is ambivalent, stresses that in the cultus of Israel gender roles are not as rigidly defined as one might expect. Quoting Gerstenberger, he argues that what a woman could do was

¹⁷⁵Babylonian Talmud, "Peshashim" 62b (EBT, "Mo'ed" IV, p. 313).

¹⁷⁶Mishnah, "Kiddushin" 1:7 (DM, p. 322); Babylonian Talmud, "Berakoth" 20b (EBT, "Zera'im" I, p. 122).

"a pragmatic and not a theoretical affair."¹⁷⁷

There were indeed certain regulations which pertained to women exclusively, due to physiology or domestic chores.¹⁷⁸ For example, a woman's atonement was incomplete after her menstrual discharge and after childbirth till she brought the necessary offering for purification.¹⁷⁹ There were also special ordinances pertaining to the sorceress, the wife incriminated under the Law of Jealousy, the daughter of a priest, and any woman making a vow. Beyond these, the balance of Israel's religious laws either excluded women explicitly, included them implicitly or permitted their participation without constraint. Vos gives an exhaustive treatment of Old Testament regulations concerning women in worship, but the work does not deal with the more dramatic developments following the Babylonian Exile which have greater relevance to early Christianity.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷Kenneth H. Maahs, "Male and Female in Pauline Perspective: A Study in Biblical Ambivalence," Dialogue & Alliance Vol. 2, No. 3 (Fall, 1988), p. 17; E.S. Gerstenberger & W. Schrage, Woman and Man, Douglass Stott, trans. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), p. 23.

¹⁷⁸Leviticus 15:19ff.; Mishnah, "Niddah" (DM, pp. 745-57).

¹⁷⁹Leviticus 12:6-8; 14:1-32; Mishnah, "Kerithoth" 2:1 (DM, p. 564).

¹⁸⁰Clarence J. Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship (Delft: N. V. Verenigde Drukkerijen Judels & Brinkman, 1968).

In the restored Temple women were permitted, though not required, to attend the three annual festivals; the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks and the feast of tabernacles, all established in the Torah.¹⁸¹ The proceedings were observed by women from the upper galleries around three sides of the Women's Court. This area was within the sacred precincts but was separate from the Sacred Enclosure in which the sacrificial worship took place, and from which women were prohibited.¹⁸²

Women were required to make sacrifices, free-will offerings, thanks offerings and offerings to complete vows, any of which could be after the order of a burnt offering or peace offering. However, since a woman could not come into the inner court to lay hands on the offering according to the sacrificial law, the question arose whether to dispense with that part of the rite in women's sacrifices.¹⁸³ In some cases the sacrifice was brought out into the Women's Court so the devotee could lay hands on it. It seems, however, that this procedure was more for the appeasement of

¹⁸¹Deuteronomy 16:16; Exodus 23:17; 34:23.

¹⁸²Shmuel Safrai, "Temple," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. XV, p. 966.

¹⁸³Leviticus 1:4; 3:2; Safrai, pp. 966-7.

discontent women than a compliance with regulations.¹⁸⁴

The establishment of synagogue worship and the changes in custom following the Diaspora required certain modifications of the religious status of women, and there is evidence that women enjoyed somewhat more involvement in synagogue worship than in the ancient temple. Rabbis allowed women to recite the Tefillah, as well as the Benediction after meals, and women were under the law of the Mezuzah. Although they were not included among the members of the synagogue, women were allowed to read publicly from the synagogue lessons, but not from the Torah.¹⁸⁵

Considering the stricter norms of earlier times, one wonders if even a synagogue reading would have been tolerated by most rabbis. If it ever was permissible theoretically the women were probably expected to decline any token opportunity to read. Sir William Ramsay, speaking of the changes in custom throughout Asia under Greek and Roman influence, says that the Jews of Smyrna were so influenced toward other cultures that they chose a woman to act as archisynagogos, but

¹⁸⁴Babylonian Talmud, "Hagigah" 16b (EBT, Mo'ed VIII, p. 109).

¹⁸⁵Babylonian Talmud, "Megillah" 23a (EBT, Mo'ed VIII, p. 140).

he adds that the issue has been exaggerated.¹⁸⁶

Another custom, which has been the subject of considerable debate, is the separation of men and women in the synagogue assembly. Concerning unfounded claims to this effect, Strack says that "neither Old Testament nor New nor earlier Jewish tradition knows of a separate part of the synagogue for women." The passage so often cited from Philo to support this belief is from the much later De Vita Contemplativa.¹⁸⁷ It appears that the synagogue only came under such an arrangement in the fourth century by two school heads, Abaji and Raba.¹⁸⁸

While the Old Testament might be ambivalent concerning the theoretical status of women, in mainstream Judaism there is an unmistakable bias in favour of men. Philo, of the early first century, clearly regarded women to be socially and spiritually inferior, depraved by nature, the initiators of sin and

¹⁸⁶W.M. Ramsay, Asiatic Elements in Greek Civilization; the Gifford Lectures in the University of Edinburgh, 1915-16 (London: J. Murray, 1928), p. 267; cf p. 268, fn. 1.

¹⁸⁷H.L. Strack, "Synagogue," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. XI (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), p. 214.

¹⁸⁸W. Bacher, "Synagogue." James Hastings (ed.), A Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 640.

perversity.¹⁸⁹ While it can be said that the frequent grouping together of "women, slaves and minors" in rabbinic literature was purely for the purpose of liturgic exemption, one cannot avoid the impression that women were generally regarded as second class human beings. The Jerusalem Talmud includes an attempt to explain away the degradation with the following rationale:

R. Judah taught three things that a man should say every day: "Blessed be God; 1. for not creating me a pagan; 2. nor foolish; 3. nor a woman." He should thank God for not having been created a pagan, for he would be little esteemed, according to this verse (Isa. 40:17): "All nations before him are as nothing;" for not being a fool, because the fool feels no fear of sin; and finally, for not being a woman, because they are not subject to all the precepts of religion.¹⁹⁰

The Genesis Creation

The Old Testament story of the Creation is the root of all Jewish beliefs concerning woman's secondary and inferior nature, and in turn becomes the foundation for Christian beliefs, primarily through

¹⁸⁹Philo Judaeus, quoted by John Stanley Glen, Pastoral Problems in First Corinthians (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 135. Similar feeling expressed by Jesus ben Sirach, around 180 B.C.; "because of her we all die" (Ecclesiasticus 25:4).

¹⁹⁰Moses Schwab (trans.), Jerusalem Talmud, "Berakoth" I, p. 155f.

references to this story in Pauline literature. But attention must be given to the origin and purpose, as well as the distinction between the two accounts of creation in Genesis.

The first account in Genesis 1 speaks of the appearance of mankind, or humanity, including the female. This is generally considered to be of priestly origin, not completed till after the temple, perhaps the final form even postexilic, when weekly liturgy followed a lunar calendar and the entire people became feminine in relation to Yahweh.¹⁹¹ At that time man and woman were presented literarily as sexually polarized within the oneness of mankind (Adam), without playing on the reversal of values which followed the Fall.¹⁹²

Genesis 2:7-22 contains the Yahwist tradition focussing on the institutions of family and society, deriving its creation and paradise material from ancient mythology.¹⁹³ It portrays the male being created first, and the female fashioned from one of his ribs. Adam is made from the dust of the ground, and whose name (ha adam) suggests perhaps the redness of

¹⁹¹For possible sources of the Pentateuch, see Artur Weiser, Introduction to the Old Testament, D.M. Barton, trans. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), pp. 81-124.

¹⁹²George Tavard, Women in Christian Tradition (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1973), pp. 11-14.

¹⁹³Weiser, p. 100.

clay. God's observation that it is not good for man to be alone seems to be an afterthought in the creation process, and the suggestion that Eve was made only after Adam failed to find a suitable companion among all the animals is a rather degrading view of divine planning.

The Yahwist account of Creation also describes the woman as a "helper" (ezer) for the man. Traditionally this expression has been thought to suggest an inferior assistant, a mate or partner, with the adjectival term neqed meaning "suitable," "fitting," or "for the benefit of." The two terms together are translated "help meet" in the Authorized Version, which in Jewish and Christian tradition has become a quaint epithet for man's inferior side-kick. But the term ezer appears twenty one times in the Old Testament of which sixteen refer to a superordinate source of help, God specifically, and never suggests the concept of a secondary assistant.¹⁹⁴ The expression actually conveys the idea of a presence like the man, a reflection of himself and in every way his equal with whom he can relate.¹⁹⁵ This is definitely suggested

¹⁹⁴Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm 121:1-2; 146:3,5. Cf. Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes, III, Male and Female: A Christian Approach to Sexuality (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 18.

¹⁹⁵Helmut Thielicke, The Ethics of Sex, John W. Doberstein, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 4.

in Adam's response upon seeing her.¹⁹⁶ Further, Michael Rosenzweig presents strong evidence that neqed also means "equal" in no way suggesting secondary or subordinate character.¹⁹⁷ But the view that male and female were created simultaneously as partners, opposites designed to complement each other, seems to have never found credence among the Hebrews in spite of the implications of the first chapter of Genesis.

The term ishah is merely the feminine of ish, and does not necessarily imply that woman was taken "out of" man as suggested in Genesis 2:23. This represents an infusion of later thinking, similar to the Platonic myth of Eros in which, according to Barnhouse and Holmes, the sexual attraction carries with it a memory of distressful tearing apart.¹⁹⁸ George Tavard feels also that the Yahwist writer portrays his Ishah-Eve in opposition to the feminine idols of the Canaanites, displaying a consciousness of fertility symbols and the submission to the lordship of the husband. He speaks in favour of her pristine vocation of completion and perfection, and man's complement. Upon this fanciful

¹⁹⁶"bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," (Genesis 2:23).

¹⁹⁷Michael L. Rosenzweig, "A Helper Equal to Him," Judaism, Vol. 35, No. 3 (1986), pp. 277-80. But uses in Psalm 16:8 and 23:5 suggest "in the presence of," "adequate," or "suitable."

¹⁹⁸Barnhouse and Holmes, p. 19.

and highly symbolic account the rabbis developed elaborate doctrines about human nature. They typically explained Eve's origin in the following fashion:

God said: I will not create her from the head that she should not hold up her head too proudly: nor from the eye that she should not be a coquette: nor from the ear that she should not be an eavesdropper: nor from the mouth that she should not be too talkative: nor from the heart that she should not be too jealous: nor from the hand that she should not be too acquisitive: nor from the foot that she should not be a gadabout: but from a part of the body which is hidden that she should be modest.¹⁹⁹

But they added that it was all to no effect, since women are basically greedy, lazy, jealous, garrulous and are compulsive eavesdroppers. So it seems that while they felt compelled to take the rib story literally the rabbis could not help but suspect that somehow, somewhere in the process God made some kind of error, either in production or in design.²⁰⁰

However, modern scholarship is forced to view critically a literal interpretation of the Adam and Eve

¹⁹⁹quoted by Tavard, p. 14.

²⁰⁰Ibid.

story,²⁰¹ and it is very likely that the difference between the first and second creation account in Genesis is highly significant to the study of female subjection.²⁰² The two accounts may be no older than the monarchy, although conservatives generally hold to Mosaic authorship of both. After 400 B.C. the two accounts came to be seen as one, with woman appearing to be an instrument of procreation, the source of sin and the bearer of a curse. Their appearance together might indicate an imperception of their original significance giving rise to misinterpretation, represented clearly by the social ills of Jesus' day.

Tavard sees the two as reflecting the influence of two contradictory traditions. The latter was nourished by other cultures, degenerate and inferior, while the former reflected the positive order to which the Hebrew

²⁰¹K.H. Graf, Julius Wellhausen, Abraham Kuenen, Samuel Driver (all of the nineteenth century), and Otto Eisfeldt, W.O.E Oesterley, Theodore Robinson and C.H. Dodd (of the first half of the twentieth century). Paul Tillich sees the Genesis Fall as historicized myth, a symbolic expression of the state of things from the standpoint of the writer. Two possible human experiences reflected in the story are: 1. The sexual awakening in adolescence, with sexual feelings and the consequent sense of guilt; 2. The human desire for forbidden knowledge and the resulting guilt. Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), Vol. II, p. 34, Vol. III, p. 73.

²⁰²John Skinner, "Genesis," ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, rep. 1969), pp. 51ff. E.F. Kevan, "Genesis," The New Bible Commentary, F. Davidson (ed.) (London: The InterVarsity Fellowship, rep. 1967), p. 80.

society hoped to return in the Messianic era.²⁰³ One rabbinic tradition saw the first account as an androgynous form of humanity, meaning that the original being was dual in sexuality.²⁰⁴ Adam's observation that Eve is "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" is intensified by his conclusion inserted by the Yahwist that man will leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two will become one flesh,"²⁰⁵ a view of women which was more elevated than later Judaism allowed. But looking at his own culture, the Yahwist could only attempt to explain how things came to be as they are, and he reconstructed a prelapsarian order, a paradise society with conditions the reverse of his postlapsarian society. Conditions after the fall, as they were observed in the writer's own and in surrounding cultures, demanded some explanation. A woman's painful and degraded lot in life is suitably

²⁰³Tavard, p. 14ff. Some feminists have argued that a female religion among prebiblical Semites did not just fade away, but was the victim of centuries of persecution and suppression by advocates of a new religion where male deities were supreme. The Adam and Eve myth was contrived to support and propagate this religion. See Merlin Stone, The Paradise Papers (London: Virago, 1979).

²⁰⁴Paul S. Fiddes, "Woman's Head is Man," The Baptist Quarterly, Vol. 31., No. 8 (1986), p. 376.

²⁰⁵Genesis 2:24; a point noted by Jesus in criticising rabbinic attitudes toward marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:1ff).

explained as a curse resulting from her sin. This includes all naturally unpleasant aspects of femininity, especially pain in childbirth, as well as the consignment to a subordinate station under the husband. However, many scholars feel that suffering and subjection are not presented here as a curse of God, but as a prediction of the suffering women will experience because of human sin and the tyranny of men.²⁰⁶

The phrase "your desire shall be for your husband" is puzzling to exegetes, although it seems to imply the writer's observation that in spite of the unpleasantness of her lot in life woman typically has a sexual appetite and yearns for a personal relationship with a man.²⁰⁷ Traditionalists typically appeal to this account as a divine ordinance of female subjection, but such an interpretation is not acceptable to most scholars today.

²⁰⁶Genesis 3:14ff. J. Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910), p. 82; S.R. Driver, The Book of Genesis (Methuen: 1904), p. 49. See Joyce Baldwin, "Women's Ministry," The Role of Women, Shirley Lees, ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 170-3.

²⁰⁷Irvin A. Busenitz, "Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered," Grace Theological Journal 7:2 (1986), pp. 203-12; Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 35.

Summary

The status of women in the ancient Near East was clearly one of subjugation to the lordship of men. There is reason to believe that the laws and norms of ancient Egypt and Babylonia had a marked influence upon the development of Israelitish culture, especially concerning the status of women. Both Rome and Greece saw certain improvements in the social rights of women, and form the immediate backdrop for first century Christianity, but within these two cultures there were also factors which were detrimental to the welfare of women in religion and society.

However, it is Jewish tradition which had the greatest influence on the status of women in the early church, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two of this thesis. No amount of apologetics can alter or cover the fact that the rabbinic attitude and that of Jewish men in general up to the first century was clearly discriminatory and biased against women.²⁰⁸ Women were considered to be inferior to men, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. They were secondary in creation, and therefore designed by God for pleasure and procreation. But by reason of their ceremonially

²⁰⁸Ben Witherington, Women in the Ministry of Jesus (Cambridge: University Press, 1984), pp. 1-10. See also Louis Jacobs, "Women," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. XVI, p. 626.

impure bodies, they are ontologically unsuitable for direct spiritual ministry in worship. Therefore, from a Jewish perspective the status of women in the first century was clearly that of subjection to males, in family, society and religion.

Chapter Two

WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The status of women in the New Testament is an essential element of the dilemma of Christians in modern society, especially for more conservative and tradition oriented churches. This collection of writings forms the basis for Christian doctrine and social ideologies. But concerning the status of women there is an increasing awareness of a disparity between various Christian traditions and those ideals which undergirded the early kerygma. There is also a demonstrable difference between the thrust of Christ's message and the application of it by the early Christian community represented by Pauline and Petrine writings. Therefore, the attitude of Jesus toward women, as far as it can be established, and the status of women in the earliest Christian community are critical to a resolution of the dilemma facing the church today.

I. JESUS AND WOMEN

New Testament spokesmen claim Jesus Christ as their authority, either by recollection of his teachings and deeds, or by response to inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the New Testament church claims Christ as its founder and author, and the source of its religious doctrines and way of life. Therefore, whatever status women may have occupied in the early church, and continue to occupy in the

church today, should ideally have its roots in the attitude, example and teaching of Jesus in anticipation of a community of believers perpetuating the Gospel after his departure. The Christian Church is without a doubt the direct outcome of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.¹

In general scholars agree that Christ's ministry included elements directed at social change, but Jesus was neither a zealot, a political rebel nor a religious reformer.² There are aspects of his manner which cause some to identify him with the Essenes, claiming that his doctrine and healing techniques were learned from that austere Jewish sect.³ But there is far too much about the ministry of Christ which differs from Essene doctrine for this theory to have merit.⁴ More appropriately, Jesus might be described as a religious and social revolutionary, with a revolutionary message and mission. Jesus' own ministerial thrust is expressed in the Lukan version of his synagogue message in

¹Maurice Goguel, Jesus and the Origins of Christianity, Vol. I (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 18.

²William Barclay, The Mind of Jesus (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 160, 230.

³Marcello Craveri, The Life of Jesus, C.L. Markmann, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 72; J. W. Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. xii-xiii.

⁴W. Rauschenbush, "Jesus the Builder of the New Society," Great Lives Observe Jesus, Hugh Anderson, ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967), p. 126.

Nazareth.⁵ His personal identity with this prophecy is suggested by the comment: "this day is the scripture fulfilled in your hearing." This, writes Vigeveno, was the revolutionary manner of Jesus.⁶ He spoke out against social injustice and moral evil of every description, but avoided the cynicism and recalcitrant spirit of philosophers and rebels of his day. He despised exploitation of the poor in the name of justice, which had characterized nobility for centuries, and lashed out far more harshly at religious hypocrisy than at the sins of the common people.⁷

Rauschenbush sees Jesus as the builder of a new society, founded on the principle of fellowship and social harmony.⁸ As human life originates in love, so love holds together the basal human organization, the family. Contrary to the principles of the social gospel Jesus did not seek to change the structure and nature of society in order to reach individuals, but conversely to change society by changing the hearts and lives of individuals. Matthews speaks of fraternity instructed by Jesus as the functional principle of

⁵Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isaiah 61:1. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

⁶H.S. Vigeveno, Jesus the Revolutionary (Glendale: G/L Publications, rep. 1972), pp. 5-12.

⁷Matthew 23:1ff; cf. Ezekiel 22:29; Ecclesiastes 5:8.

⁸Rauschenbush, p. 126.

love towards mankind. He further asserts that the times and places where people "have come most under the influence of the words and life of Jesus have been those in which institutions at variance with fraternity - branding, polygamy, the exposure of children, slavery, drunkenness and licentiousness - have disappeared."⁹

Such objectives without a doubt were of utmost importance to Jesus. The undergirding of his redemptive sacrifice was the establishment of a potential lifestyle whereby the principles of sacrificial love might abolish social injustice. True greatness, Jesus taught, could not be obtained through military conquest, financial gain or social subjugation, but through individual humility and service to others. Cullmann sees this principle at work in the lives of early Christians, and the means whereby the example of Christ continued to influence the world after his departure.¹⁰

For precisely these reasons women held a position of high esteem in the life and ministry of Jesus, and it becomes abundantly clear that Jesus held a view of women quite contrary to that of his contemporaries.¹¹ Most certainly in

⁹Shailer Matthews, "Jesus' Philosophy of Social Progress," Great Lives Observed Jesus, p. 122; cf. Matthews, The Social Teaching of Jesus, An Essay in Christian Sociology (New York: Macmillan, 1897), pp. 191-7.

¹⁰Oscar Cullman, The Early Church, A.J.B. Higgins, ed. (London: SCM Press, 1956), p. 195.

¹¹Ben Witherington, Women in the Ministry of Jesus (Cambridge: University Press, 1984), pp. 125-131.

whatever sense Jesus hoped to minister to social needs and proclaim the principles of justice, mercy and love, so he sought to liberate women.¹² Daniel-Rops says that "toward women Jesus always displayed a special kindness" which is worthy of consideration in the light of his mission.¹³ And Pratt comments that "women of all ranks in society found in him a benefactor and friend, before unknown in all the history of their sex."¹⁴ Both liberal and conservative scholars agree that from the first women were responsive to his teachings and devoted to his person.¹⁵ *NBS*

For the purpose of this study an attempt must be made to establish those critical details which reveal Jesus' mind and feelings, his deep concerns and ultimate objectives, both on a spiritual and temporal plain.¹⁶ Herein is to be found the genuine premise for Christian doctrine on the status of women. There is, of course, a certain difficulty in

¹²Albrecht Depke, "γυνή," IDNT, Vol. I, G. Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1969), p. 784; Leonard Swidler, "Jesus Was a Feminist," South East Asia Journal of Theology XIII:1 (1971), pp. 102-4.

¹³Henri Daniel-Rops, Jesus in His Time, R.W. Millar, trans. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, rev. 1956), p. 252.

¹⁴D.M. Pratt, "Women," ISBE, Vol. V. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1955), p. 3102.

¹⁵Martin Debelius, Jesus (London: SCM, English edition, 1963), p. 54.

¹⁶The difficulty of discovering the historical Jesus is acknowledged. R. Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, John Marsh, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

determining details of Jesus' life. The Fourth Gospel is problematic in that many reputable scholars see it as the work of a second century Christian whose purpose was to represent Christian theology as it was interpreted by his community. Each character becomes a literary device to present to the readers a key message of the Gospel relevant to his day.¹⁷ The discourses of Jesus contained therein might not, therefore, represent the actual historical Jesus, and what one might actually learn about the attitude of Jesus toward women from the Fourth Gospel is questioned by some scholars. However, it is certain that the writer sought to communicate a message that the spirit of Jesus in the Gospel was contrary to various traditions which held women in subjection. And scholars who have been most critical of the Fourth Gospel tend to see a tradition or source of factual events which pre-dates the Johannine author and his circle. In this regard Bultmann speaks of a "sign source"¹⁸ and Schnackenburg discusses a "Cana tradition" from which the writer drew to present a preview of Jesus' signs and ultimate glory.¹⁹ On this basis also Brown introduces his discussion of women in the Fourth Gospel, suggesting that the

¹⁷R. Bultmann, The Gospel of John, A Commentary, G.R. Beasley-Murray, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971 edition).

¹⁸Bultmann, John, pp. 113, 119.

¹⁹Rudolf Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St. John, Vol. I, K. Smith, trans. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 326.

writer offers through discourses constructed from pre-Johannine traditions, "very perceptive corrective. . .to some ecclesiastical attitudes of his (own) time."²⁰ Therefore all four Gospels are significant as witnesses to the attitude of Jesus toward women.

Concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus, an enormous body of tradition has developed over the centuries.²¹ To some scholars the New Testament stories of Mary are genuine, offering brief glimpses into the humanity of Jesus and his attitude toward women as a class.²² To others the mother of Jesus is, especially in the Fourth Gospel, a literary device and nothing in the traditions about her contributes to our understanding of Jesus' attitude toward women.²³ But Mary's ubiquitous presence in the Gospels from Jesus' birth till after his death makes a statement about the elevated role of women in and around Jesus' ministry, at least in the eyes of the four Gospel writers.²⁴ The Lukan account gives unusual

²⁰Raymond E. Brown, "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel," Theological Studies 36 (December, 1975), p. 689.

²¹Craveri, pp. 9ff.; Otto Hophan, Maria (Turin: Marieti, 1953).

²²Paul K. Jewett, "Mary and the Male/Female Relationship," Christian Century 90 (December, 1973), p. 1255.

²³Brown, "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel," p. 695; Eugene D. Stockton, "The Woman: A Biblical Theme," Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology 1:6 (1973), p. 109.

²⁴Luke 1:27-38, the announcement of Mary's pregnancy. Bultmann regards this and the parallel in Matthew 1:18-25 an adaptation from Hellenistic sources, Synoptic Tradition, p. 296.

attention to Mary, perhaps even suggesting her as a source of information on the early life of Jesus.²⁵ Twice Luke states that Mary kept all these events "in her heart."²⁶ The Fourth Gospel also gives special prominence to Mary, though she is never named. The dialogue between Jesus and his mother at the wedding feast in Cana has suggested to many scholars the closeness between the two, perhaps even a prompting by Mary to demonstrate his identity by means of a

Luke 1:46-55, the Magnificat. Neither Mary nor Elizabeth can be credited with its composition. C.M. Connick, Jesus, The Man, The Mission, The Message (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 104.

Matthew 1:20-25, the Virgin Birth tradition and connection to Isaiah 7:14 is highly suspect. A.R.C. Leaney, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958), pp. 20-27; Connick, pp. 104f.; James Orr, The Virgin Birth of Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907); W.C. Allen, "Matthew" ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, third edition, 1965), pp. 18-22.

Luke 2:1-18; the journey to Bethlehem and birth narrative.

Matthew 2:1-16; the census, the shepherds, the magi and the slaughter of babies; cf. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, pp. 297-8.

Luke 2:41ff.; Jesus' dedication in Jerusalem at age twelve.

John 2:1-11; wedding feast at Cana. Cf. C.H. Dodd, Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), pp. 297, 315-21; Bultmann, John, p. 118.

Mark 3:31-35 (Matthew 12:46-50, Luke 8:19-21); family concern for Jesus' sanity in or around Capernaum.

John 19:25-27; Mary at the cross. Acts 1:14; in the company of the one hundred twenty disciples.

²⁵Norvel Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1968), p. 114; Alfred Plummer, "Gospel According to Luke," ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, fifth edition, 1964), p. 78; Jules Lebreton, The Life and Teaching of Jesus Our Lord (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, reprinted 1957), p. 27.

²⁶Luke 2:19, 51.

miracle.²⁷ Jesus' reply τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί when she points out the lack of sufficient wine seems sharp, abrupt and critical. But the expression was common in both Jewish and Hellenistic circles to mean "So what?" and displays no disrespect whatsoever.²⁸ Jesus calling her "woman" (γυνή) indicates no disrespect either, since he uses the same term in his dying hour when he consigns his mother to the care of "the beloved disciple."²⁹

The Fourth Gospel gives special prominence to women as a class, and several women in particular. One such incident is Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar.³⁰ The account is valuable in that it suggests that Jesus had little regard for the common pious avoidance of contact with Samaritans, nor was he concerned about suspicion of wrong doing on the basis of public conversation with strange women.³¹ The writer also points out this woman's knowledge of religious history and awareness of current

²⁷John 2:1-11.

²⁸Bultmann renders the expression "What have I to do with you?" (p. 116); Barclay, "Let me handle this in my own way;" and Goodspeed, "Do not try to direct me." See Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 180-81. It seems rather to mean "What does that have to do with you and me?"

²⁹John 19:26.

³⁰John 4:1-42.

³¹D. Daube, "Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: The Meaning of sugchraomai," Journal of Biblical Literature LXIX (1950), p. 137-47.

affairs.³² But more significant, perhaps, is the suggestion that Jesus would discuss with her the deepest implications of his ministry, identify himself as the Messiah, and declare that "God is spirit, and worshippers must worship Him in spirit and truth."³³ The role she plays in evangelism, once she is convinced of Jesus' identity as the Messiah, is also significant.³⁴ The writer suggests that eventually many Samaritans came to believe on Jesus through her testimony. Therefore, neither Jesus nor the writer of the Fourth Gospel saw anything wrong with a woman preaching the Good News or informing men on spiritual matters.

Other accounts in the Fourth Gospel also illustrate a higher estimate of women on the part of Jesus than was common in his day. The story known as the Adulterous Woman, traditionally located at John 7:53-8:11, serves to demonstrate Jesus' rejection of typical bias against women in interpreting and enforcing religious laws.³⁵ While others were quick to condemn, Jesus called attention to the universality of sin and urged compassion and forgiveness. The account also demonstrates the common slant of rabbinic

³²Rivalry concerning Mt. Zion and Mt. Gerizim, the history of Jacob's well, and prophecies concerning the Messiah.

³³John 4:24.

³⁴See verses 28, 39. Brown, p. 691; Barrett, p. 204; Swidler, p. 108.

³⁵Barrett, p. 492.

laws against women, with no condemnation of men guilty of the same sins.

The Johannine account of Jesus' relationship with Mary and Martha of Bethany draws attention to the personal nature of Jesus, and draws unusual attention to the personalities of these two women. In the account of the resurrection of Lazarus Martha's confession of Christ as the Son of God is surprisingly similar to the better known confession by Peter.³⁶ The anointing of Jesus by Mary is attested to by two of the Synoptics, and therefore has greater credibility than perhaps some of the unique records in the Fourth Gospel in spite of confused details.³⁷ The significance is, as Jesus points out, both in her sacrificial love and the symbolic act of anointing him for burial. Bultmann states that here she may have done more than she realized.³⁸

Mary Magdalene has become famous in Christianity for her prominence and devotion during Jesus' ministry, his trial, crucifixion, burial and resurrection.³⁹ The Fourth Gospel

³⁶Brown, "Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel," p. 693.

³⁷John 12:1-9; Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9.

³⁸Bultmann, John, p. 416. On the semeion of Jesus' burial see Dodd, Fourth Gospel, p. 370; Possible implications of Jesus' being anointed as prophet, priest and king, see Barrett, p. 341.

³⁹One of a group of women mentioned frequently by all four Gospels.

gives her prominence as a witness of the resurrection,⁴⁰ for which cause in the western church she became known as "the apostle to the apostles."⁴¹

The Synoptics offer various glimpses which are more readily accepted by scholars than those of the Fourth Gospel, and which reflect something of Jesus' opposition to traditional attitudes toward women. Bo Reike correctly notes that the Lukan writer emphasizes the attention given by Jesus to Samaritans, women and other despised classes.⁴² The Lukan account of his visit to the home of Mary and Martha⁴³ demonstrates the right of women, at least in Jesus' eyes, to set aside domestic chores in favour of spiritual interests.⁴⁴ While Martha is busy with food preparation Mary chooses rather to sit talking with Jesus, which in her defence he suggests is more important.

Luke's account of the sinful woman anointing Jesus might be a variation of an incident in the other three

⁴⁰Also Mark 16:9.

⁴¹Brown, "Role of Women. . ." pp. 692-3.

⁴²Bo Reike, The Gospel of Luke, R. Mackenzie, trans. (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 63.

⁴³Luke 10:38-42.

⁴⁴Swidler, p. 104. The Tübingen proposition is that Martha represents Judaic Christianity trusting in works of the Law, while Mary represents Pauline Christianity, reposing simply on faith. See Plummer, p. 293.

Gospels commonly identified with Mary of Bethany,⁴⁵ although some see it as a second anointing.⁴⁶ The unique details serve primarily as a didactic tool contrasting the self righteous attitude of Simon the Pharisee with the spirit of forgiveness which Jesus represented. But the attention given to this incident by Luke also clearly demonstrates the concern Jesus felt for the plight of women, who as a class suffered humiliation and degradation not experienced by men.⁴⁷ It is also noteworthy that tradition has identified Mary of Bethany with the sinful woman, clearly as an effort to discredit her and diminish any prominence she might otherwise attain as a witness to the resurrection.⁴⁸

Luke's unique account of the woman with a crooked spine⁴⁹ also has interest, first because Jesus noticed such an insignificant person and interrupted his teaching to address her needs. Geldenhuys says that her condition was probably spondylitis deformans, by which the bones of her spine were fused into a rigid mass.⁵⁰ Such was her state

⁴⁵Luke 7:36-50.

⁴⁶Norvel Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, rep. 1968), p. 234.

⁴⁷It is commonly speculated that this woman was a prostitute.

⁴⁸A point raised by Rosemary R. Ruether in a lecture at the University of Natal, August, 1989.

⁴⁹Luke 13:10-17.

⁵⁰Geldenhuys, p. 375, fn. 1.

that she walked about bent over, unable to straighten her back. When Jesus healed the woman, the result was an immediate uproar among pious Jews because he had violated rabbinical law by healing on the Sabbath. Jesus responded by declaring that human needs take precedence over religious laws and traditions.⁵¹ Depke further points out that his calling her "a daughter of Abraham" would have been scandalous in his day, which clearly demonstrates his concern for the plight of women in Jewish tradition and his intention of effecting positive change.⁵²

Other significant incidents are recorded by either two or three of the Synoptists. Jesus' compassion for the woman with a haemorrhage demonstrates his unconcern for religious taboos and ceremonial impurities incumbent upon women,⁵³ and becomes a paramount example of salvatory faith.⁵⁴ This woman would have been considered perpetually unclean according to rabbinic law, and therefore was forbidden to touch a man. But Jesus appears more concerned for her physical and spiritual

⁵¹Donald Guthrie, Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), p. 207.

⁵²Albrecht Depke, "γυνή," TDNT, Vol. I, G. Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1969), p. 784.

⁵³Leviticus 15:25-28; Cf. F Hauk, "καθαρὸς," TDNT, Vol. III, G. Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1974), pp. 423-31; Bobby Lee Holley, "God's Design: Woman's Dignity," Mission, III:10 (April, 1975), p. 292; Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be (Waco: Word, 1974), p. 57.

⁵⁴Mark 5:25-34; Matthew 9:20-22; Luke 8:43-48.

needs than for either rabbinic law or religious and social taboos.

The woman who persistently begged healing for her demon possessed daughter is also of great interest.⁵⁵ This encounter was in the region of Tyre and Sidon, and Matthew refers to the woman as a Canaanite. Mark calls her a Greek, a Syrophoenician by race. In view of the Jewish orientation of Matthew the writer's failure to state, as does Mark, that Jesus entered a house in this region is understandable.⁵⁶ While Mark records an immediate response to the woman grovelling at Jesus' feet in a house, Matthew leaves the impression that Jesus was outside, perhaps on the open road, and continued walking with the woman following behind. Matthew also adds that the disciples requested that Jesus dismiss her, perhaps annoyed by her persistence or fearing that she might create a commotion. Jesus' comment that it is not fit to cast the children's bread to the dogs is thought by some to represent the typical attitude of Jews toward Gentiles.⁵⁷ But the diminutive *κυνάρια* seems not to refer to mongrels of the street but to pet dogs who play in the house

⁵⁵Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30.

⁵⁶R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, reprinted 1964), p. 595.

⁵⁷E.P. Gould, "The Gospel According to Mark," ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, reprinted 1969), p. 136.

with children.⁵⁸ His initial refusal, then, simply points out that his blessings are to be dispensed among Jews alone, and not to the Gentiles who live among the "children." The woman's retort adds another diminutive ψιχία, suggesting her willingness to accept even the smallest crumbs that fall from the master's table. Both writers imply Jesus' delight in her answer and faith, and record an immediate grant of her request.

In addition to these, several women in the Gospels are noteworthy because of giving money. The widow whom Jesus commended to the disciples for giving all she had into the temple treasury has become a well known illustration of sacrificial giving.⁵⁹ Perhaps of even greater significance are a group of women mentioned by name in Luke who "ministered unto him (Jesus) out of their substance."⁶⁰ It seems quite extraordinary that Jesus would reverse the usual order of financial dependency, accepting support from a group of women so that he could be devoted to public ministry.

The Synoptic divorce material is of great scholastic interest, partly because of various interpretive

⁵⁸W.C. Allen, "The Gospel According to Matthew," ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, reprinted 1965), p. 165.

⁵⁹Luke 21:1-4; Mark 12:41, 44.

⁶⁰Mary Magdalene, Joanna wife of Chuza, and Susanna; Luke 8:1-3. See Geldenhuys, pp. 238-9.

complexities.⁶¹ But in all three Synoptics Jesus clearly is presented as attacking traditional divorce practices among the Jews, particularly their inclination to interpret Mosaic divorce laws for personal advantage and generally in favour of men.⁶² The teachings of Jesus appear to have brought together the more noble principles of all societies before his time, as well as pointing out the shortcomings of social and religious traditions. But Catchpole demonstrates effectively that Jesus' teachings were neither borrowed from contemporary society nor an accommodation of local religious sects, but rather an inspired response to the degenerate norms of the ancient world.⁶³ It is interesting also that in the long discourse on divorce in Matthew 19 Jesus appeals to the priestly Creation Story, rather than the Yahwist's story of Adam and Eve,⁶⁴ and then shifts to Genesis 2:24 to support

⁶¹Charles C. Ryrie, The Role of Women in the Church (Chicago: Moody, 1978), pp. 40-49. The "except for fornication" clause in Matthew has been the source of debate in church doctrine concerning grounds for divorce and remarriage. Witherington is probably correct in concluding that the clause is redactional, an expansion of Jesus' original teaching to accommodate Jewish readers. Witherington, Women in the Ministry of Jesus, p. 128.

⁶²Matthew 19:4-9; Mark 10:3-12; Matthew 5:31-2; Luke 16:18; cf. Deuteronomy 24:1ff.

⁶³David Catchpole, "The Synoptic Divorce Material as a Traditio-Historical Problem," Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 57:1 (Autumn, 1974), p. 93.

⁶⁴Genesis 1:27.

the concept of marital devotion and oneness.⁶⁵ Jesus seems careful to avoid the implications of the Adam and Eve story which served as the basis for traditional rabbinic teachings on the subordination of women. Witherington also stresses that in discussing sexual sins Jesus seems to redirect attention from women, who generally bore the brunt of accusation and punishment in Jewish society, to men who are duly responsible for controlling their aggressive passion.⁶⁶ Thus in Jesus' teaching traditional stereotypes are rejected.⁶⁷

It is quite significant that the attitude of Jesus toward women as represented in the Gospels is not that which is perpetuated in later Christian tradition. Instead, he appears to have suggested in various ways his rejection of the notion of female inferiority, often boldly challenging tradition. Holley words it succinctly:

⁶⁵Matthew 19: 5-6.

⁶⁶Witherington, Women in the Ministry of Jesus, pp. 18-28.

⁶⁷Witherington also finds evidence of Jesus' attempt to elevate the status of women in a number of parables (viz. The Lost Coin, Luke 15:8-10; The Leaven and Dough, Luke 13:20-21; The Obstinate Widow, Luke 18:1-8) which indicate his sympathy for women in a male dominated society. The frequent pairing of parables and pericopes, one featuring a man and the other a woman, represents a further effort, at least on the part of the Lukan writer, to promote female equality (e.g. Luke 4:21-39; 15:8-10). Witherington, Women in the Ministry of Jesus, pp. 35-44. See also A.M. Hunter concerning the parables as "Jesus' justification of his mission to the last, the least and the lost." The Parables Then and Now (London: 1971), p. 56.

In Jesus' actions and attitudes, in his willingness to come up against the traditions of cultures, in his loving concern, he was revealing the will of God Jesus treated women of whatever sort as persons of value and worth, as genuine human beings, not just as inferior or despised females. There was never in his manner any condescending, sentimentalizing, jeering, patronizing or putting them in their place.⁶⁸

Instead, it appears that Jesus attempted to elevate women in such a way as to demonstrate the remarkable change the kingdom of God would effect in a human life and in society. Both the Synoptic tradition and the Fourth Gospel offer strong evidence that within the broad framework of his ministry Jesus sought to elevate the status of women, in fact to teach principles by which all forms of discrimination against women might be abolished. However, Jesus does not reject the concepts of marriage and family. Witherington argues convincingly that Jesus not only upheld but in certain ways strengthened the concept of family, although his departure from the notion of paternal lordship and his rejection of various forms of injustice with regards to familial responsibility are quite remarkable.⁶⁹ But Witherington also concludes that Jesus sought to reform, not reject, the patriarchal framework under which he operated.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Bobby Lee Holly, "God's Design: Woman's Dignity," Mission III:10 (April, 1975), p. 294.

⁶⁹Witherington, Women in the Ministry of Jesus, pp. 11-18.

⁷⁰Witherington, p. 126.

Therefore Witherington finds the concepts of male dominance of the home and church in later Pauline tradition rooted in Jesus himself. Such a conclusion, it seems, lacks supportive evidence in the Gospels.

Because Christianity has its ultimate source in the mind and ministry of Jesus Christ, his own attitude toward women has critical significance in evaluating church doctrines and traditions today. This becomes even more evident when one considers the elevated status of women in the early Christian community, to be discussed below. As Scroggs points out, one cannot "explain the prevalence and equality of women in the earliest church if such attitudes were not initiated by Jesus himself."⁷¹ Furthermore, Jesus' clear opposition to the prevalent attitudes toward women in his own culture also becomes the primary basis in Christian theology for rejecting patriarchal models which developed in later church tradition.

II. FEMALE PROMINENCE IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The status of women in the early Christian Church seems remarkably different from that of contemporary cultures. No doubt such a change in attitude among the disciples of Christ represented the practical application of the revolutionary teachings of Jesus concerning social injustice and religious hypocrisy. The results were far reaching. The most obvious

⁷¹Robin Scroggs, "Women in the New Testament," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, supp. vol. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 967.

factor in this regard is that women were subject to the same personal response to the gospel message as men.⁷² Beginning with the sermon of Peter on Pentecost, women were called to repentance, faith and confession of Christ without discrimination.⁷³ They were subjected to immersion, named among the believers and encouraged to participate in various acts of godly service in the daily activities of the Christian community. As churches were established in Palestine, Asia Minor, and Europe many women found roles of service and leadership within the Christian community, and many also attained prominence and fame.

Prominent Women

During the early stages of the church the Apostles so dominate the historical picture that little treatment is given by the writer of Acts to the activities of converts individually, whether men or women. The narrative does, however, give sufficient detail so as to reveal the presence and significant role of women in the events surrounding the establishment of the church. Mention is made of certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, among approximately one hundred and twenty disciples at Jerusalem.⁷⁴ Luke's mention of this group of women is

⁷²Oepke, p. 785.

⁷³Acts 2:37ff, 5:12-14.

⁷⁴Acts 1:14-15.

perfectly in keeping with their prominence in the Gospels. The group likely includes those who accompanied Jesus from Galilee and those present at the cross and at the grave.⁷⁵

The three thousand that made up the initial Jerusalem church doubtless also included many women.⁷⁶ In his quotation from Joel, Peter's mention of women prophesying has been understood by many as a strong hint of social and religious change which would mark the New Age.⁷⁷

The first woman among the Jerusalem Christians to be discussed in detail is Sapphira, wife of Ananias. The story of this couple is one of two examples given by Luke to illustrate the practical results, both positive and negative, of the community of goods operative in the early Jerusalem church.⁷⁸ The most prominent woman in the Jerusalem church was Mary, mother of John Mark, and identified by the writer as the sister of Barnabas.⁷⁹ The fact that Peter went to her house directly upon his escape from prison, and that a sizable group had assembled there, suggests that her home

⁷⁵Matthew 27:55ff.; Mark 15:20, 16:1; Luke 24:10; John 19:25.

⁷⁶Acts 2:37ff.

⁷⁷Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28.

⁷⁸Acts 5:1-11; 2:45; cf. 4:32-37; F.F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1970), pp. 131-6.

⁷⁹Acts 12:12; Colossians 4:10.

was well known by the Jerusalem Christians.⁸⁰

Various other vignettes in Luke's Acts are, according to Witherington, clearly calculated efforts to demonstrate the elevation of women's roles in the Christian Community.⁸¹ Dorcas, for example, a disciple in Joppa reputedly raised from the dead by Peter, is important in connection with benevolence among widows in her community.⁸² Such is her significance in Acts that today "Dorcas Societies" perpetuate her memory, and in the modern city of Jaffa there is a memorial in the "Tabitha School" devoted to the care and education of underprivileged girls.⁸³

The mother and grandmother of Timothy also receive prominence in Lukan and Pauline materials.⁸⁴ Presumably both Eunice and her son were converted during or subsequent to Paul's first visit to Lystra. Although married to a Greek, it appears that she and her mother Lois did all in their power to train Timothy in the fear of God and in the knowledge of holy scripture. Apparently Eunice had chosen Timothy's name,

⁸⁰Louis Matthew Sweet, "Mary," ISBE, Vol. III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 2006; cf. William Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller, p. 385.

⁸¹Witherington, Women in the Ministry of Jesus, p. 129.

⁸²Acts 9:36; her name is given as Tabitha in Aramaic, translated into Greek as *Δορκας*, meaning "a gazelle." She is called a disciple (*μαθήτρια*), the only place in the N.T. where the feminine form occurs.

⁸³S.F. Hunter, "Dorcas," ISBE, Vol. II, p. 870.

⁸⁴Acts 16:1ff.; II Timothy 1:5, 3:15.

rather than his father, since its meaning is "one who honours God," further indicating a desire to rear her son according to Jewish, and then Christian, tradition.⁸⁵

Among Paul's early converts in Philippi was a merchant woman of the Lydian city of Thyatira. The name Lydia by which she is identified is probably derived from her home country. Luke identifies her as "a God-fearer," or "one who worshipped God."⁸⁶ Euodia and Syntache were two women in the church at Philippi⁸⁷ whom Paul states had "laboured" with him "in the gospel," strongly suggesting some practical role in evangelism.⁸⁸ Chrysostom regarded the pair to be "the chief of the church which was there (at Philippi)."⁸⁹

There is disagreement among scholars as to the meaning of "chief women" mentioned among the converts in Thessalonica.⁹⁰ The text reads *γυναῖκων τε τῶν πρῶτων*, which might be understood as "wives of the leading men." The Western editors probably so understood it, for codex Bezae

⁸⁵John Rutherford, "Eunice," ISBE, Vol. II, p. 1037.

⁸⁶Acts 16:12ff; Cf. Bruce, p. 314.

⁸⁷Philippians 4:2-3.

⁸⁸Carrington, p. 181.

⁸⁹Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XIII (NPNF, XIII, p. 244).

⁹⁰Acts 17:4.

omits the articles leaving the text *γυναικῶν πρώτων*⁹¹ But even this reduction could be construed as "leading women" or even "women of the best social standing," so the reason for the variation is unclear.⁹² The precise meaning of Luke's adjective "chief" is also unclear. But there is significance in the fact that he drew special attention to these women, and their community influence due to both their status and number is unquestionable. Further the writer of Acts makes special mention of the honourable Greek women in the city of Berea,⁹³ whom some scholars believe to have been converted in greater numbers than the men, and that they were of greater community influence and social status than the men.⁹⁴ In Athens a woman named Damaris is listed among the converts.⁹⁵

Among Paul's closest companions in the Gospel were Aquila and Priscilla.⁹⁶ But of the two, there is reason to

⁹¹B.M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London: United Bible Society, 1971), p. 453; Rackham, p. 295.

⁹²A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. III (London: Harper, 1930), p. 243.

⁹³Acts 17:12.

⁹⁴R.C.H Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (Minneapolis:Augsburg, 1961), p. 703.

⁹⁵Her identity is unknown, although some have insisted that she was an aristocrat and of considerable influence. Cf. D.M. Beck, "Damaris," IDB, Vol. I (New York: Abingdon, 1962), p. 757; Lenski, p. 741. Her mention is omitted by Codex Bezae.

⁹⁶Acts 18:19-23; a shorter form Prisca appears in I Corinthians 16:19.

believe that Priscilla was the more capable and the more zealous in the faith.⁹⁷ Bruce, Harnack and others consider it possible that this couple had been converted elsewhere and were foundation members of the Roman Church.⁹⁸ Harnack was the first to suggest Priscilla as the author of Hebrews, a theory which might explain why early church tradition left the author anonymous. History of textual transmission in the late first and early second centuries lends support to Harnack's theory.⁹⁹

Of critical importance is Paul's mention of Phoebe in his list of greetings at the close of Romans, where she is called a *διάκονος*, translated "servant" in the Authorized Version.¹⁰⁰ This reference therefore becomes a key in establishing the office of deaconess in the first century church.

Also in Romans 16 six of the twenty-seven people

⁹⁷Her name is mentioned first in Romans 16:3 and II Timothy 4:19; Early church tradition held her in high esteem, considering her to have been the more productive in the faith; Chrysostom, Homilies on II Timothy, X, (NPNF, XIII, p. 515). Bruce also contends that she was of Roman nobility, bearing the title gens Prisca; F.F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame (Paternoster, 1970), p. 15.

⁹⁸Bruce, The Spreading Flame, p. 137.

⁹⁹Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downer's Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), pp. 696f.

¹⁰⁰Romans 16:1-2. The masculine noun cannot correctly be rendered "deaconess," but in view of the male domination of society in that day a masculine noun in connection with a woman strongly argues in favour of its official and titular use.

saluted by name are women, and two additional women mentioned are unnamed. These include Miriam, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and Persis, all of whom Paul says are to be noted because of their "labour (κοπίαν) in the Lord."¹⁰¹

Junias,¹⁰² whom most scholars take to be a woman also, is said to have been a fellow prisoner of Paul and along with Andronicus "of note among the apostles." Chrysostom understood this to mean that the couple were actually considered Apostles by the early church.¹⁰³ C.H. Dodd thought that the term was used here in an unofficial sense, but had no difficulty with the possibility that the early church sent out a woman on gospel missions.¹⁰⁴

Deaconesses

Probably the earliest office to develop in the early church is that of deacon.¹⁰⁵ The origin of the diaconate is

¹⁰¹Romans 16: 6, 12. Hauck states that in the New Testament the term *κοπίαν* has a distinctive use for Christians toiling in and for the community; Friedrich Hauck, "*κοπος, κοπίαν*" *TDNT*, G. Kittel, ed., Vol. III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 828-9.

¹⁰²Romans 16:7.

¹⁰³Chrysostom, Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans, XXXI (*NPNF*, Vol. XI, p. 555).

¹⁰⁴C.H. Dodd, "The Epistle of Paul to the Romans," James Moffatt, ed., The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), p. 239.

¹⁰⁵*διάκονοι*, "servants," or "ministers." The primary meaning is "a waiter at a meal" or "a servant of a master." H.W. Beyer, "*διακονία*," *TDNT*, Vol. II, G. Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 88, 91-2.

commonly sought in the selection of the Seven at Jerusalem,¹⁰⁶ a view which has found favour with scholars in general since the early church fathers.¹⁰⁷ These seven were selected from among the Jerusalem Christians, and were appointed by the Apostles to "serve tables," embraced by the term *διακονία*, so that the Twelve could "continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word." The term "deacon" does not appear in this passage however, at least not in reference to the Seven, and the qualifications do not parallel those prescribed in the Pastoral Epistles.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Acts has Stephen and Philip immediately appearing before the public as miracle workers and evangelists, rather than carrying out any form of benevolent ministry as deacons. The Seven can be called deacons only in the sense that they were appointed to a benevolent ministry in the church, and that they became the assistants or helpers of those holding a superior office, in this case the Apostles.

The first use of the term *διάκονος* as an official title is by Paul in his letter to the Philippians, around A.D. 59-60, but the reference gives no details as to duties or qualifications.¹⁰⁹ By this date there appears to be a fixed order of officials in the church at Philippi including both

¹⁰⁶Acts 6:1-8.

¹⁰⁷W.A. Heidel, "Deacon," ISBE, Vol. II, p. 800.

¹⁰⁸I Timothy 3:8-12.

¹⁰⁹Philippians 1:1.

bishops (elders) and deacons.¹¹⁰ The Pastoral Epistles of a later date include certain guidelines for selecting both deacons and elders.¹¹¹ Combining the root meaning of *διάκονος* with the personal requirements to hold such an office, it appears that deacons served as assistants to the elders, ministering to the material needs of the church and working in all areas of physical Christian service.¹¹²

It is difficult to state to what degree deacons should be thought of as officers of the church, since the term means "servant" or "minister" and is used by Paul to describe the roles of apostle and evangelist.¹¹³ But there is ample evidence that its primary use was in connection with official positions in social and religious life, even in the mystery cults.¹¹⁴

Although the offices discussed or implied by New Testament writers are almost totally occupied by men, there are hints that certain women in the early church held official positions, including that of deaconess. On this subject thoughts immediately return to Phoebe. Dodd states

¹¹⁰Philippians 1:1.

¹¹¹I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-12.

¹¹²Walter Lock, "The Pastoral Epistles," ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, rep. 1966), p. 40.

¹¹³Paul: Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23,25; Timothy: I Timothy 4:6; Titus: Colossians 4:7.

¹¹⁴James H. Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), p. 149.

with confidence that whatever the deacons at Philippi were Phoebe was at Cenchraea.¹¹⁵ Certainly it must carry the same weight as when applied to Paul, Timothy or Titus, whether official or unofficial.¹¹⁶ Significant also is Paul's term *προοτάτις* in describing Phoebe's relationship to the church at Cenchrea, strongly suggesting leadership and administrative status.¹¹⁷

Another possible reference to deaconesses in the early church is I Timothy 3:11. The context is that of the qualities desirable in candidates for elders and deacons. Verse eleven is immediately preceded by a list of characteristics desirable in deacons, which most naturally indicates that *γυναῖκα* (women) must in some way parallel the above mentioned categories.¹¹⁸ The Authorized Version renders this term "wives," implying that that certain qualities were expected also of the wives of candidates for

¹¹⁵Dodd, p. 235.

¹¹⁶Ephesians 3:7, 6:21; Colossians 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; I Timothy 4:6.

¹¹⁷*προοτάτις*, translated "helper," often denotes a technical or official status of "patron" as does the Latin patronus, a title given to certain wealthy and influential individuals appointed by a city as guardian of the poor. Cf. W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, "The Epistle to the Romans," ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, rep. 1968), p. 418-20. The verb form of the word is used elsewhere in reference to the role of elders and deacons; I Timothy 3:4-5, 5:17; Romans 12:8.

¹¹⁸R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 598.

either elder or deacon or both. This translation clearly reflects the seventeenth century ecclesiastical attitude toward women, and appears to be intentionally misleading.

The absence of an article with the noun *γυναικας* suggests that the women in this context, like elders and deacons, are official servants in the church, the nature of their role demanding maturity and exemplary character in those so appointed. Had the passage been intended to describe wives of deacons and elders one would expect to find such characteristics as subjection to their husbands, child rearing and hospitality as in Titus 2:4-5, and it would have been simple enough for the writer to use the possessive pronoun "their" to make himself clear. Instead, he used the term *ὡσαύτως* (likewise), which customarily introduces the second and third entities in a series and would seem to place these three groups in categories of similar nature. The same thing is suggested by the verb combination introducing each category, suggesting what qualities the candidates must have.¹¹⁹ The qualities themselves further indicate the office or ministry of deaconess. Of the four adjectival expressions used here two are found among the qualifications for elders and deacons, and the other two are paralleled roughly.¹²⁰ And, the fact that Paul inserts the women in the

¹¹⁹ *δεῖ εἶναι* , "must be" in verse 10, 11 and 12.

¹²⁰ *νηφελίους* "sober minded" (cf. I Timothy 3:2); *σεμνός* , "grave" (cf. verse 8); *μη διαβόλους* , "not devilish"; *πιστας εν πᾶσιν* , "faithful in all things."

middle of his discussion of deacons suggests that their work is similar, and on a plain not quite the same as that of elders.¹²¹

Perhaps the strongest argument for the existence of deaconesses in the first century church is their mention in later patristic writings. Even if their roles change during the development of the Catholic tradition, as clearly happened with other leadership roles, the fact of their existence cannot be denied.

Widows

The Lukan reference to widows in Acts 6 gives rise to another possible office in the early church. Commentators commonly explain this reference as pertaining to poor widows needing special assistance from the church. Some scholars, however, see here a ministry performed by widows over which the Seven were selected as supervisors. The problem which came to the Apostles' attention may have had to do with Palestinian widows being appointed to such a ministry while Hellenistic widows were being excluded. This would then be the beginnings of both formal deacons, acting in a supervisory capacity, and the order of enrolled widows

¹²¹James B. Hurley, "Women in Ministry," Shirley Lees, ed. The Role of Women (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 138-9. It is interesting that Hurley, a conservative, sees the deaconess as a non-authoritative role under the direction of men, therefore harmonizing with his interpretation of I Timothy 2.

mentioned in I Timothy¹²² who, in return for financial support, devoted their time to prayer and good works.¹²³

A second reference to widows in Acts is in connection with Dorcas.¹²⁴ The writer is careful to point out that she was much loved and had abounded in deeds of charity and kindness, the widows showing Peter tunics and garments she had made. The concern is whether the phrase "while she was with them" suggests her ministry to them, or her affiliation with them as an order of ministering widows. It is also noteworthy that after her recovery Peter called for "the saints and widows" to see her alive, which leaves the impression that the widows were a class or group in some way distinct from the rest of the community of believers. So it is quite plausible that early in the Jerusalem church there was at least a rudimentary form of what later becomes an official "order of widows."¹²⁵

The primary source of information concerning widows in the New Testament period is I Timothy 5:3-16. A substantial portion of this letter deals with church offices, perhaps

¹²²I Timothy 5:3-12.

¹²³Rackham, p. 82; Bruce, p. 151. MacKenzie represents the traditional view that the widows here were totally recipients of charity, with no service required on their part; Donald MacKenzie, "Widows," Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, Vol. II, James Hastings, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p. 676.

¹²⁴Acts 9:46ff.

¹²⁵Bruce, p. 212.

more appropriately described as roles of service in the church, and Timothy's responsibility in selecting and working with each as a minister and evangelist. At times in I Timothy the specific concern of the writer is unclear. For example, at the beginning of chapter five it is impossible to determine whether the older and younger men and women are being discussed as church officers or simply age groups. But in the thirteen verses which follow the writer carefully identifies and discusses a class of women whose problems, needs and unique opportunity of service comprise a very special facet of the work of the early church. At least five categories of widows are distinguishable.

First, those who were legitimately destitute and therefore eligible for financial support from the church the writer calls "real widows."¹²⁶ Second, a "widow with living relatives" or with other revenue needs no financial assistance from the Christian community and therefore should not be thought of as destitute.¹²⁷ Third, a widow who has guaranteed maintenance might well be listed among the idle rich, and is described as "self indulgent" and "dead while she lives."¹²⁸ Fourth, concerning "the young widow" the

¹²⁶Concerning the plight of destitute widows in ancient Palestine, see Chayim Cohen and Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, "Widow," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. XVI (Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 487-95.

¹²⁷Family members are strongly urged to care for their own, verse 4.

¹²⁸Verses 5-6.

writer recommends marriage, raising children and keeping a home. In this he sees a noble life style, quite in keeping with the principles and social standards of the day. He does not recommend any kind of celibate vow or dedication to an exclusive order which might prove too demanding or unfulfilling for a young woman full of life and passion, nor does he imply that being young of necessity excludes some widows from having legitimate need for assistance.

Fifth, the primary group of widows discussed in this section are "enrolled widows." The term *καταλέγειν* means "to place on a list," and implies an enrolment of widows for some special designation. As Lenski suggests, this group apparently comprised an honour roll among widows, or some type of widow's guild.¹²⁹ There can be no doubt that they were special in that stringent qualifications are set down comparable to those given for elders and deacons in the same letter.¹³⁰ Bruce is convinced that the enrolled widows of this era received support from the church, in return for which they cared for orphans, tended the sick, showed hospitality and gave themselves to spiritual meditation.¹³¹ So, in spite of complexity of detail, there can be little

¹²⁹Lenski, p. 670.

¹³⁰The age of sixty is that set by Plato for men and women who join the priesthood in his ideal state; Laws (LCL, p. 579). *ἑνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή* ("wife of one man") Lenski renders "true and faithful to one man," p. 669; cf. I Timothy 3:2, 12.

¹³¹Bruce, The Spreading Flame, p. 189.

doubt about the existence of some kind of order of widows in the apostolic church.

Women Elders

The primary office clearly functional in the first century church is that of the elder (or presbyter, *πρεσβυτέρος*), also called bishop (or overseer, *ἐπίσκοπος*) or pastor (shepherd, *ποιμήν*).¹³² Although these and perhaps other terms are more descriptions than titles and may vary with locality, they represent a single leadership role which arose naturally from the Jewish concept of community and synagogue elders. Peter is careful to point out, perhaps in reflection of Jesus own words to the disciples, that his role is one of gentle shepherding and example, rather than authoritative rule.¹³³ Nevertheless, the congregation is encouraged to submit to their guidance.

The Pastoral Epistles include certain noteworthy references to "the older women."¹³⁴ The identity of these women is obscure, but the qualities expected of them and the responsibility to teach could easily be associated with those who are specifically identified as "enrolled widows." But some suggest that the responsibility of teaching implies

¹³²I Timothy 3:1ff; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 14:23.

¹³³I Peter 5:3; Mark 10:42.

¹³⁴I Timothy 5:1-2; Titus 2:1-5.

a role more appropriately described as "female elders."¹³⁵ Scanzoni and Hardesty point out that traditional translations seem to camouflage the possible administrative role of women here, avoiding terms that might imply women elders.¹³⁶ Therefore I Timothy 5:17-22 might conceivably include both men and women who deserve financial support because of their work in teaching, and who served the church as official shepherds. Furthermore, it appears that at the Council of Laodicea, 363 A.D., the office of female elder is discussed in a manner which suggests that such had existed in some form up to that point but was now being abolished.¹³⁷

Once the possibility of female elders is entertained, the common collective use of a masculine noun essentially includes women in any reference to "the elders" of a church, just as the masculine "prophets" would include "prophetesses," and "deacons" would include "deaconesses."¹³⁸ Therefore we have reason to consider the possibility that in the earliest Christian community both men and women served in an official capacity as shepherds and overseers in some local churches. However, as will be

¹³⁵"apt to teach," cf. I Timothy 3:2.

¹³⁶Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 63.

¹³⁷"Ten Very Good Biblical Reflections," Seek (June/July, 1989) p. 7.

¹³⁸Examples include prophets of I Corinthians 11-14, and the use of collective terms like "disciples," "saints," and "believers."

pointed out later, the Pastoral Epistles generally represent a period of developing church organization in which methods were being devised to control and suppress female leadership, and any hint of women elders in I Timothy does not indicate the writer's support of such an office.

Prophetesses

The participation of women in the formal assembly of the early church, along with their involvement in preaching, is probably a more controversial issue among churchmen today than is the possibility of female officers. It is relatively certain that women had a part in proclaiming the Gospel to non-believers. But evidence is strong that for some time during the first century, particularly where charismatic gifts were common, women participated in the formal church assembly both as speakers and engaging in open discussion with other speakers and teachers. Such noted women were called prophetesses.

Prophetism in early Christianity is essentially an extension of the same concept in Judaism.¹³⁹ In cultures antedating that of Israel and in some of its contemporary

¹³⁹The Hebrew term nabi' occurs over 300 times in the masculine in the O.T. and six times in the feminine. The root meaning is "to utter a sound," or "to announce, speak, or proclaim;" Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, eds., A Hebrew and English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, rep. 1968), s.v. A synonymous term is roeh, "a seer," one who sees and hears beyond natural perception; C. Von Orelli, "Prophecy," ISBE, Vol. IV, James Orr, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 2459.

cultures prophetism was marked by frenzy and ecstatic speech. It was believed that a seer, as many ethnic prophets were known, might be seized suddenly by a spirit causing him "to rave" as if possessed and in this state would utter messages from the world beyond. Most of the prophetic practices in Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Canaan and other ancient cultures are related primarily to magic and astrology, and the ecstatic experiences and dreams were often induced by artificial means.¹⁴⁰

The Old Testament prophets were also involved, to a certain extent, with visions, dreams and forecasts, and were characterized by strange behaviour. But as a whole they represent a more noble ministry than that of other ancient cultures. Essentially, the prophet of Yahweh was a proclaimer of religious truth and of the profound mysteries of the kingdom of God. He was the mouthpiece of God driven by his zeal and by the burden of a divinely inspired message to preach to God's people.¹⁴¹ Merrill argues convincingly that the Old Testament prophet was neither ecstatic nor was he overwhelmed by his prophetic burden. His own personality was constantly evident, and he was in total control of his

¹⁴⁰Karl Burger, "Prophecy and the Prophetic Office," TNSHERK, Vol. IX, S.M. Jackson, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, rep. 1964), p. 271; Helmut Kramer, "προφήτης," IDNT, Vol. V, Gerhard Friedrich, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 786-7.

¹⁴¹A.B. Davidson, Old Testament Prophecy (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1903), p. 89.

behaviour.¹⁴² Neither was prediction of the future the principal element in Old Testament prophecy. Prediction was certainly employed by most and the fulfilment of their prophecies served as evidence of divine calling, but the Old Testament "man of God" was primarily a man of the present. He related military defeats, grasshopper plagues and famines to the immediate spiritual needs of the people. He predicted the future and recalled the past for the purpose of present motivation to allegiance to God.¹⁴³

Although men dominate the prophetic office in the Old Testament it would seem that women were not categorically excluded. The term "prophetess" is applied to Miriam, the sister of Moses;¹⁴⁴ to Deborah, one of the judges prior to the monarchy;¹⁴⁵ to Huldah, a contemporary of Jeremiah and apparently a functioning female prophet;¹⁴⁶ to Noadiah, a professional prophetess who opposed the work of Nehemiah;¹⁴⁷ and to the wife of Isaiah.¹⁴⁸ In the Gospel of Luke the term προφῆτις is applied to Anna, who is doubtless a remnant of

¹⁴²Eugene H. Merrill, "Prophecy," Christianity Today (March 12, 1971), p. 541.

¹⁴³Von Orelli, p. 2461.

¹⁴⁴Exodus 15:20; Numbers 12:2.

¹⁴⁵Judges 4:4, although this is likely a late inscription.

¹⁴⁶II Kings 22:14; II Chronicles 34:22.

¹⁴⁷Nehemiah 6:14.

¹⁴⁸Isaiah 8:3.

the Old Testament prophetic ministry.¹⁴⁹

In the New Testament the concept of prophecy seems much the same as in the Old Testament, except in the content of its message and context of its utterance. The prophet in the early church was not so much a seer of visions nor a prophet of future events as an inspired preacher or teacher and an organ of special revelation, and understood to perform by Holy Spirit inspiration. In simpler terms, he was a proclaimer of the word of God.¹⁵⁰ Some facets of the prophecies uttered by this kind of prophet may have been apocalyptic in nature but for the most part his message was straightforward and quite relevant to the lives of his audience. As suggested by Lightfoot, his calling was not so much to "foretell" as to "forth tell."¹⁵¹

Therefore it can be said with reasonable certainty that prophets in the apostolic church were essentially inspired preachers of the word of God, whose primary service was the edification of the Christian community.¹⁵² They were not

¹⁴⁹Luke 2:36.

¹⁵⁰Gerhard Friedrich, "προφήτης," TDNT, Vol. VI, Gerhard Friedrich, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1971), p. 829. Ben Witherington III, Women in the Earliest Churches, Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 59 (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), pp. 92-4.

¹⁵¹J.B. Lightfoot, Notes of the Epistles of St. Paul, From Unpublished Commentaries (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. 83. Cf. H.B. Swete, "The Prophets in the Christian Church," The Biblical World, XXVI (September, 1905), p. 208.

¹⁵²I Corinthians 14:6, 24ff.

merely recognized as prophets because of repeated utterances in assembly, but rather were known in their own community as those having been endowed with the gift of prophecy by the Apostles.

During the Pentecost sermon Peter quoted the prophet Joel concerning the New Age.¹⁵³ In view of the apocalyptic nature of this prophecy it is difficult to determine whether female prophecy would be essential for it to find some degree of fulfilment. It does appear that some type of ministry by inspired women was considered a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the initiation of a new age for God's people, and reference to this particular prophecy would suggest that the writer of Acts, if not Peter himself, also thought so. The majority of scholars, so it seems, hold that the one hundred and twenty disciples of the previous chapter were assembled on this occasion and that the entire group, including a number of women, received the "outpouring" of the Holy Spirit, evidenced by tongues of fire and the ability to speak in tongues.¹⁵⁴

The first clear mention of female prophetism in the history of the early church is the case of the four

¹⁵³Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17.

¹⁵⁴Bruce, p. 88; Rackham, p. 17. Others believe the Pentecost event centered upon the Apostles only, which seem more harmonious with other references in Acts and does no harm to the prophecy; cf. Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; G.H.C. Macgregor, "The Acts of the Apostles," The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. IX (New York: Abingdon, 1954), p. 34.

daughters of Philip, described by the writer as "virgins" (παρθένοι).¹⁵⁵ They were present when the prophet Agabus warned Paul of the dangers which awaited him in Jerusalem, but nothing is stated about their work or role in the church. By the time these events transpired, prophetic gifts had long been in use in Corinth, and Paul had already written a letter dealing extensively with the misuse of charismatic gifts in that church. It could be argued that both they and Agabus were remnants of Old Testament prophetism, as probably was Anna, or that they were called to some special prophetic ministry such as that of John the Baptist. But it would seem more logical to define their role according to the implications of the clearest portion of evidence, that being I Corinthians 11-14.

However, concerning prophetesses in I Corinthians commentators wrestle with what appears to be a blatant contradiction in policy, in that Paul in one chapter acknowledges such a ministry and in another chapter seems to deny them the right to speak.¹⁵⁶ The apparent injunction of silence in I Corinthians 14 will be discussed later, along with various efforts exegetes have made to reconcile the two passages. But at this point it is only necessary to assert

¹⁵⁵Acts 21:7-14. This record, however, would have been written after Paul's mention of prophetesses in I Corinthians, dated around AD 55. See also Witherington, pp. 151-2.

¹⁵⁶I Corinthians 11:4-5; 14:1-26.

that prophetesses did exist in the church at Corinth, and that they exercised their gift in the general assembly.¹⁵⁷

Following John Calvin, Bachmann and a few others have argued that prophetesses were permitted to speak only in private home devotions, defined as assemblies of limited circles such as "house churches," or perhaps even at family devotionals.¹⁵⁸ But in I Corinthians 11 the clear relationship of the first section to the Lord's Supper discussion which follows cannot be ignored in favour of the above theory.

Very similar to the above argument is the suggestion by Prohl that the agape (love feast) and the eucharist (Lord's Supper) were closed feasts, to which only "the initiated were invited."¹⁵⁹ He asserts that where no outsiders were present the wives were permitted to join the men in leading prayers and in prophesying. However, there is no suggestion in the New Testament that non-believers were prohibited from attending any of the assemblies, and I Corinthians 14

¹⁵⁷The entire section 11:2-14:34 seems to deal with matters concerning the church assembly: cf. 11:18, 20; 14:5; etc.

¹⁵⁸John Calvin, I Corinthians, I, 356; H.A.W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 247; Abel Isaksson, Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple: A Study with Special Reference to Matthew 19:3-12 and I Corinthians 11:3-16 (Lund: Gleerup, 1965), p. 155.

¹⁵⁹Russell G. Prohl, Women in the Church, A Restudy of Woman's Place in Building the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 30.

implies quite the opposite, that unbelievers were welcome.¹⁴⁰ It seems that secret or closed meetings only arose out of necessity during periods of extreme persecution, and as long as the Christians were in no physical danger their assemblies were open to any passerby.

Therefore, it must be concluded that the proceedings implied by the term "prophesying" in I Corinthians 11:5 were involved with the assembly of the church, and that women who possessed prophetic gifts played an active role in inspired teaching and preaching, both in assemblies and in public evangelism.¹⁴¹ One need not look for special references to prophetesses once it is established that they existed, for the masculine plural would doubtless include all females with the same prophetic gift.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰I Corinthians 14:23ff.

¹⁴¹One further reference, Revelation 2:20 suggests the possibility of prophetesses in the early church, although this one is entirely negative. Concerning whether the prophetess Jezebel was a real figure in the church in Thyatira, see R.H. Charles, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John," Vol I, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, rep. 1963), p. 70; G.B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 43. Harnack was probably correct in seeing Jezebel in Revelation as a figure for emperor worship, Gnosticism or any other heresy; Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries Vol. II (London: Williams and Norgate, 1908), p. 69.

¹⁴²E.g. Romans 12:6.

Leaders in Prayer

The same statement by Paul which indicates that women engaged in prophecy in the assemblies of the Corinthian church also indicates female leadership in public prayer.¹⁶³ The term translated "praying" in this passage is used more than eighty times in the New Testament with the same meaning.¹⁶⁴

A variety of prayer forms, such as petitions, supplications, praise, thanksgiving, and such like, came into Christianity from Judaism. But as early as the teachings of Jesus there occurs a shift to a more personal style of prayer, which no doubt motivated the disciples to say "Lord teach us to pray."¹⁶⁵ Even in Judaism just prior to the life of Christ prayer came to take the place of sacrifice in a shift of religious emphasis from the nation to the individual, and it would seem, as stated by Nash, that "the immense outflow of spiritual power and moral energy that founded the Christian church made prayer its spring and soul."¹⁶⁶

New Testament examples and instruction concerning prayer reveal a surprising lack of liturgy, although psalms

¹⁶³I Corinthians 11:4-5.

¹⁶⁴προσεύχονται, cf. Liddell, Scott, Jones, and McKenzie, s.v.

¹⁶⁵Luke 11:1.

¹⁶⁶H.S.Nash, "Prayer," NSHERK, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), p. 154.

and devotional forms were incorporated into the wording of many prayers. Prayers appear to have been generally spontaneous and related to special needs and circumstances.¹⁶⁷ A common attitude of prayer was to hold the arms out with palms open and turned upward, either indicating a request for sustenance, as a symbol of unconditional surrender to God, or even as a symbol of moral purity.¹⁶⁸ But there is no indication that any special attitude was practised ritually, for New Testament writers as a whole regard virtually any position as acceptable. Early Christians seem to have been accustomed to keeping hours of prayer, although this may have been true only among those converted from Judaism.¹⁶⁹

Paul stresses the importance of congregational prayers, often soliciting prayers on behalf of himself and others whose circumstances were precarious.¹⁷⁰ As to whether prayers were recited in unison or worded by an individual nothing concrete can be determined. The relationship between prayer and inspired prophecy is also obscure. Prayer is never listed among charismatic gifts, although some suggest that the prayer to which the Corinthian church would have

¹⁶⁷Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. I, p. 463; cf. Matthew 6:5-15; Philippians 4:6.

¹⁶⁸Cf. I Timothy 2:8, Lock, p. 30.

¹⁶⁹E.g. Peter in Acts 10:9.

¹⁷⁰Romans 12:12; 15:30-32; II Corinthians 1:11; 9:12ff.

responded "amen" was worded by a prophet.¹⁷¹ Concerning the women who "pray and prophesy" in I Corinthians 11 it is difficult to know whether their prayers were charismatic or by any prophetic authority. But it is likely that those who possessed prophetic abilities were devoted to extensive prayer and meditation, and were called upon most often to word prayers for edification when the whole church was together.¹⁷²

A second text in the Pastoral Epistles which might indicate the participation of women as leaders in public prayer is I Timothy 2:8-10. The writer here seems to allude to public prayer, the expression "every place" referring to wherever Christians might assemble. But the overall tone of his statement has application in every sphere of Christian life, and not just to a formal assembly. Traditionally, Christian exegetes have argued that women in the assembly prayed only after the fashion of Hannah who spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.¹⁷³ There are other authorities, however, who contend that the use of "likewise" connects verse nine with the subject of prayer in the previous eight verses. Ramsay, representing New Testament scholarship just after the turn of the century,

¹⁷¹Friedrich, p. 853.

¹⁷²Luke 2:36-38; Acts 13:1-3; I Thessalonians 5:17ff.

¹⁷³Cf. I Samuel 1:13; William Hendriksen, A Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (London: Banner of Truth, 1964), p. 102-3.

wrote that "likewise" in this place is meaningless if it does not relate praying to women also, and later scholars have felt that the Greek conjunction might even carry on to women all that has been said concerning men in the previous verses.¹⁷⁴ If this is the case, the regulations concerning dress in verses nine and ten must be taken to represent the standards expected of those women who play a leading role in assembly of the church. Much the same principle appears in I Corinthians 11:5 and 13 concerning the headcovering.

Consecrated Virgins

The subject of virginity is not a common topic in the New Testament, occurring only twice where some sort of special class might be implied. The first are the daughters of Philip, discussed also in connection with prophecy and about whom we know virtually nothing.¹⁷⁵

The other occurs in a lengthy discussion of chastity by Paul in I Corinthians 7, although there is nothing therein which suggests an order of consecrated virgins in the early Christian community. The longest section of I Corinthians 7, verses 25-40, is a rather complicated discussion of those believers whom Paul identifies as *παρθένοι*. The application

¹⁷⁴W.M. Ramsay, "Historical Commentary on the First Epistle to Timothy" The Expositor, VIII (September, 1909); Walter Lock, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles," ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, rep. 1966), p. 31.

¹⁷⁵Acts 21:9.

of the term here is consistently a point of divergent opinion among scholars.

Ford, for example, argues that the equivalent term in Hebrew, Greek and Latin does not always refer to a man or woman who has never been married, but can be a term of status; that is, referring to one who has been married only once and who is pure by merit of faithfulness to one partner.¹⁷⁶ On this basis she approaches this section of I Corinthians, suggesting that Paul is referring to young widows and widowers and that the subject under discussion is some form of Levirate Marriage.¹⁷⁷ Her theory, however, makes too much of an obscure and questionable use of the term *παρθένος* and wrongly presupposes the practice of Jewish Levirate marriage among Corinthian Christians, most of whom were of pagan background. Others, of whom Elliott is representative, understand *παρθένος* to mean a "betrothed girl" and view the passage as dealing with engaged couples.¹⁷⁸ But the passage is quite understandable when *παρθένος* is taken in its most common sense of "virgin."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶J. Massyngberde Ford, "The Meaning of Virgin," New Testament Studies 12:3 (April, 1966), pp. 293-8.

¹⁷⁷Ford, "Levirate Marriage in St. Paul (I Cor. 7)," New Testament Studies 10:3 (April, 1964), p. 361.

¹⁷⁸J.K. Elliott, "Paul's Teaching on Marriage in I Corinthians: Some Problems Considered," New Testament Studies 19:2 (January, 1973), pp. 219-25.

¹⁷⁹Meaning a woman never having been married, and therefore assumed to be a virgin. It refers to women only in verses 28, 34, 36, 37 and 38; cf. Revelation 14:4.

There can be no doubt that the Apostle Paul preferred a life of celibacy, which we must conclude pertained largely if not totally to his unreserved commitment to the Gospel.¹⁸⁰ In this vein he recommends such a life to others, since marriage has certain difficulties which might restrict one's spiritual service. Paul also recommends celibacy in view of the troublesome times and specific dangers incumbent upon believers in his day.¹⁸¹ And there is reason to think that an intense eschatological awareness on the part of Paul and many Christians of his time contributed to their greater devotion to preaching and diminished interest in mundane matters.¹⁸² But concerning others the Apostle seems to suggest that while a celibate life is noble, marriage is both natural, normal and acceptable as a Christian life style.¹⁸³ And he acknowledges that the ability to remain chaste is a "gift," perhaps possessed only by a few.¹⁸⁴ The alternative of self control is marriage, "for it is better to marry than

¹⁸⁰This fact sets Paul at odds with his rabbinic background; cf. Witherington, p. 27.

¹⁸¹Suggested by "the present crisis" (v. 26).

¹⁸²Verse 31; cf. I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T Holmes III, Male and Female (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 24.

¹⁸³Witherington, pp. 28-9; Witherington also points out that Paul sees marital intercourse as an obligation for both partners, not an option, which discounts the possibility that he is advocating "spiritual marriage."

¹⁸⁴Verse 7; Paul is careful not to give ascetics grounds for using his words to command others to abstain from marriage, which in later years happens anyway.

to burn."¹⁸⁵

Verses 10-23 are essentially a discussion of marriage problems, primarily those relating to believers married to unbelievers and the tension and unhappiness which might result from their different life styles. Whether Paul made some concession for divorce is difficult to determine.¹⁸⁶ But he clearly permitted remarriage of a widow, which doctrine he may have acquired from Gamaliel.¹⁸⁷

With verse 25 Paul returns to his discussion of virgins, and he clearly distinguishes the unmarried woman (either a widow or divorced woman) from the virgin in verse 34. The section deals with the whole issue of marrying in view of difficult times, and on this subject no traditional teaching of Jesus had reached the Apostle.¹⁸⁸ Claiming no

¹⁸⁵Verse 9; The use here of *πυρρῶσθαι* is also debatable. Traditionally it has been taken to refer to the fire of passion. Barre has argued that it refers to the fires of judgment for wrong doing. M. L. Barre, "To Marry or To Burn: *purousthai* in I Cor. 7:9," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 36:193-202 (1974).

¹⁸⁶"Not under bondage" has been a controversial expression known as "the Pauline privilege," the issue being whether he is allowing divorce (and therefore remarriage) when an unbelieving partner departs. Witherington, among others, understands verses 10 and 15 to refer to divorce; p. 32. Elliott, on the other hand, argues that the terms *ἀφίεναι* and *χωρισθῆναι* refer to separation. J.K. Elliott, "Paul's teaching on Marriage in I Corinthians: Some Problems Considered" New Testament Studies 19:2 (1973), pp. 219-25.

¹⁸⁷Vss. 8, 39. Cf. I Timothy 5:14, Romans 7:2-3; Gamaliel, "M. Yebamoth," 16:7 (DM, pp. 244-5).

¹⁸⁸Verse 25.

direct revelation on it he offers his personal opinion.¹⁸⁹ Verse 36 must be understood in the light of the Roman patria potestas, a concept which had permeated most cultures of the west by Paul's day.¹⁹⁰ Paul gives advice concerning fathers who because of the critical times might have reservations about giving their daughters in marriage. Then concluding advice is given concerning widows, with a parallel axiom in Romans 7:1-6. Paul says a widow is at liberty to marry provided she marries a Christian,¹⁹¹ which is quite harmonious with I Timothy 5:14. But, as in all other cases, Paul is confident that a widow who is truly dedicated to the Lord will be happier if she imitates his choice to remain celibate.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹Suggested both by *γνώμην* "judgment" and by the verb *νομίζω* in verse 26.

¹⁹⁰Otto Kiefer, Sexual Life in Ancient Rome, Gilbert and Helen Highet, trans. (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1941), p. 43; see above, p. 27 concerning the father's rights.

¹⁹¹This interpretation has been disputed by Harnack and others; see A. Robertson and A. Plummer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians" ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, second edition, rep. 1967), p. 135.

¹⁹²Witherington's discussion of I Corinthians 7 is thorough and his observations sensible. He is correct in concluding that Paul does not think sexual relations or marriage are either evil or questionable, and approaches this discussion out of concern for the Christian's attitude toward relationships in view of troubled times. Paul's advice to the unmarried to remain as they are is part of his general advice to remain in whatever status or situation one is found upon conversion. But he further stresses that the Christ event has called the believer to live unattached to things of this world, therefore offering each one a choice

III. APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE

Having noted the abundant New Testament evidence for the prominence of women in the early decades of the Christian Church, attention must turn to more precise doctrines concerning female status which are associated with the apostolic period. Of particular concern here is the doctrine of female subordination and inferiority found primarily in Pauline texts, and the apparent contradiction between these passages and the body of New Testament evidence supporting female elevation.

Four factors should be kept in mind concerning the passages discussed in this section. First, a distinction must be recognized between those doctrines which pertain to the general social status of women and those which pertain to the function of women in the church, which distinction is represented in the section outline. Second, it is apparent that the latter issue arose naturally out of the former, and restrictions on the role of women were imposed in order to harmonize church liturgy with social norms. Therefore, the ancient concept of patriarchy, or male headship in marriage, became a determining factor in early Christian liturgy and doctrine. Third, a distinction must be noted between passages of undisputed Pauline authorship and those of a later date in order to appreciate the use of the Genesis

about how best to serve God. Witherington correctly concludes, however, that Paul was not an ascetic; pp. 26-42.

Creation motif in relation to various problems in the early church, and to demonstrate the development of Christian doctrine in the first and possibly second centuries relevant to the status of women.¹⁷³ Fourth, an appropriate exegesis of these passages must anticipate the modern debate on the status of women, and will therefore challenge traditional interpretations in the light of current theological and sociological trends.

A. STATUS

Pauline Doctrine of Equality

Galatians is possibly the earliest Pauline work, and therefore represents certain apostolic concerns after the first two to three decades of evangelism.¹⁷⁴ In addition, Galatians 3:28 is a pivotal verse in the controversy over Pauline doctrine on women, both because of its implications in contrast to other Pauline texts and because of the way churchmen have interpreted it in order to harmonize Pauline teachings in defence of traditional subordination of women. Paul here draws upon three critical areas of social stratification to illustrate the objective of the Gospel and

¹⁷³This takes into consideration the fact that scholarship tends to reject the Pastorals as Pauline, written in the early second century by an anonymous Paulinist.

¹⁷⁴Considering the two mentioned visits to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18 and 2:1) the latter being fourteen years after his conversion, most scholars settle on a date around AD 48 or 49.

the nature of the kingdom of God.¹⁹⁵ And it is in this triad that practical theology with regard to the place of women in the church finds its critical moment. In whatever way the Gospel message applies to slavery and social discrimination it applies to the status of women. But how this verse has been understood by the church through the centuries reflects the practical approach it would take to social ethics in general, and to the status of women today.

Many scholars, liberal and conservative, have felt compelled to defend the traditional position that male dominance, at least in the home if not in church liturgy as well, is a divinely ordained pattern for all believers everywhere. Following that presupposition Galatians 3:28 is understood to refer only to the spiritual freedom and equality available in Christ. Caird, for example, argues that freedom is "one of the inseparable corollaries of his (Paul's) doctrine of justification by faith."¹⁹⁶ This in fact is the primary thrust of his letter to the Galatians in which the Apostle compares legalistic Judaism to Hagar, a bondwoman rearing enslaved children, while Christianity, the heavenly Jerusalem and covenant of faith, corresponds to

¹⁹⁵The format of antithetical pairs is also found in I Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11, which suggests to Witherington that Paul may here be working with a set piece; p. 77.

¹⁹⁶G. B. Caird, Paul and Women's Liberty (The Manson Memorial Lecture, University of Manchester, 1971), p. 271.

Sarah the true wife whose children are free.¹⁹⁷ But the liberty of which Paul speaks is spiritual, not legal, political or social. Zerbst also contends that Paul is concerned only with the spiritual value of people to God, declaring His accessibility to everyone regardless of social status. The immediate context of this critical verse is the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile unto God through a spiritual body, and the mention of slaves and women is merely an extension of the same theme:

The realm has nothing to do either with the body or external forms of human society, but is wholly of a spiritual nature. . . .He (Paul) does not. . . .destroy the civil order or do away with the gradation of rank, without which human society cannot exist.¹⁹⁸

Therefore, Paul's understanding of the Gospel is summarized in the good news that God is not exclusively the God of the Jews, of the rich, of citizens or of males only, but that all classes and both sexes have equal invitation to serve God and find spiritual harmony with Him.¹⁹⁹

Most advocates of this position admit that these principles of spiritual equality should have both personal and social implications, but only to the extent of expressions of love, compassion and fellowship in the

¹⁹⁷Galatians 4:22.

¹⁹⁸Fritz Zerbst, The Office of Women in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), p. 35.

¹⁹⁹Romans 10:12; Colossians 3:11; I Corinthians 12:13.

church. They do not, according to this view, eradicate essential forms of social stratification. No New Testament writer overtly denounces slavery or any other form of social discrimination. Instead the New Testament as a whole encourages all parties to carry out the obligations of their status in the spirit of Christ.²⁰⁰ Likewise the political hierarchy of the Roman Empire, with its technical distinction between slave and free classes and its opposition to the tenets of the Christian faith, was to be honoured and supported by all believers.²⁰¹ Furthermore, as John Davis argues, the patriarchal structure of Jewish society remains "a providentially prepared social paradigm for the Christian Church."²⁰²

A further argument is based on the contention that God designed a hierarchy for marriage with the husband as the head. Burton, advocating this line of interpretation, takes note of the "ineradicable distinction of sex," concluding that the passage has nothing to do directly with the practical merging of nationalities, annulling class distinctions or abolition of slavery, and therefore cannot abolish the practical subordination of the wife to her

²⁰⁰Philemon; I Peter 2:19; Colossians 3:22.

²⁰¹Romans 13:1ff.; I Peter 2:13ff.

²⁰²John Davis, "Some Reflections on Galatians 3:28, Sexual Roles, and Biblical Hermeneutics," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 19:207, 1976.

husband and all its implications.²⁰³ Chadwick also sees Paul's words as the offer of moral choice and the responsibility of spiritual behavior, but not a program of emancipation. The role of the husband and wife, he says, stays the same by God's authoritative design.²⁰⁴

Witherington sees Paul's statement as a response to the common emphasis in his day on marriage and procreation. Paul had to affirm that in Christ there was a place and a meaningful role for a single person. In this the text has clear social implications for the woman in Christ. But to Witherington, this "does not lead to an agenda of obliterating or ignoring such (social) distinctions or their advantages."²⁰⁵

As a whole, advocates of this interpretation of Galatians 3:28 acknowledge that there are certain social distinctions which are inevitable in any culture. There will always be leaders and followers, teachers and pupils, rich and poor, employer and employee, governor and citizen; there will always be male and female. The New Testament does not instruct that such social distinctions are to be disregarded

²⁰³E. De W. Burton, "The Epistle to the Galatians," ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, rep. 1968), p. 206; H. N. Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1970), p. 149.

²⁰⁴Henry Chadwick, The Early Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 58-9.

²⁰⁵Witherington, pp. 76-8. See also Ben Witherington, "Rite and Rights for Women- Galatians 3:28," New Testament Studies 27:5 (1981), pp. 593-604.

by Christians, or even that such should not persist within the body of believers, but that these standards have nothing to do with salvation or quality of service in the kingdom of God. Therefore, Paul is only stating that in God's eyes there are no social distinctions, and everyone can enjoy a station of dignity in the body of Christ, even a Gentile, a slave and a woman.

In contrast with the traditional line of reasoning, many scholars are inclined to see Galatians 3:28 as a statement of the ideal attainable if and when Christian principles lead to spiritual maturity in people and attain their objectives in socially meaningful ways. In the words of Roger Haight, this verse is "a rather direct expression of the substance of Jesus' revelation of a God of boundless love," and a concise statement of the essence of Christianity.²⁰⁶ Most exegetes today reject an interpretation of this passage which obviates the practical issue of social relationships.²⁰⁷ Paul must be understood to declare, at least as a potential for a mature church, dignity and equality for all.²⁰⁸

The first objection to the traditional view limiting

²⁰⁶Roger Haight, "Women in the Church: A Theological Reflection," Toronto Journal of Theology, 2:113, 1986.

²⁰⁷E.S. Gerstenberger and W. Schrage, Woman and Man, Douglas Stott, trans. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), p. 150.

²⁰⁸Norman Parks, "Set Our Women Free," Integrity (January, 1973); J. B. Lightfoot, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1972), p. 150; F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Galatians (Paternoster, 1982), pp. 188-90.

this passage to spiritual relationships is that it renders Galatians 3:28 meaningless, even in spiritual terms. In almost every religion of the ancient world, including Judaism, women enjoyed the same status as men when considered from the standpoint of divine blessings and either personal or national relationship to deities. As was the case with Israel, many cults were nationalistic and no individual could be thought of as having a greater or lesser degree of spiritual importance than anyone else, except of course the priests and prophets. But the outward form of spiritual expression clearly discriminated against women; the exclusion from certain cultic rituals, along with the ceremonial encumbrances and traditional taboos which made the lot of women unbearable. And, according to Paul, it was this useless body of tradition from which Jews could be freed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.²⁰⁹ Therefore, if acknowledgment by God as the spiritual equal of men was her only benefit, converting to Christianity would offer a Jewess no tangible benefits or advantages whatsoever.

A further objection to the traditional line of reasoning is that it tends to create a monstrous contradiction between what is commonly recognized as Christian ideology and actual New Testament doctrine. While New Testament writers, and more significantly Jesus himself, encourage the support of government officials, even if they

²⁰⁹Galatians 3:13; Colossians 2:14.

happen to be evil and their form of rule tyrannical, the underlying principles of New Testament theology clearly oppose tyranny.²¹⁰ However, Paul himself instructs slaves to submit to their masters and masters are encouraged to treat slaves fairly, which weighed according to the hermeneutic of certain fundamentalist scholars should be taken as supportive of slavery. In direct contrast, the underlying principles of love, mercy, equity and justice clearly oppose slavery.²¹¹ One must assume, therefore, that the fulfilment of the Christian message and the development of a mature church requires time, so that the principles of the Gospel slowly permeate social structure and supplant tyranny and injustice. This implicit phenomenon is essential to the process of evangelism.

It is also possible that Paul was not that far sighted.²¹² As stated by Terrien:

Paul may not have intended or foreseen the momentous consequences of his statements in terms of social ethics, even though he stated its consequences in

²¹⁰Romans 13:1-14; Mark 12:16-17.

²¹¹Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1, Philemon 1-25.

²¹²A comparison of Acts 2:39, 10:1ff. and Galatians 2:7-13 suggests that Peter did not envision Gentiles becoming part of the New Age, and had trouble adjusting to it when it occurred. I Corinthians 13:12 might be taken to mean that Paul also recognized his inability to grasp the total implications of the Gospel.

terms of ritual and racial exclusion.²¹³

But other visions and aspirations for the Church, as well as fears and warnings, suggest that Paul did have some awareness of what the Gospel could produce should it find a suitable place to grow.²¹⁴ Therefore, it is quite reasonable to conclude that Galatians 3:28 represents perhaps the clearest New Testament declaration of the egalitarian nature of the kingdom of God, and Paul's vision for a mature and perhaps ideal church.

Further evidence that Paul had more in mind than mere spiritual status are the practical and social implications of Christianity to Jews and Gentiles.²¹⁵ The three pairs mentioned in Galatians 3:28 denote the three deepest divisions which split society in the first century, and were the three specific classes mentioned in the Jewish morning prayer. In his ministry and writings Paul openly sought to abolish the social walls between Jew and Gentile.²¹⁶ He was often involved in mediating between Jewish and Gentile factions, especially where Jewish Christians attempted to

²¹³Samuel Terrien, "Toward a Biblical Theology of Womanhood," quoted by Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T Holmes III, Male and Female (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 24.

²¹⁴Ephesians 4:13-16 concerning growth of the Church to maturity; Acts 20:28-9 concerning later apostasy; also I Timothy 4:1ff if accepted as Pauline.

²¹⁵Daniel P. Fuller, "Paul and Galatians 3:28," ISF Bulletin 9:9-13, 1985.

²¹⁶Ephesians 2:14-22.

impose upon Gentile converts at least certain aspects of Mosaic law to satisfy their traditional prejudice.²¹⁷ Paul claims to have opposed Peter face to face over a similar issue.²¹⁸ As Paul saw it, such resistance to change was contrary to the true meaning of the Good News and served to quench the spirit of grace.

No doubt similar tension developed between members of different socio-economic strata. There was some consolation in knowing that God did not measure their spiritual worth in terms of material possessions.²¹⁹ But various New Testament writers draw attention to the practical implications of the Gospel in response to social inequity. From the outset wealthy Christians were encouraged to share their abundance with the poor, and to avoid discrimination against them in the affairs of the church.²²⁰ Likewise the poor were encouraged to maintain faith, and the lazy were admonished to work in order to have possessions with which to support their own relatives and to share with others who might have nothing.²²¹

This seems to be the case concerning the status of

²¹⁷The Jerusalem Council, Acts 15.

²¹⁸Galatians 2:11-21.

²¹⁹James 1:9-10.

²²⁰James 1:9-10; 2:1ff; I John 3:13-18.

²²¹A particular problem at Thessalonica; II Thessalonians 3:10-12. Cf. Ephesians 4:28.

women also. In practical terms the various restrictions placed upon women in the early Christian community were necessitated by social and cultural pressures, but this fact should not be understood as a divine pattern for universal church dogma. In Galatians 3:28 the Apostle Paul reveals the ultimate, the ideal, in Christian objectives, setting aside in theory all practical rules of subordination and declaring the freedom of all subjected classes, slaves, Gentiles and women, from social discrimination. The implications of such a teaching are summarized by Glen:

Both Jew and Gentile were to be reconciled in their actual outward relationships as well as in spirit and mind. . . . The Gospel is the power that shattered and continues to shatter slavery, not only as a spiritual and mental form of bondage, but as an institution; no less that form of slavery, the formal institution of subordination of women to men.²²²

If, therefore Paul's words do not suggest the practical emancipation of women, to be evidenced first in the role of women in the church and second in the sphere of social relationships, then they have no meaning at all. And as Paulsen suggests, Paul would here have provided the church with a model which stands starkly opposed to reality.²²³

²²²J. S. Glen, Pastoral Problems in First Corinthians (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 137-8.

²²³H. Paulsen, "Einheit und Freiheit der Söhne Gottes-Gal. 3:26-29," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 71:95, 1980. Cf. Maahs, p. 21.

Male Headship in Marriage

Perhaps Paul's earliest conflict on the issue of women arose in the Corinthian church, in specific connection with the work of prophetesses. In dealing with those problems Paul's teaching left a number of hermeneutical difficulties for future generations.

The traditional Christian family structure is rooted in I Corinthians 11:3 which has been taken as divine authority for the husband's role as head of the wife and the household, and which, coupled with later Pauline statements, assign the wife to a role of submission.²²⁴ This hierarchy of authority has been a paradigm for social relationships throughout the Judaeo-Christian tradition.²²⁵ One of the most influential proponents of this theology today, Larry Christenson, sees that structure of headship working in the family, each member living under the authority of some other individual filling a role designated by God:

The husband lives under the authority of Christ and is responsible to Christ for

²²⁴Generally the verb ὑποτάσσειν, a common term meaning "to rank, to place under, to subordinate;" Ephesians 5:21-24; Colossians 3:18; I Timothy 2:11; I Peter 3:1-5; cf. Genesis 3:16.

²²⁵Roberta Hestenes, "Women in Leadership: Finding Ways to Serve the Church," Christianity Today (September 3, 1986), pp.7-1f. Noteworthy also is the instruction by Paul that a wife should "reverence" her husband (Eph. 5:33), and the mention in I Peter 3:6 of Sarah calling Abraham "lord." Both are clear reflections of the social expectations in the first Christian century.

the leadership and care of the family. The wife lives under the authority of her husband, and is responsible to him for the way she orders the household and cares for the children. The children live under the authority of both parents. . . the authority of the mother is a derived authority. She exercises authority over the children on behalf of and in the place of her husband.²²⁶

Others, like David Field,²²⁷ find support for the authority paradigm in the concept of governments and political officials serving as God's agents to keep peace,²²⁸ the authority of parents over their children,²²⁹ and even the authority of God the Father over the Son.²³⁰ An exhaustive discussion of this subject from the traditional point of view has been published by Stephen Clark, director of a large Christian community in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He states that God is a God of order and that the New Testament presents a pattern which if followed will produce the most stable and harmonious marriages possible.²³¹ Proponents of this order for family structure see no danger or wrong in the husband

²²⁶Larry Christenson, The Christian Family (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970, p.17-18.

²²⁷Field, p. 58.

²²⁸Romans 13:1-7.

²²⁹Ephesians 6:1-3.

²³⁰I Corinthians 11:3; 15:28.

²³¹Stephen B. Clark, Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980), p. 285.

being in the power position purely by reason of gender, for he in turn is in a subordinate position to God and Christ and is instructed to love his wife and sacrifice himself for her welfare.²³² And since this conservative interpretation is typically rooted in the belief that such biblical teachings are fully inspired of God and are divinely authoritative for all believers, the logical conclusion is that if this is God's plan it must be the best.²³³

The topic of discussion at the thirty eighth meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, held in Atlanta late in 1986, was "Male and Female in Biblical and Theological Perspective." A major area of concern was the meaning of the classical Greek term *κεφαλή*, used by Paul in I Corinthians 11:3 to describe the relationship of the husband to wife, and that of God to Christ.²³⁴ Wayne Grudem, of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, represented the traditional position arguing that *κεφαλή* in the New Testament carries the connotation of authority, as do its Hebrew and Latin

²³²Ephesians 5:25.

²³³Some advocates of the traditional position note the use of *ἄνθρωπος καὶ γυναῖκός* by Paul for "husband and wife" in all related passages. Therefore the authority relationship is only applicable in marriage, not of men in relationship to women. But the intimate relationship between families and church demands male headship also in the church. This has become more or less the official position among Churches of Christ. James O. Baird, "The Role of Women in the Church," Introducing the Church of Christ, John Waddey, ed. (Ft. Worth: Star, 1981), pp. 121ff.

²³⁴David Neff, "The Battle of the Lexicons," Christianity Today 31:44 (Jan. 16, 1987), p. 44.

equivalents, and essentially means "boss" or "chief."²³⁵ But Catherine Kroeger, Gilbert Bilezikian, and other participants suggested that the term refers to "source," as in the English concept of the headwaters of a river, reflecting the Genesis account of woman being taken out of man and having her origin in him.²³⁶ This is the meaning of the term understood by Bartchy, Fiddes, Scanzoni and Hardesty, and numerous other conservative scholars who advocate feminine equality.²³⁷

Mickelsen demonstrates that where the Hebrew ro'sh is used metaphorically in the Old Testament to describe a leader or authority figure, the Septuagint prefers the term ἀρχων in most cases.²³⁸ And based on this and comparable studies Maahs concludes that there is no reason to assume that a Hellenized Jew would understand κεφαλὴ to mean "one having authority over someone."²³⁹ The motif in this passage, he

²³⁵See also Peterson, p. 16.

²³⁶Also the meaning of Christ's relationship to the church, Colossians 1:15-18, Ephesians 1:22.

²³⁷Paul S. Fiddes, "Woman's Head is the Man," The Baptist Quarterly, Vol. 31, No. 8 (1986), pp. 370-83; Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be (Waco: Word, 1974), p. 30-31; Witherington, Women in The Earliest Churches, p.84-5.

²³⁸Berkely and Alvera Mickelsen, "The 'Head' of the Epistles," Christianity Today, 20:264, 1981.

²³⁹Maahs, p. 23; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in I Corinthians 11:2-16," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 42:196-215, 1980. Aristotle's reference to to the husband as "head of the household" seems to mean this, although it could be seen as the source of sustenance for all in household;

argues, is one of propriety and respect for one's source.²⁴⁰ If this is correct the term cannot be taken as supportive of the traditional subordination of the wife to the husband, and refers to a deeper implication of social and personal relationships. The same would be true of the use of *κεφαλή* in Ephesians 5. Following this approach Witherington is convinced that Paul tried to reform, while still supporting, traditional patriarchy by redefining the cultural concept of headship in terms of love and mutual submission, a view which is becoming more common among Christian family counsellors.²⁴¹ Fiddes stresses, however, that an exact correspondence of origins cannot be found since even Paul points out in I Corinthians 11 a reciprocity in the male-female relationship that is not true of God and Christ. While the rabbinic tradition viewed woman as having been taken out of man, Paul states that it is also through woman that man now comes to be. Therefore they depend on each other. Nor, as Fiddes stresses, is there any basis for the idea that woman

i.e. the chief provider. Politics, 1254-55 (LCL, 21).

²⁴⁰Figurative references to Christ as "head" of the church can also be understood as "source of life" rather than "authority over," especially Colossians 2:9-10. However, the natural sense of Ephesians 1:22 is authority, strengthened by the preposition *ὑπὲρ*, "head over all things to the church."

²⁴¹Witherington, Women in the Ministry of Jesus, p 129. Witherington also attempts to demonstrate, unsatisfactorily, that apparent contradictions in Paul's teachings on female leadership are not caused by tension between his rabbinic background and his Christian theology, but but were inherent in the teachings of Jesus which Paul echoes.

is only related to Christ through her husband for both are "in Christ," and while woman may reflect the glory of man Paul does not deny that both man and woman were created in the image of God.²⁴² Michael and Valerie Griffiths, also evangelical feminists, further argue that the thrust of New Testament teaching on marriage relationships is that of reciprocal love, dependency and care, and not one of authority.²⁴³ In fact, modern feminists feel strongly that the submission and domination ethos was of Greek origin and was introduced into Christianity principally through the "household tables."²⁴⁴ Thus alleged apostolic teachings became the means whereby Graeco-Roman patriarchy was codified and imposed upon Christians as holy scripture.²⁴⁵

Karl Barth represents those older scholars who have advocated "submission in equality" drawing from Paul's teaching of mutual love and submission in Ephesians 5:21. Barth observed that the untidy order in which Paul mentions

²⁴²Fiddes, p. 371; cf. Genesis 1:28.

²⁴³Valerie Griffiths, "Mankind: male and female," and Michael Griffiths, "Husband/Wife relationships: a practical Christian viewpoint," Shirley Lees, ed. The Role of Women (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984). Specific reference to I Corinthians 7:3-4, concerning conjugal rights of both husband and wife.

²⁴⁴Ephesians 5:21-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:1.

²⁴⁵Elizabeth Shüssler Fiorenza, "Breaking the Silence-Becoming Visible" in "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology," Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds., Concilium: Religion in the Eighties (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), pp. 5 ff.

man, Christ, woman and God in I Corinthians 11 makes it clear that they are not being arranged by scale, although he concluded that female subordination is proper.²⁴⁶ This role, he believed, is one like Christ's in that through submission and suffering there is great honour and dignity.

Today a growing number of conservative scholars are recognizing that while the authority paradigm is to be rejected, the "submission in equality" argument is weak and patronizing, to say the least.²⁴⁷ A more acceptable alternative is presented by S. Scott Bartchy based on papers presented in 1987 at the "Consultation on a Theology of the Family" at Fuller Theological Seminary.²⁴⁸ Bartchy contends that the ideal approach to decision making and problem resolution in marriage is that a couple share responsibility in an attitude of love and mutual submission. This, rather than the concept of male dominance, he suggests is the true theology of the family in Pauline writings and represents the spirit of the New Testament as a whole. Such a

²⁴⁶Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. III, Part 2; Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth, S.D. McClean, ed. and trans. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), p. 181.

²⁴⁷Witherington discusses at length the implications of ὑποτάσσω in Pauline Haustafel (Ephesians 5:21-22 and Colossians 3:18). Since the concept of submission is predicated of all believers in their relationships to each other, as well as to children, wives and slaves, the verb appears to be used by Paul to describe the nature of Christian humility and service appropriate to any social role; pp. 50ff.

²⁴⁸S. Scott Bartchy, "Issues of Power And A Theology Of The Family," Mission 21, No. 1 (July-August, 1987), p. 3-15.

Partnership Paradigm is becoming the predominant approach among evangelical scholars where a devotion to the authority of scripture is preserved while also addressing the issue of social equity.²⁴⁹

Bartchy focusses on a number of points and problem areas which he sees as the core of the family power issue today:

1. A law which assigns the husband the role of authority simply because he is male invites and provokes the wife to manipulative attitudes and actions. This is the natural response in all social "power down" positions.

2. There is no sound basis for the notion that one person has to be in charge. Paradigms often set forth from military and government life as models for such reasoning are invalid.²⁵⁰

3. There is no evidence that God grants any blessing to families on the basis of the traditional structure. The large number of battered women and abused children in so called "Christian homes" suggests that such a structure is open to abuse by men who feel compelled to verify their masculinity through domination. Bartchy writes:

Many women, including more Christian women than generally acknowledged,

²⁴⁹Hestenes, p. 8-If.

²⁵⁰Churches of Christ generally hold that monarchical elderships are wrong for the very reason that where one person is in charge there is the potential for "lording over the flock" and leading the church into heresy. If this argument is valid, the same principle would apply to one leader over a family.

rightly perceive their marriage as situations in which their psychological health if not also their physical well-being is at risk. Yet for many women who are not in such immediate danger, fear of being rejected if they become "too assertive," frustration with always being in the "power-down" position, and resentment against "being told" rather than being consulted, all encourage them to become manipulators of their husbands in a culture that gives so much permission to men to dominate others simply because they are males.²⁵¹

4. Traditional arguments seem to draw excessively from religious language and pious feelings for the purpose of reinforcing a worldly and male dominated status quo, which truly Christ oriented attitudes would abandon.

5. This system demands the stifling of natural talents in wives for the sake of maintaining their proper place in the "Christian marriage."

6. An excessive degree of importance has been attached to the term "Christian marriage," suggesting that the mere acknowledgment of male dominance and female subordination will produce the happiness desired in marriage.

7. There is a general absence of recognition in the Christian world for the mutual subordination model for marriage, which is silently proving to be the accepted and superior structure.²⁵²

²⁵¹Bartchy, p. 10.

²⁵²Rooted in Ephesians 5:21. Paul Tournier writes extensively on in-depth relationships in marriage, stressing that sharing is a mutual need. In his opinion the ideal

Jesus seems to have totally rejected the ethos of power and control of others, according to Mark's Gospel.²⁵³ The spirit of his ministry was that of servitude, not domination. And this more than anything else he attempted to communicate to his followers. This is without a doubt the message behind the washing of the disciples' feet in the Fourth Gospel.²⁵⁴ The apostle Paul seems to have recognized this and plays upon it in the famous Christological Hymn of Philippians 2:2-8. In this vein he frequently sets forth an ideal for human relationships based on self-subordination and service. It is this which dominates that portion of his letter to the Christians at Ephesus which is so often quoted in support of male domination in the home,²⁵⁵ and also appears strongly in the Epistle to the Romans.²⁵⁶

Therefore, there is quite sufficient reason to reject the traditional interpretation of Paul's teaching as an essential pattern for male authority in marriage in favour of a partnership paradigm, which seems more sensible, noble and just. However, it should be noted that among conservatives

relationship is one of balance where neither dominates the other. The Gift of Feeling (SCM: 1981), p. 102ff. Cf. Valerie Griffiths, "Mankind: male and female," The Role of Women, Shirley Lees, ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 80-1.

²⁵³Mark 10: 32-45.

²⁵⁴John 13:1-20.

²⁵⁵Ephesians 5:19-21.

²⁵⁶Romans 12:3-21.

this is generally accomplished by diluting the inegalitarian nature of Pauline views of husband/wife relationships and focussing on mutual love and consideration in other passages. The primary motive for this approach is to maintain allegiance to the Bible as divine authority and at the same time to find a feasible application of its doctrines. This approach does not effectively explain the clearly traditional hierarchy of male authority in I Corinthians 11 and other passages. Therefore, to the dismay of conservative feminists, their best exegetical efforts still leave an inexplicable conflict within Pauline doctrine.²⁵⁷

Ontological Inferiority

Comments concerning women are numerous in the Pastoral Epistles, particularly in I Timothy.²⁵⁸ These letters reflect the fact that as time went by problems similar to those at Corinth arose in other places, and it had become

²⁵⁷R.K. Johnston, Evangelicals at an Impasse (Atlanta: John Knox Press, n.d.), p. 69; Griffiths, p. 81.

²⁵⁸The authorship of I Timothy has been disputed by Schleiermacher, Baur, Holtzmann, Dibelius and others, primarily because of its omission from Marcion's Canon of AD 140. The Pastorals were likely written in the second century by a Paulinist, developing and applying Pauline doctrine in a more advanced ecclesiastical context. As Witherington points out, whether the Pastorals were written by Paul or by a later Paulinist, they still represent a development of Pauline thought. But the question is whether the development is an enhancement of earlier teaching, or against and beyond them. There are clear linguistic parallels between I Timothy 2 and I Corinthians 14, and some have even suggested that if I Corinthians 14 is an interpolation it came from I Timothy 2. See Witherington, pp. 117ff.

clear that female leadership in the church was not going to be well received. It appears that the stability of marriages were being threatened because of a general reluctance to abandon the traditional subordination of women. Therefore Christian leaders in both Pauline and Petrine camps reverted to a very conservative rabbinic exegesis of the Old Testament to defend and strengthen predominant thinking in the church.²⁵⁹ The result was the infusion of patriarchal structures into Christian tradition. This is particularly evident in I Timothy.

Perhaps the greatest myth concerning women, the one from which all others arise, is their alleged natural and ontological inferiority to men. This notion is taught in I Timothy 2:13-15. Here traditional rabbinism is evident in the writer's appeal to the Genesis Creation Narrative to strengthen his argument for the subordination of wives to their husbands.²⁶⁰ Each of the three distinct elements in his argument hinge upon the Jewish concept of woman's secondary creation and essentially inferior nature. The initial assertion is that Adam was formed first, clearly

²⁵⁹Heine suggests that by this time Charismatic elements had disappeared, structures of order had replaced the prophetic word, and there were vigorous campaigns against Gnostic teaching. "The Pastoral Epistles are evidence of the last stage of the development indicated in the New Testament." Heine, p. 139; See also Constance F. Parvey, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," R.R. Ruether, ed. Religion and Sexism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 137.

²⁶⁰Kevin Giles, Created Woman (Canberra: Acorn Press, 1985).

reflecting a literal interpretation of the second account of creation in Genesis 2. Paul implies much the same thing in I Corinthians 11:2-16 by stating that man was created first, that woman was taken out of man, and man is the glory of God.²⁴¹

The point is raised by Maahs that the use of the J creation account becomes a major problem for modern exegetes. Since scholarship is becoming less inclined to defend the historicity of Adam and Eve, much less the literal details of the Second Creation story, doctrine based on those details becomes highly dubious.²⁴² Maahs correctly suggests that rather than using Paul or any other writer as an inspired entree to Genesis, one has to view this use of Genesis critically. Assuming Pauline authorship of I Timothy, Maahs states:

This would mean that Paul is not attempting to establish a permanently valid exegesis of Genesis, but rather is willing to use traditional interpretation as a means of keeping a lid on an explosive issue to which ideological pursuits were willing to link the very life of the church.²⁴³

²⁴¹Peterson, p. 17.

²⁴²E. F. Kevan, "Genesis," NBC, F. Davidson, ed. (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, rep. 1967), pp. 78-9. See also Louis Praamsma, The Church in the Twentieth Century, Vol. IV (St. Catharines, Paideia, 1981); on the approach to scripture and myth in Genesis by Barth, pp. 53-7; Brunner, pp. 58-60; Bultmann, pp. 61-4; Niebuhr, pp. 64-9.

²⁴³Richard Longenecker sees in Gal. 3:19f., 4:29f., and II Cor. 3:13-18 Paul using argumentum ad hominum, interpreting OT passages in typically rabbinic fashion to his own

Fiddes points this out in connection with I Corinthians 11 where Paul seems to hold with the rabbinic view of androgyny in the original creation,²⁶⁴ which would also fit his belief in "one flesh" in marriage and his view of reciprocal submission and devotion.²⁶⁵ But it is also clear that Paul rejected the kind of literal asexuality fostered by various Gnostic groups, who taught that all sexual distinctions were abolished in the new creation so that marriage and procreation were to be disdained. The writer of I Timothy does not suggest this at all.

A major problem lies in the fact that the argument in I Timothy 2 is not really valid. The Second Creation account indeed suggests that woman was taken out of or made from man, but this no more implies her subordinate or inferior status than does man's being made out of dust make him subordinate to the earth, or that subsequent birth of males from women make them inferior and subordinate to them.²⁶⁶ In Genesis this notion can only be found in the fashioning of

advantage. Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 120f.

²⁶⁴Genesis 1:28.

²⁶⁵Ephesians 5:31-33; "Androgyny" meaning that the original Adam carried within himself (itself) the potential for both sexes. Keil and Delitzsch discount this possibility in light of Genesis 1; C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, "The Pentateuch," Vol. I, Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 65, 90.

²⁶⁶Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 28.

Eve when Adam discovers that there is no "help meet" for him among all the animals. Therefore she becomes an afterthought, necessary only because of the male's "needs." The writer, following rabbinic doctrine, ventures to say much more than can be found in Genesis but clearly what was believed by his contemporaries.

Even if this story were taken literally, the deception of Eve does not imply intellectual inferiority on her part.²⁴⁷ It should be noted that Eve leaps to God's defence when the Serpent discredits Him, and she engages in a discourse with her temptor concerning the consequences of the prohibition. Churchmen as far back as Ambrose have pointed out that Adam was tempted by his own partner, a mere human, while the woman fell to the trickery of a fallen angel, a creature superior to a human.²⁴⁸ If this implies anything at all, it implies male inferiority.

Maahs also stresses the growth in Paul's perspective concerning the Gospel and theoretical social equality. As the church grew Paul came to be more an accommodative missionary than a philosophical theologian, willing to delay full implementation of various ideals in order to ensure

²⁴⁷e.g. Bengel, Gnomon; cf. N.J. Hommes, "Let Women be Silent in the Church: a Message Concerning the Worship Service and the Decorum to be Observed by Women," Calvin Theological Journal, (April, 1969), p. 21.

²⁴⁸Andre Dumas, "Biblical Anthropology and the Participation of Women in the Ministry of the Church," in Concerning the Ordination of Women (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1964), p. 32.

survival and growth of his missionary efforts.²⁶⁹ Therefore, some of his teaching was very much beneath his own view of ideal Christianity, and calculated to keep a lid on potentially explosive situations till the church developed enough to survive.

This indeed is possible. But Maahs might be giving Paul too much credit. One cannot set aside the fact of Paul's Jewish background and traditional views which could have influenced his judgment in difficult didactic circumstances. On this basis it is very likely that he thoroughly believed the Genesis creation story and constructed the major part of his doctrine on it. This becomes especially plausible when considering that female prophetism seems to have caused problems, and preserving marriages and church order became a priority. Nevertheless, it is evident that the writer of I Timothy appealed to the Creation in a careful and calculated manner as a literary device in controlling unpleasant developments. Whether this was done by Paul or by a Paulinist of a later date, the doctrine offers nothing which should today be construed as evidence of woman's ontological inferiority. If the writer meant this by his comments, or if he believed it to be so, he was in error.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹Maahs, p. 27.

²⁷⁰It should also be noted that dismissing both I Timothy 2 and I Corinthians 14 from the collection of genuine Pauline works helps resolve the dilemma concerning women in church, in that it removes from "inspired scripture" the doctrine of "silence in church" as well as the restriction of women from

The Cause of Sin

Hays finds virtual universal evidence for the myth of feminine evil in primitive societies. While woman is viewed with desire by the male, she is at the same time considered to be the source of uncleanness, a debilitating influence and a threat to male virility.²⁷¹ The male psyche appears to perceive the female as a castrated male, bleeding and deprived of masculine aggression and strength, yet at the same time graceful and alluring. Therefore, in some bizarre sense, woman becomes both the object of his lust and the scapegoat for his guilt. Holding her in subjection both gratifies his ego and satisfies his need to punish her for being naturally appealing to him.

The story of the temptation and fall in the Garden of Eden contributes heavily to the perpetuation of a certain blame on women for all human struggles. Clearly relying upon this tradition the writer states in I Timothy 2:14 that it was Eve, not Adam, who was deceived by the Serpent, and for this she was in transgression.

Most scholars, even conservative ones, acknowledge that the "forbidden fruit" represents something more serious, but

teaching and having authority over men. But rejecting these two passages is even more painful for conservatives than other alternatives, and illuminates another dilemma, i.e. the inerrancy of scripture. To this we shall return in the concluding chapter.

²⁷¹Hays, p. 96-8.

there is no way of determining the nature of it.²⁷² A very old tradition says that it was sexual intercourse, although this cannot be harmonized with the commission "be fruitful and multiply" of the earlier account, nor with the logical purpose of the sexes. There appears in various traditions a fear of the female ability to lure and deceive, as if she has inherited a special penchant for evil from her mother Eve.²⁷³ Some have suggested that the original sin resulted from Eve's tendency toward liberation, specifically because she encroached upon man's exclusive role in theology. Early feminist Judith Murray suggested that the story represents an effort on the part of woman to intellectual pursuits. The Hebrew account, she believed, has Isha as being tempted because she represented in that time the sacred, the intellect, the one desiring knowledge and man's link with the divine, not because she was thought to be weaker.²⁷⁴

For the writer of I Timothy Eve's temptation becomes the premise upon which he bases his advice that wives should allow their husbands to play the role of leadership, both in the social aspects of marriage and in the spiritual guidance

²⁷²Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), pp. 178ff. Niebuhr sees the Genesis Fall as representing human pride, i.e. his presumption to know truth without and apart from a relationship with God.

²⁷³Walter Wagner, "The Demonization of Woman," Religion in Life XLII (Spring, 1972).

²⁷⁴Tavard, p. 14.

of the home. But he refrains from mentioning that Adam accepted Eve's offer of the "forbidden fruit" without question and in total disregard of the instructions of God.²⁷⁵ The account offers no explanation of the failure on the part of Adam to exercise his authority over her in the light of her apparent imperception. Nor can it be overlooked that the account has God pointing a finger of guilt at Adam, upon which basis in Pauline doctrine Adam becomes the type of fallen man and the source of death.²⁷⁶

But it is not the husband's role or guilt in the Fall which is emphasized here, implying that a predominant difficulty among Christians at Ephesus was the unwillingness of some women to accept the subordinate role in marriage. It might also suggest the difficulty husbands were having in coping with the changes Christianity brought about in relationships and the liberty afforded their wives in Christ. Witherington argues that the writer was not accusing women of being weak and susceptible to deception, but was using Eve as an illustration of the evil that can result from being led astray. Therefore, those women who were inclined to overstep the bounds of propriety should be reminded to exercise

²⁷⁵Genesis 3:3, 11.

²⁷⁶Romans 5:14-19; I Corinthians 15:21-45. Tavard totally rejects I Timothy 2:13-15 as Pauline, because it is out of step with these other passages where Adam bears the stigma of Original Sin, pp. 27f. See George Tavard, Women in Christian Tradition (Notre Dame: University Press, 1973), pp. 27ff.

caution and restraint.²⁷⁷

The consequences of the Fall in Genesis are also noteworthy. They are not set forth as divine rules but tendencies, clearly an attempt to explain social customs from the standpoint of the writer. "He shall rule over you" is not a divine command or pronouncement, but a description of the disorder and perversion which would result from sin.²⁷⁸ Even scholars like Russell Prohl, who believes in a created order of subordination of the wife to the husband, rejects this as a proof text for male domination:

God is not here issuing a special commandment, "Be thou ruled by him!" or, "Thou shalt not rule!" But here in Genesis 3:16 we have a statement, a prediction, a prophecy of how man, degenerated by sin, would take advantage of his headship as a husband to dominate, lord it over, his wife. Nowhere in the Bible is Genesis 3:16 quoted or referred to as establishing a general subordination of woman to man.²⁷⁹

Therefore, it would seem that reflection on this account in I Timothy serves simply to remind women of their weaknesses and tendencies to err, for which reason all men and women have suffered since the sin of Eve.

But sadly, in Christian tradition these highly symbolic myths from Genesis via Pauline tradition become not only a

²⁷⁷Witherington, p. 122.

²⁷⁸Maahs, p. 19.

²⁷⁹Russell C. Prohl, Woman in the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 39.

divine seal upon male domination of women, but the source of many related doctrines degrading and shaming women.²⁸⁰ Yet in reality, the Genesis record cannot be taken as a historical account of the first act of sin, or of woman's role in bringing sin into the world. Instead, it is a reflection of the social and religious degradation of women during the time of the writer. And in drawing upon the Adam and Eve story the writer of I Timothy clearly alligns himself with a tradition which is no longer acceptable as an ideal model.

Created for Pleasure and Procreation

It is also clear that the writer of I Timothy viewed woman as created specifically for man's benefit, following the Genesis 2 account of creation, as man's "help meet." Traditionally this has meant a combination of subordinate roles, including sex for the pleasure of the male and for procreation.²⁸¹ In I Corinthians 11:9 Paul states that woman was made "for ($\delta\iota\alpha$) the man." As stated earlier, a literal interpretation of Genesis 2 is to be rejected, but one is forced to assume that Paul and the writer(s) of later Pauline literature held the same view as their rabbinical

²⁸⁰Walter Wagner, "The Demonization of Woman," Religion in Life, XLII (Spring, 1973); H.R. Hays, The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964).

²⁸¹Cf. I Corinthians 7:34. See also Scanzoni and Hardesty, pp. 119ff.

contemporaries.²⁸²

Perhaps a more complicated assertion is that woman will be saved in childbearing in I Timothy 2:15. Two main streams of thought have arisen concerning this statement. The first is that in spite of Eve's foolish deception which brought sin into the world woman became the essential instrument for producing the Saviour, specifically the motherhood of Mary. This view was suggested by various church fathers, revived by Ellicott, von Soden and Wohlenberg, and upheld by a few modern scholars.²⁸³

The second view is that childbearing, including the rearing and instruction of children and keeping of the home, is the highest ideal in Christian womanhood and is the

²⁸²A question might be raised concerning the credibility of a writer who knowingly appeals to mythology as if it were factual. But it is probable that Paul believed Adam and Eve to be genuine historical figures and the details of Genesis 2-3 to be factual. The mythical nature the Adam and Eve story is perhaps one reason Jesus made no reference to it, although he did refer to the Jonah myth. An example of a totally mythical legend incorporated into scripture is the Lame man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:4). As a setting for this story the writer uses the legendary troubling of the waters, to which a later copyist added the explanatory verse 4. Another example is the dispute over the body of Moses (Jude 9) taken from the apocryphal work, The Assumption of Moses.

²⁸³E.g. Ignatius, Justin, Tertullian and Theophylact; See P.B. Payne, "Libertarian Women in Ephesus; A Response to Douglas Moo," Trinity Journal, 2 (1981), pp. 169-97; Walter Lock, "The Pastorals" ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, rep. 1966), pp. 32-33.

lifestyle by which a Christian wife attains eternal life.²⁸⁴ Pauline works frequently discuss womanhood in terms of marital responsibilities, and the fact that in the immediate context the writer deals with the subordinate demeanor of wives, favours this interpretation. This in no way implies that salvation is dependent upon fertility, nor that marriage and childbearing are a requirement for every woman.²⁸⁵ But rather, the writer employs an expression which embraces the entire role of a woman who submits to the duties of marriage. By playing that role well, she has a far greater potential for influencing mankind toward Christianity, and for obtaining her own salvation, than by attempting to dominate her husband and playing the role of a teacher. These words certainly were intended as an expression of the dignity of motherhood, from a perspective of male authority. Hendriksen summarizes the probable original meaning well:

The path that leads to salvation is ever that of obedience to God's ordinances. It is His will that woman should influence mankind "from the bottom up" (that is by way of the child), not "from the top down" (that is, not by way of the man).²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴R.C.H. Lenski, Interpretation of Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon (Minneapolis: Augsburg, rep. 1968), p. 572-3; F.D. Gealy, "I Timothy," The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. XI, G.A. Buttrick, ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1955), pp. 406-7.

²⁸⁵Attention has already been given to Paul's recommendation of celibacy for both men and women.

²⁸⁶William Hendriksen, I and II Timothy and Titus (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, rep. 1964), p. 111.

From the modern perspective such a view of womanhood fails to address reality. As a paradigm for lifestyles it reduces woman to a womb, and hopelessly minimizes the numerous contributions women can and do make to the social economy outside the scope of homemaking. Also, it fails to address the roles to be played by millions of childless and single women who do not fit the pattern of motherhood and subordination to a husband.²²⁷ Having grown beyond the patria potesta and the rigid rabbinism of Paul's day, exact scholarship today must reject any interpretation of this passage which seeks to bind on Christian women the stereotype of motherhood and confinement to domestic chores.

The Weaker Vessel

I Peter 3:7, traditionally ascribed to Peter, is generally quoted in support of the idea that women are weaker than men. Although it is not paralleled in Pauline literature we shall consider it here as part of the basis of later tradition.²²⁸

Likewise ye husbands, dwell with them
according to knowledge, giving honour
unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel,
and as being heirs together of the grace
of life; that your prayers be not

²²⁷Scanzoni and Hardesty, pp. 133f.

²²⁸Although some have placed this work in the early second century, a Petrine source is strongly attested. A likely date is around AD 63-4, just before Nero's persecution.

hindered.

The term "weak" is a relative. It is true and undeniable that universally human females are characteristically shorter and physically weaker than males. But this idea has lent itself to support various mythical notions in the polarity of the sexes, and has been exploited in defence of traditional female subordination. Even in modern times, particularly in education, there have been claims that women were innately inferior to men in certain academic subjects; mathematics, physics, chemistry and such like, and that emotionally they are unstable and therefore unsuited for certain forms of leadership.

In biology the symbol ♂ is the astronomical symbol for Mars, the sword and shield representing war. That for the female, ♀, is the mirror of Venus, the goddess of beauty. As Scanzoni and Hardesty point out, traditionally women are thought to be Narcissistic, subjective, dependent, passive, intuitive, fragile, irrational, frivolous and weak. This is the "feminine mystique."²⁸⁹ But adages and observations in early cultures became prescriptions rather than descriptions, and with time came to be viewed as divine institutions. Today in western society it might be observed that little boys use toys and blocks to construct outdoor scenes of action, animals, war, cars and trucks. Little girls, in

²⁸⁹Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 73.

contrast, build interiors and play housekeeping, serve tea, dress dolls and pretend to be mothers. This childhood play is seen by traditionalists as an enactment of man's world and woman's place in it, complete with a whole set of traits, attitudes, roles and obligations proper for a woman, and all so designed by God.²⁹⁰

Most of the pioneers in the field of psychology were also inclined to view the polarity of the the sexes as a result of innate characteristics. Erik Erikson represents traditional typology in stating that men are active, interested in things and ideas, whereas women are passive and intuitive, interested in people and feelings:

Stand in the sun and experience light,
hot active, positive male yang. . . Move
under cover and feel the dark, moist,
cold, passive force of female yin."²⁹¹

But today sociologists and psychologists feel strongly that these traits are not determined by genetics nor even the balance of hormones, but by conditioning and role modeling in

²⁹⁰Janeway, pp. 13-15.

²⁹¹Erik Erikson, Childhood and Society, 2nd edition (New York: W.W. Nalon, 1963), pp. 97-108. Sigmund Freud believed that all women considered themselves to be castrated males, incapable of any great cultural achievement. Most of his assertions are answered by feminist Kate Millet in Sexual Politics (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 176-203. For a thorough treatment of the religious implications of Erikson's views, see Patricia Martin Doyle, "Women and Religion: Psychological and Cultural Implications," Religion and Sexism, Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 15-40.

each given society.²⁹² Likewise the male image, dominated globally by machismo, power, dominance, taking possession, achievement, is also a learned behaviour.²⁹³ Sociological studies of various cultures suggest that the characteristics assigned to each sex by the Judaeo-Christian tradition are neither global nor innate. In Iran the women are expected to be practical and cool while men are emotional, sensitive and intuitive. The Tutsi of Africa consider women to be naturally stronger, and for this reason many African peoples associate their women with hard labour. Among the American Indian tribes, the Navaho and Hopi specifically, weaving has been traditionally regarded as men's work while pottery making was only for women.²⁹⁴

Margaret Mead found illustrations of this in various tribes of New Guinea.²⁹⁵ Among the Arapesh both males and females are mild tempered, gentle and submissive, while the Mundugumor men and women are equally ruthless and aggressive. Tchambuli women, on the other hand, are energetic,

²⁹²Erik Erickson, Identity, Youth and Crisis (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), pp. 268-74.

²⁹³Scanzoni and Hardesty, pp. 73-82.

²⁹⁴Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 77.

²⁹⁵It is noteworthy that the works of Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict still carry considerable scholastic weight, though dating from the 1930s, and theories relevant to this study have not been refuted. See Adriana Valerio, "Women in Church History," Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds. Concilium (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), p. 66.

impersonal, unconcerned with personal beauty and the dominant social managers, while the men are less responsible, emotionally dependent, and are described as spending their time in gossip, dancing and adorning their hair.²⁹⁶

There is a strange paradox in the myths about women. The apparent weakness and universal subordination of women in a way becomes a mask for power. There are also many ancient myths about the power in females, including fertility cults and magic. In some African tribes women are thought to own the crops because of their principal role in cultivation and harvest, and thereby they have a considerable degree of community power. It may be that through centuries women have been willing to acquiesce in the myth of subordination in favour of a more subtle power.²⁹⁷ Sex has proved to be a powerful tool of manipulation. Studies in Japanese marital relationships have discovered an interesting paradox. In public a woman appears to honour her husband as lord and master, but in private is the mother of another child in desperate need of love and maternal care."²⁹⁸ Hence femininity has a subtle power greater than the masculine pretense.

²⁹⁶Margaret Mead, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Cultures (New York: William Morrow, 1935), p. 280.

²⁹⁷Janeway, 54-5.

²⁹⁸Robert Jay Lifton, "Woman as Knower," The Woman in America, Lifton, R. J. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), p. 44.

Elsie Thomas Culver appeals to genetic research to counter traditional allegations that certain kinds of work are innately suited best to males or females. She quotes J. A. Jenkins of the Department of Genetics at the University of California, who states that with the exception of the relatively few genes located on the XY pair, each individual receives an equal contribution of genes from both parents.²⁹⁹ She argues that boys and girls start life about equal physically, and are then moulded by pressures of conformity to society's established pattern. The equal genetic contribution by both parents is dramatically affected by that one characteristic, determined by the XY pair; viz. either maleness or femaleness, and it is totally invalid to argue that physical abilities, agility or dexterity are moulded by social environment. But this fact should not be taken as indicative of any form of intrinsic inferiority in women, no more than a man born of petite Indian parents should be considered intrinsically inferior to one of gargantuan Swedish stock. The former is without a doubt physically weaker, and will be defeated by the latter in numerous forms of competition. But this does not suggest that Indians are inferior to Swedes.

All of the above are aspects of the total picture of the inferiority of womanhood which is today being dismissed as

²⁹⁹Elsie Thomas Culver, Women in the World of Religion (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

myth. Karl Barth, eminent theologian and proponent of "neo-orthodoxy,"³⁰⁰ made a systematic effort to dispel all myths about sex. Among the subjects of his criticism was Medieval romanticism which elevates woman to a quasi-divine level. Barth rejected in theory all phenomenology or typology of sexes.³⁰¹ He was strong on the mysterious and subjective nature of divine calling in the lives of individuals, and insisted on the free will and individual responsibility of both men and women to respond to that calling. But precisely how divine will is brought about in an individual's life is not clear, and is debated in evangelical circles today.

But Barth also struggled to formulate a new model for the modern female in relation to man, particularly in marriage. To him the Christian is responsible for ordering his or her relationships with other people in the total sociological context. And while he declared males and females equals before God, he still found reason to place woman in a subordinate, though not inferior, relationship to the man.³⁰²

Emil Brunner published The Divine Imperative in Germany in 1932. In contrast to Barth he saw each human being, male and female, as imago Dei. Yet paradoxically Brunner saw them as different in both body and spirit, a viewpoint traceable

³⁰⁰also termed "evangelical theology."

³⁰¹Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics III:4, p. 152.

³⁰²Barth, p. 170-171.

to Aristotle and echoed by Thomas Aquinas. Woman is therefore a special kind of human being because of those spiritual differences.

. . .spiritually the man expresses the productive principle and the woman expresses the principle of bearing, tending and nourishing. The man turns more to the outside world, the woman turns more to the inner realm; the man inclines to be objective, the woman to be subjective; the man seeks the new, the woman preserves the old; the man roams about, the woman makes a home.³⁰³

Brunner's position was rooted neither in theology or philosophy, but in his own common sense observation of the way things are in life. He saw certain traits in women which rob them of higher spiritual destiny. Wives typically allow themselves to be persuaded by their husbands of their subordination. They are more sexual than men although the instinct is less acute. The sexual disposition helps to determine the whole psychical and spiritual nature of males and females. Hence, Brunner observed:

If the husband is falsely free, she is falsely bound; and if the husband is impersonal and intellectual, she tends to be personal and natural in a wrong way.³⁰⁴

There is more than mere typology rooted in physiological distinctions. Brunner saw these characteristics as

³⁰³Emil Brunner, Man In Revolt, p. 354.

³⁰⁴Brunner, p. 354.

determining propriety and spiritual responsibility.

The man is the one who produces, he is the leader; the woman is receptive and she preserves life; it is the man's duty to shape the new; it is woman's duty to unite it and adapt it to that which already exists. The man has to go forth and make the earth subject to him, the woman looks within and guards the hidden unity. The man must be objective and generalize, the woman must be subjective and individualize; the man must build, the woman adorns; the man must conquer, the woman must tend; the man must comprehend with all his mind, the woman must impregnate with all her life and soul. It is the duty of the man to plan and master, of the woman to understand and to unite.³⁰⁵

The contention of sociologists today is that all such sexual traits and typologies, and no one denies their existence, are shaped by dynamics of social structure which exaggerate and build upon certain basic genetic distinctions in the sexes, but they are not determined by an innate typology in males and females.³⁰⁶ We know that males and females differ physiologically, which determines that generally males prove superior in certain physical skills, sports and such like. But it has become clear in this century that the differences are not as sharp and pronounced as once

³⁰⁵Ibid., p. 358-359.

³⁰⁶S. Viljoen, "The role of women in society- a sociological perspective," Sexism and Feminism in Theological Perspective, W.S. Vorster, ed. (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984), pp.110-117.

thought.³⁰⁷ There is nothing to support the claim that they differ in intellectual capability, or that innately women have a penchant for certain academic interests and men for others. Nor can it be stated that women are superior in skills which traditionally have been classified as domestic, such as cooking, interior decoration, art, crafts, financial management, child counselling, or infant care. Those differences which do show up in the area of parenting are fostered by the interest developed naturally during pregnancy and childbirth. But none of these can be taken as grounds for a rigid social or religious typology.

Many traditional beliefs concerning male and female emotions are also being dismissed as myth. Lester Kirkendall represents the convictions of psychologists and sociologists in general today in stating that concerning the expression of emotions both men and women tend to behave the way they are expected to by society.³⁰⁸ Men are stereotyped as having logic and objectivity under pressure, while women are thought to break down in tears and lose control in crises. But in reality, these characteristics are instilled in us from childhood by the distinctive ways little boys and little girls are treated. The expression of emotion through tears is considered to be a sign of weakness and is discouraged in

³⁰⁷Mary Tanner, "The Ministry of Women: An Anglican Reflection," One In Christ, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1985), p. 286.

³⁰⁸Lester A. Kirkendall, "Are Women More Emotional Than Men?" The Citizen, February 23, 1988, p. 20.

boys, while tenderness, free emotional expression and sentimentality are encouraged in girls. Therefore the whole view of men and women tends to promote the notion that women are the weaker sex.

Males in western society are raised in an environment which not only encourages but demands a competitive spirit and aggressive behaviour. Achievement and success depend on it. And in such a structure most of the role models presented on television, in movies, and in periodicals are those who get what they want by defeating the competition. Dr. Marshall Segall, professor of social and political psychology at Syracuse University and an associate at the Center for Research on Aggression, describes the male dilemma in these terms:

Much teaching in our society, including the role modeling in TV and movie fiction, reinforces the view that if males don't get what they want, or if life has been unfair, they should go out and get even by beating up, even killing, other people.³⁰⁹

There is a negative side to almost everything, and one of the negatives in a free society, a society that promotes the rights and value of the individual, is that the spirit of "self" tends to override and cuts across the grain of Christianity. It would appear that a central aspect of

³⁰⁹John Barbour, "Aggression: Why Are Americans So Violent?" The Daily Breeze (Torrence, California: August 26, 1984) Section A, p. 11.

Jesus' approach to abundant living was that of selflessness, a philosophy quite different from the aggressiveness of a highly technological and competitive society. Segall is convinced that this general attitude in the west, that a man is less than a man if he does not get what he wants, is the basis for "compensatory masochism" expressed in the domination of, perhaps even in the abuse of, his family.

Therefore it seems that even in the context of modern life, with all the benefits of new perspectives, many churchmen hold to the myth of male as leader and female as follower simply because of the way things were in the past. It appears that we have been caught in a perpetual maelstrom of myth and tradition, with no means of breaking out in spite of the absence of logic or solid support. And the Bible remains as it has been for centuries the primary proof for Christians of what is taken to be God's irrefutable design. As Tavad points out, this typology of the sexes has been taken for granted and in turn promoted for centuries. But as Barth stressed, there is no warrant for it in the Christian faith,³¹⁰ and we should not appeal to the Bible in support of myths which should be abandoned.

Keepers at Home

In Titus 2:5 the writer urges that the older women instruct the younger women, along with being subject to the

³¹⁰Tavad, p. 183.

authority of their husbands, to be "keepers at home."

In proper perspective, this statement must be seen to address problems created by idle busy bodies who went from house to house stirring up problems among believers.³¹¹ In keeping with all other traditional Pauline doctrines, this writer's advice to young married women is to be industrious and devoted to their husbands.³¹²

But this passage alone has become the proof text in Christian tradition for restricting women to housekeeping, and discouraging their participation in secular employment. Tennyson's poetic verse captures the essence of tradition:

Man for the field, and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword, and for the needle she;
Man with the head, and woman with the heart;
Man to command, and woman to obey;
And else confusion.³¹³

Billy Graham, popular evangelist and author, is representative of the view of traditional churchmen that homemaking is the divine destiny of the female:

The biological assignment was basic and simple: Eve was to be the child-bearer, and Adam was to be the breadwinner. . . . Wife, mother, homemaker—this the appointed destiny of real womanhood.³¹⁴

³¹¹The Pastoral Epistles deal repeatedly with interpersonal problems related to younger women (I Tim. 5:13; II Tim. 3:6, Titus 2:4).

³¹²*οἰκουργούς*, "home-workers."

³¹³Alfred Lord Tennyson, The Princess, Part V.

³¹⁴Billy Graham, "Jesus and the Liberated Woman," Ladies' Home Journal (December, 1970), p. 42.

Modern scholars have offered a variety of interpretations of Titus 2:5 which make allowances for women holding jobs outside the home, as long as they give due respect to their husbands and due maternal guidance to their children.³¹⁵ But the approach still betrays a proclivity for a view of the home and family which cannot be taken as a pattern for all time, even if an apostle of Christ believed it so. In Janeway's words:

From eternity to yesterday, we tend to assume, women dwelt in the bosom of their own families occupied by traditional domestic tasks, raising and ruling their children in the age-old role of mother-matriarch, devoted wife, skilled homemaker and mistress of the hearth, as ordained by nature. It is a charming picture, this, of our ancestress spinning or sewing, with the little ones gathered around, the bread in the oven and the the kettle singing on the hob.³¹⁶

In reality, modern Christian notions about the ideal home structure are not really rooted in ancient customs, nor could they be defended on the basis of biblical teachings. The classic paramount portrait of the worthy woman in Proverbs 31 has her conducting business and acting as general manager of the household while the husband sits all day long at the city gates.³¹⁷ In those days for many people the household was the business, and therefore managing servants,

³¹⁵Field, pp. 60-61.

³¹⁶Elizabeth Janeway, Man's World, Woman's Place (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1971), p. 14.

³¹⁷Proverbs 31:10-31.

handling finances, and conducting trade all might fall under the supervision of the wife. Especially for poorer class, woman and man worked side by side in livelihood, as suggested by Priscilla and Aquila, the tent making friends of Paul.³¹⁸ Often the house served also as a shop, with wares made, bought or sold from one central room where the entire family lived, ate and slept.³¹⁹

It is not until the development of a distinct and independent middle class in Northwestern Europe during the sixteenth century that we can find a family centered life or the concept of "home" similar to that common in today's western society.³²⁰ And very quickly what came to be the new tradition was the new law, taught by preachers and academicians as God's ordained way. The Puritans and the Geneva Bible became ambassadors of the new way, both in Europe and in the Americas. But the format was not just Calvinistic. It became the universal Christian way. As the Anglican Richard Hooker said:

To fathers within their private families
Nature hath given a supreme power; for
which cause we see that throughout the
world men from the foundation thereof,
all men have ever been taken as lords and

³¹⁸Acts 18:1-3.

³¹⁹Mary Steward Van Leeuwen, "The End of Female Passivity," Christianity Today (January, 1986, insert), p. 11-12.

³²⁰Philippe Aries, Centuries of Childhood (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 10.

lawful kings in their own houses.³²¹

In most of the ancient cultures and even in Medieval Europe the modern concept of homelife did not exist. Children were raised by servants, husbands and wives slept apart.³²² The family centered life is essentially an invention of the middle class of the post Renaissance era. Woman's daily work in the ancient world was much the same as that of women in many third world countries today. It may not have been at home, but consisted of long treks to draw water, gather fire wood, tend animals, or to sell goods at the market. While considered a second rate and inferior entity in the society, she may have contributed as much as seventy or eighty per cent of the labour in the local economy, and much of that outside the confines of the family dwelling.

Women who helped carve settlements in new territories, such as pioneer America, Australia, and Southern Africa expended as much physical energy as men and did precisely the same work. An 18th century Pennsylvania newspaper carried an advertisement for women settlers; they had to be capable of raising small stock, dairying, marketing, combing, carding, spinning, knitting, sewing, pickling, preserving, and such like. Historians are convinced that they could hunt game and

³²¹Quoted by Carl Bridenbaugh, Vexed and Troubled Englishmen (New York:Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 70.

³²²Janeway, pp. 13-15.

skin as well as any man.³²³ This hardly fits the traditional picture of a housewife, nor does it represent the common understanding of a man earning the family living by the sweat of his brow to care for the wife and children at home.

In Medieval Europe women were very much involved in the labour force, long before industrialization found them a place in factories. As a foreigner observed: "your citizens' wives are like partridges; the hens are better than the cocks."³²⁴ Janeway points out that in 19th century England 25% of married women had a job which gave them a classification other than housewives and which provided a significant portion of the family income.³²⁵ They worked in mills, factories, and farms. Many were merchants. Few were Victorian ladies in the classic sense.

In America one can hardly find a place where women did not work, except those of exceptionally affluent families. The eighteenth century woman is commonly characterized by the Colonial matron, whose one concern is to please the man she loves; dress for him, tend to his needs, and if she reads or plays an instrument it is purely to make her better qualified

³²³Mary Ryans, Womanhood in America (New York, 1975), cf. Chafe, p. 32.

³²⁴Wallace Notestein, "The English Woman 1580-1650," Studies in Social History, J. A. Plumb, ed. (London: Longmans Green and Company, 1955), p. 94.

³²⁵Janeway, p. 178.

for conversation with him.³²⁶ But this was not real life. William Chafe stresses that in Colonial America "prescriptive norms about women appear to exist more as a part of society's rituals than as a major force dictating people's daily lives."³²⁷

Eli Ginzberg gives a thorough analysis of women in relation to secular work, indicating that the only period during which American women were generally isolated from work was between the Civil War and World War Two. During that period industrialization and urbanization ushered in what had already existed in Europe for some time, an urban middle class. And with it so shifted the family pattern to the form of husband going to work and the wife staying at home.³²⁸ But even then many women of both middle and lower classes worked outside the home. In 1890 a million women in the USA worked in factories. Nearly half of the 2,7 million black women during that era were working in agriculture or as domestic servants. About this time also, according to a Bureau of Labour survey, a shift occurred in the female work force to single immigrant females, 75% under the age of twenty five. Before that time female workers were older, and

³²⁶Julia Cherry Spruill, Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies (New York: 1972), p. 164.

³²⁷William Chafe, Women and Equality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 21.

³²⁸Eli Ginzberg, Life Styles of Educated Women (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 7.

were predominantly married white Protestants, American born. According to the 1900 census 81% of white females worked.³²⁹

A significant argument by traditionalists is that mothers working outside the home are neglecting their primary obligation to their children. Janeway summarizes:

In the end the problem remains empirical: not whether woman should work, but how those who want to, or need to, can work without leaving their other obligations unsatisfied, in this case without neglecting their children.³³⁰

But we are discovering that children beyond the age of two do not need the constant presence and attention of their own mothers, provided they receive sufficient care and enjoy a healthy relationship with their mothers or mother substitutes. And considering that only about 20% of women in any society actually have small children this is hardly sufficient grounds to justify the imposition of the "keeper at home" myth as divine law.³³¹

Role playing is a significant part of the norm in any society. Patterning behaviour so that it is comprehensible

³²⁹Chafe, p. 24. Today in the USA more than six million wives earn more than their husbands, making the wife the primary wage earner in over 12% of husband-wife homes. But this figure does not accurately reflect the balance of work because of the lower wage scale for women. Associated Press, Dallas Morning News, January 16, 1984. Of course, traditionalists might respond that what is common in society is not necessarily right, and that we are warned by Paul not to conform to society (Romans 12:1ff.).

³³⁰Janeway, p. 180.

³³¹Ibid.

and generally approved keeps a society coherent. But, as the noted English theoretical analyst R. D. Lang points out, if a society freezes behaviour into roles that were appropriate to past generations but have lost their utility and approval the result is social delusion.³³² Besides, we are now learning that the concept of a western nuclear family is not the only family structure which works. Sociologists Bohannon and Middleton argue that there are a number of ways to raise children which offer the essential emotional nourishment, role modelling, and security essential to healthy development.³³³

Therefore, it becomes clear that in the modern context the Pauline doctrine of mothers being "keepers at home" cannot be taken as a divine prohibition to hold secular employment or to contribute as a wage earner to the financial support of the family.

B. ECCLESIASTICAL FUNCTION

Concern for compliance with social norms with regard to female status naturally affected the roles which women were permitted to fill in the church. Therefore, in spite of the liberty and prominence enjoyed in certain quarters during the

³³²R.D. Lang, Self and Others (New York: Pantheon, 1969), p. 122; cf. Janeway, p. 132.

³³³Paul Bohannon and John Middleton, eds. Marriage, Family and Residence (New York: The Natural History Press, 1968), p. ix.

early decades of the church, traditional patriarchy in marriage eventually led to restrictions of female service in the church.

Headcovering in Worship

The issue of authority arises in I Corinthians 11:10 where Paul states that in order for a prophetess to speak she should have "authority on her head because of the angels."³³⁴ Traditionally the point of discussion here has been understood to be a veil, an artificial head covering, as a "sign" or "symbol" of authority, an interpretation traceable at least as far back as the gnostic Valentinus.³³⁵ There can be no doubt that the prime concern was somehow related to husband-wife relationships and traditional subordination of wives, which had become a problem because of prophetesses speaking out in the church assembly.³³⁶ But the whole passage is troublesome, reflecting a number of customs and social ideologies perhaps lost to the modern exegete.

The first exegetical problem concerns veiling customs in

³³⁴M.D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: an Examination of I Cor. XI: 10," New Testament Studies, 10:415f., 1963-4.

³³⁵Valentinus, circa. AD 160. On the veiling of virgins, see Tertullian.

³³⁶Paul's use of *ἀνὴρ καὶ γυναικὶς* in several passages pertains to "husband and wife," not "man and woman" as generic categories. Abel Isakssen, Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple; a Study With Special Reference to Matt. 19:3-12 and I Cor. 11:3-16 (Lund: Gleerup, 1965), p. 165.

the ancient world, and the meaning of *κατὰ καλύπτω*.³³⁷ In spite of discoveries concerning life in ancient Greece, it may be impossible to determine exactly what Paul is referring to.³³⁸ It is commonly argued that in Jewish circles of the first century there was a strong aversion to women praying without a veil.³³⁹ But Paul's suggestions here neither harmonize with Jewish customs, nor are they clearly relevant to a Corinthian setting.³⁴⁰ Witherington finds evidence that this teaching came from Tarsus, and that Paul's upbringing

³³⁷Used in verses 5,6,7,13 and 15. *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* ("having the head covered") appears in verse 4, and *περιβολαίου*, "a mantle" (literally, "a throw-around") occurs in verse 15. The common terms for "veil" (*καλυμμα*, *κρεδεμνόν*, and *καλυπτρα*) do not appear here.

³³⁸Background studies in recent years have contributed immensely to our understanding of the problems suffered in the Corinthian church. Jack Finegan, "Corinth," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, I (New York: Abingdon, 1962), p. 682; W.R. Halliday, The Pagan Background of Early Christianity (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, rep. 1970).

³³⁹Johannes Weis, The History of Primitive Christianity, Frederick C. Grant, trans. (New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1937), p. 584; Clarence Tucker Craig, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 10 (New York: Abingdon, 1955), p. 126; C.K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 251.

³⁴⁰Goudge states that both men and women prayed with the tallith; H.L. Goudge, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: Methuen, 1911), p. 94. But there is a dispute as to whether this head covering existed in Jewish tradition before the fourth century A.D. See A. Robertson, "First Corinthians," ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 229; Paul Billerbeck and H.L. Strack, Kommentar zum Neue Testament ans Talmud und Midrash, Vol. III (Munich: Beck, rep. 1956), pp. 423-6.

influenced his opinion here.³⁴¹ But it is more likely that the issue involved Greek customs, perhaps even specific to Corinth. And while there is evidence for headcoverings among Greek women, customs are not consistent over the centuries surrounding the birth of Christianity. Many exegetes, including Witherington, have relied on the work of C.M. Galt in the 1930's, concluding that headcoverings were customarily required for women in all rituals, funerals, weddings and religious gatherings.³⁴² But more recent studies suggest quite the opposite.³⁴³ Witherington himself is convinced that the Corinthians would have met in private homes, and if so the primary motive of hiding a wife from view in public disappears.³⁴⁴

Paul's reference to hair in this passage is also troublesome. Hurley has argued effectively that the whole

³⁴¹Witherington, p. 82.

³⁴²Fritz Zerbst, The Office of Women in the Church; a Study in Practical Theology (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), p. 37; Hurley, p. 196; Roland de Vaux, "Sur le voile des femmes dans l'orient ancien," Revue Biblique 44 (1935), p. 408; Hooker, pp. 410ff.; Witherington's conclusions are based on alleged evidence collected by Galt that in Greece during the Hellenistic period women wore head coverings during religious rites and dances. She describes them as "facial veils" which "covered the face up to the eyes, and fell over the neck and back in folds." C.M. Galt, "Veiled Ladies," American Journal of Archaeology, 35:373-93 (1931). See also Witherington, pp. 82ff.

³⁴³Albrecht Depke, "κατακαλύπτω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. III, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 560ff.

³⁴⁴Witherington, p. 80.

point of concern was actually hairstyle, the idiom "covered" meaning "having the hair tied up in a chiton" as becoming a married woman.³⁴⁵ This is suggested particularly by verse 15 where Paul states that woman's hair is given to her "for a covering,"³⁴⁶ supported by the illustration of "shaving and shearing" and the alleged shame of long hair for men.³⁴⁷

Scholars agree that very little can be said about what "nature" teaches concerning hair length, either for men or women, and here Paul might have been referring rather to "custom" and to social propriety in that specific locality.³⁴⁸ Paul's allusion to "shaving and shearing"

³⁴⁵James B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of I Corinthians 11:2-16 and I Corinthians 14:33b-36," The Westminster Theological Journal, XXXV, 2 (Winter, 1973), pp. 190-220. Hurley's understanding of Paul's terminology is derived in part from the LXX wording of key phrases in Leviticus 13:45 and Numbers 5:18 where ἀκατακάλυπτος suggests "loose hair." But Hurley also notices that Paul's teaching is contrary to the Old Testament regulations, which required a head covering for the priests and implied long hair.

³⁴⁶Περίβολαίον . Witherington sees a clear distinction between a veil and a mantle, the former of which he believes covered the face. He is convinced Paul uses the περίβολαίον as an illustration of woman's need for a covering, and not that the hair is sufficient for a covering.

³⁴⁷Verses 6 and 14.

³⁴⁸The term φύσις describes the natural form or constitution of a thing, the way things happen to be according to physical laws. Practically speaking, the term refers to the way things are done in a society by reason of custom, habit, or doing whatever comes naturally. Many scholars feel that universally long hair on men is disgraceful and in discord with the nature of men; F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 260. Marcus Dods, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: Hodder and

suggests that such would be shameful for a woman,³⁴⁹ and serves simply as support for his argument that the woman's head should be covered. It has been commonly argued that prostitutes were made to wear shorn hair, but there is no substantial evidence that this was so.³⁵⁰

Paul's reference to angels adds to the confusion. It is ludicrous to suggest that an angel would be offended or inflamed with passion upon seeing a bareheaded woman praying, although this has been the interpretation of many.³⁵¹ Some have suggested that Paul was referring to the ministers of the church.³⁵² But it is more likely that he drew on common beliefs that angels were present in and concerned with human

Stoughton, 1900), p. 253. However, such conclusions appear to represent the same kind of unfounded traditional prejudice which Paul addressed at Corinth.

³⁴⁹Lucian, The Runaways 27 (LCL, V, p.85); This classical writer was critical of Spartan women who looked masculine due to short hair.

³⁵⁰F.W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 254; H.A.W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 248.

³⁵¹Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women," II (ANF, IV, p. 15, 32); John R. Rice, Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers (Wheaton: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941), p. 73; Leslie Greer Thomas, Women and Their Veils (Knoxville). Of course, the nonsensical character of such a belief does not preclude it from Paul's thinking.

³⁵²As suggested by Ambrose and Primarius; see Robertson, pp. 233f.

service to God,³⁵³ and therefore would delight in a Christian assembly conducted with propriety, decency and order.³⁵⁴

Many commentators assume the term *ἐξουσίαν* to refer to the authority of the husband over the wife, and the unmentioned veil a sign or symbol of such authority.³⁵⁵

Robertson represents the traditional application of this passage in a modern context, warning that "the freedom of women to minister in church must not overthrow or disregard the leadership role of men in families and church."³⁵⁶ This exegesis has been challenged by others who see Paul alluding to the woman's own authority to speak and share in the assembly proceedings under the new Christian order.³⁵⁷

In spite of all the difficulties, the most reasonable conclusion is that Paul here refers to some form of veiling in compliance with social expediency, and that he uses

³⁵³J.A. Fitzmyer, "Features of Qumran Angelology and the Angels of I Cor. XI 10," New Testament Studies, IV (1957-8), pp. 48-58. Chrysostom said: "Do you not know that you stand in the midst of angels? With them you sing, with them you chant, and do stand laughing?" quoted by Robertson, p. 233; cf. Hebrews 12:1.

³⁵⁴Henry Alford, The Greek New Testament, Vol III (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1861), p. 566.

³⁵⁵*ἐξουσίαν . . . ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς*, Maahs, p. 24. The conventional understanding is supported by the Arabic word for veil, shultana, which means "authority."

³⁵⁶Robertson, p. 17.

³⁵⁷Hooker, pp. 410-16; C.K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: A & C Black, 1968), pp. 253-5; F.F. Bruce, I and II Corinthians (London: Oliphants, 1971), p. 106.

hairstyles, common beliefs concerning angels, and other customs as arguments to support his case. Whether the authority in question is that of the husband over the wife, or that of the wife to speak on her own merit, there can be no question that Paul's advice in the end defers to traditional male domination and customs which required wives to be in subjection. Even prophetesses had to conform.³⁵⁸

Paul's conclusion in verse 16 is as difficult as the rest of the passage, but appears to be an appeal to unity and peace.³⁵⁹ But there is nothing about the passage which should cause a believer to think that God has ordained that women should cover their heads in a religious assembly, either to pray or to speak, or that the customs and doctrines

³⁵⁸Sir William Ramsay believed, based on Dio Chrysostom, that veiling of women was prescribed more strictly in Tarsus than any other place. Therefore Paul was greatly influenced by his upbringing. The Teaching of St. Paul in Terms of the Present Day (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 214. He wrote in conclusion: "In this matter we must, I think, recognize an instance of the Apostle's occasional inability to rise above the ideas of his own time. Old prepossessions, dominant in his mind from infancy, made him see a moral duty where in our modern estimation only a social custom was really in question."

³⁵⁹Scholars disagree as to whether *τοιαύτην* means "no such" or "no other," and whether the "custom" he refers to is that of head coverings, throwing off head coverings, or being contentious about it, one way or the other. I Cor. 14:40 suggests that Paul is concerned with order in the assembly. With this Lenski agrees, quoting the Augsburg Confession: "It is proper that the churches should keep such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquility, so far that one does not offend the other, that all things be done in the churches in order, without confusion." R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1946), p. 452.

contained in this section of scripture constitute a universal mandate for church assembly. The fact that few modern churches require a veil for women, or long hair for that matter, indicates the ability even in conservative tradition to recognize the cultural nature of some New Testament teachings, and therefore disregard them as modern church dogma.³⁶⁰

Silence in the Assembly

I Corinthians 14:34-36 is a conundrum by contrast to chapter 11, in that it appears to abolish what was clearly taking place under the auspices of prophetic gifts. For this reason some have concluded it to be a post-Pauline interpolation.³⁶¹ An appeal to the Law seems quite out of the ordinary for Paul, although the reference may be to rabbinic law rather than the Law of Moses.³⁶² However,

³⁶⁰Generally true also of wearing gold, braided hair, expensive garments, etc.; I Timothy 2:9-10, I Peter 3:3.

³⁶¹Elaine Pagels, p. 544, 1974; James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (New York: Harper, n.d.), pp. 231f. C.B. Caird, Paul and Woman's Liberty (The Manson Memorial Lecture, University of Manchester, 1971), p. 371. Susanne Heine, Women and Early Christianity: Are the Feminist Scholars Right? (London: SCM, 1987), p. 135.

³⁶²Tertullian noticed this also, Against Marcion, V, 8 (ANF, III, p. 446). No such law exists in the Old Testament, unless it is a loose allusion to Genesis 3:16. Dick and Joyce Boldrey suggest that here *ὁ νόμος* refers to "propriety;" "Women in Paul's Life, Trinity Studies 2:13 (1972). But such a use is not common to Paul. Witherington (p. 103) believes it refers to silence when a word of counsel is spoken, from Job 29:21.

evidence for interpolation is lacking from the standpoint of textual criticism,³⁴³ and there are various internal reasons for accepting it as Pauline.³⁴⁴

It appears that most scholars have felt compelled to harmonize chapters 11 and 14, and to harmonize Paul with contemporary tradition and general church dogma even if this is accomplished by means of fantastic conjectures. A variety of theories have been offered. Moffatt's suggestion is that women were so susceptible to the mysterious and ecstatic that a potentially beneficial practice soon got out of hand.³⁴⁵ Von Dobschutz proposed that chapter 11 came from fragments of an earlier letter, and sometime after writing it Paul simply changed his mind on this issue. The two portions came to be copied as one letter very early.³⁴⁶

Various other exegetes have suggested that the problem addressed here is not that of prophetesses at all, as was the case in chapter 11, but women who were interrupting and

³⁴³B.M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 565.

³⁴⁴Various exegetes have defended verses 33-6 because of the link of terms such as λαλέω, σιγάω, and ὑποτάσσω in verses before and after, as well as the pattern of instructing submission in close proximity to an exhortation involving inspired speech (Col. 3:18ff.; Eph. 5:19ff); Witherington, p. 91.

³⁴⁵Moffatt, pp. 207-18. Witherington also stresses the likelihood that the Corinthian Christians were highly prone to practices originating with Mystery Cults; p. 92.

³⁴⁶Ernst Von Dobschutz, Christian Life in the Primitive Church, p. 38; quoted by J. Weis, The History of Primitive Christianity, Vol. I (New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1937), p. 332

confusing the assembly with questions, or even idle chattering by women of the church.³⁶⁷ This theory allows for women speaking as prophetesses, but not in circumstances which created an unacceptable disruption. Witherington concurs, seeing no contradiction between the implications of chapter 11 and the injunction of silence in chapter 14, since he feels the latter deals with a specific problem of propriety and order.³⁶⁸

However, in verse 28 there appears a command of silence on the part of those who were addressing the congregation in charismatic tongues without an interpreter. Under these circumstances, Paul says, a speaker should "keep silence in the church, and speak to himself and to God."³⁶⁹ This does not suggest total silence, but refraining from speech so as to maintain order.³⁷⁰ And it appears that the problem

³⁶⁷Heinrich Schlier, "κεφαλή," Kittel, Vol. III, p. 680. There is evidence that the verb λαλέω was commonly used for "chattering" as might occur at a party or social gathering; Moulton and Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, p. 386. The verb σιγᾶω means "to hush," "be quiet," "refrain from talking;" See Liddell, Scott, Jones, s.v. However, the same term appears some eighteen times in I Corinthians 14, in each place apparently meaning "speaking to communicate a message," and in most referring to public speaking (I Cor. 14:3, 19, 21, 29). See R.C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 286; W.E. Vine, I Corinthians (London: Oliphants, 1965), p. 199.

³⁶⁸Witherington, p. 104.

³⁶⁹Verses 28-9; also suggests the general church assembly

³⁷⁰G. Friedrich, "προφήτης," IDNT, Vol. VI, G. Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 829. Total silence not meant for the women either, for they partook in singing

addressed is indeed related to those who possessed charismatic gifts, and therefore would include prophetesses.

Hurley suggests that the answer lies in verse 35, which pertains to judging the validity of prophecy. The prophetesses were continually firing questions at the speakers, perhaps with the motive of learning, but assuming the anomalous role of judging men and creating a general atmosphere of disorder. Paul instructs that they be quiet, and ask such questions at home.³⁷¹ Witherington's exhaustive exegesis yields much the same conclusion.³⁷² Peterson makes a distinction between prophecy, which he feels was an acceptable practice for women in the early church, and teaching which was not. The latter, he says, was "an authoritative function concerned with the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine or tradition," and was committed to men only.³⁷³

Kaiser, Odell-Scott and others find a radically different way of explaining the injunction of silence. They see Paul here referring to some earlier communication from Corinth, which he completely rejects. The strong particle ἡ in verse 36, usually translated "What?" introduces a sentence

and said "amen" in response to prayers.

³⁷¹Hurley, p. 217.

³⁷²Witherington, Women in the Earliest Churches, pp. 101-2. More specifically, that wives were becoming insubordinate to their husbands through judging prophecy.

³⁷³Peterson, p. 19.

contrary to the one preceeding it. Paul therefore is saying: "What? did the Word of God originate with you (men), or are you the only ones it has reached?" With this interpretation, the injunction of silence becomes a heretical doctrine which Paul rejects and denounces and the traditional proof text for the silence of women is removed altogether.³⁷⁴

It does appear that Paul was concerned with order and propriety in the assembly, as well as general unity in the whole church. In view of various social traditions, a doctrine of female subordination was essential to those objectives. It must be recognized also that prophetic gifts were a transient element of the early church destined to disappear with time, and that female prophetism represented an element in the church which contradicted the norm.³⁷⁵ While many exegetes seem to be obsessed with harmonizing and justifying Paul, a more rational alternative is to accept that in view of the circumstances his doctrine on women was simply less than ideal, and that dedication to Christianity in a modern world does not require a fundamental application of all he taught or recommended on this issue. As Dwight Pratt suggests, regardless of the immediate problems Paul

³⁷⁴Kaiser, p. 12-1; D.W. Odell-Scott, "Let the women speak in church, an egalitarian interpretation of I Cor. 14:33b-36," Biblical Theology Bulletin, 13:3 (1983), pp. 90-3.

³⁷⁵Schlier argues that the use of prophetic gifts by women was an exception to the general rule of propriety. Henry Schlier, "*κεφαλή*," IDNT, Vol. III, G. Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 680.

addressed, his prohibition was applicable only to the peculiar circumstances at the time and are irrelevant to church life today.³⁷⁶

Prohibition from Teaching and Positions of Authority

It is generally agreed that I Timothy 2 pertains to the formal assembly,³⁷⁷ although the writer's concern for appropriate attire is paralleled elsewhere clearly with regards to general lifestyle.³⁷⁸ But of critical concern is the traditional allegation that I Timothy 2, supported by the writer's appeal to Genesis 2, declares a biblical and theological principle of male authority.³⁷⁹ His advice that women "learn in silence," is then taken to mean refraining from speech during a church assembly,³⁸⁰ and the remainder of the charge prohibits women to play any role where they might appear to have authority over a man, particularly as elders or preachers or in public teaching.³⁸¹ Eenigenburg

³⁷⁶D. Pratt, "Women," ISBE, V, p. 3103.

³⁷⁷Hendriksen, p. 109. Implied by his mention of prayer (vv. 1, 8), and lifting up hands (v. 8).

³⁷⁸Titus 2:7-8; I Peter 2:12ff.

³⁷⁹Peterson, p. 17.

³⁸⁰As was the case in I Corinthians 14:33ff.

³⁸¹Roger E. Dickson, International New Testament Study Commentary (Church of Christ: 1987), p. 593; James O. Baird, "Role for Women in the Church," Introducing the Church of Christ, John Waddey, ed. (Ft. Worth: Star, 1981), pp. 123-4. In fact, some conservatives understand I Timothy 2:9 to imply that only males could lead public prayers. I. Howard

summarizes the traditional understanding of this passage: "A woman who by divine ordinance is subject to her husband in the home can hardly bear rule over him in the house of God."³⁸²

The writer seems very concerned here with a violation of social propriety on the part of some wives, perhaps in a context identical with that of I Corinthians 11-14. Here the term *ἡσυχία* refers to a quiet and peaceful manner, suggesting an attitude of life which is orderly and submissive.³⁸³ The term *αὐθεντεῖν* here is an hapax legomenon in the New Testament which Hommes understands to be a "good, pithy colloquial expression" very nearly equivalent to the modern expression "wearing the pants."³⁸⁴ Rather than "playing the boss" over their husbands the writer advises that wives should be quiet and remain within the

Marshall, "The role of women in the church," The Role of Women, Shirley Lees, ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 191-2.

³⁸²Elton M. Eenigenburg, "The Ordination of Women," Christianity Today 3:15-16 (April 27, 1959).

³⁸³A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. IV (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), p. 570; J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, rep. 1963), p. 281. Cf. I Peter 3:4.

³⁸⁴N.J. Hommes, "Let Women Be Silent in the Church; A Message Concerning the Worship Service and the Decorum to Be Observed By Women," Calvin Theological Journal, April, 1969, p. 6.

scope of social expediency.³⁸⁵ The verb *ἐπιτρέτω* should be translated "I am not permitting," and suggests that this is the writer's timely and expedient prohibitive judgment, but not one based on the Law nor suggesting a timeless divine ordinance.³⁸⁶

Although these exegetical points are clear, there is still uncertainty as to the problem which gave rise to such advice. Walter Kaiser contends that traditional exegetes have overlooked the point of verse 11, that women need to be taught. Considering that in the first century women generally lacked the education to impart knowledge and expound scripture, women in the church were unsuitable as teachers and the writer recommends that they refrain from trying to play that role. The appeal to Eve serves to stress her lack of instruction and understanding of God's commands.³⁸⁷ Therefore, Kaiser argues, if and when women receive the essential education to equip them to be teachers, the entire

³⁸⁵For a variety of possible causes of the upset, see Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 71. It should be noted that the spirit of Christ would not approve of anyone "playing the boss" over another, not even a church elder; Mark 10:42, I Peter 5:3-4. If this denies women the right to fill roles of leadership, teaching, or authority, then it does so for everyone.

³⁸⁶Witherington, p. 120. Not like the rabbinic formula of I Corinthians 14:38 "it is not permitted."

³⁸⁷This is also stressed by Witherington who sees the problem as the susceptibility of women to false teaching and their being easily led into apostasy. The Pastorals are likely dealing with proto-Gnosticism. Pp. 117-127.

situation changes.³⁸⁸

But Witherington states emphatically that there is no universal and unqualified prohibition of women preaching and teaching in this text regardless of the immediate point of concern, nor does it speak to the issue of female ordination.³⁸⁹ And, as Barclay points out, the real problem for the church today lies in thinking that the advice in I Timothy 2, regardless of its specific nature, constitutes a divine prescription for our practice today. It is simply wrong to make this teaching a universal rule for the church.³⁹⁰

Pauline Ambivalence

Most of the teachings on the status of women in the early Christian community are traditionally ascribed to Paul, with various allusions to or quotations from the Genesis Creation Narrative. And it is this corpus of passages which comes to serve as the ultimate proof texts for the subordination of women in Christian tradition. Galatians 3:28, discussed in the previous chapter, has been understood by many as an emancipation proclamation for women with Paul

³⁸⁸Walter C. Kaiser, "Shared Leadership," Christianity Today, Vol 30, No. 14 (October 3, 1986), p. 12-1.

³⁸⁹Witherington, p. 122.

³⁹⁰William Barclay, The Letters To The Corinthians (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, rep. 1965), p. 152.

as the great New Testament champion of female liberation.³⁹¹ But this passage, representing what is now being viewed as a principal element of the Christian message, clearly stands in juxtaposition to Pauline doctrine as a whole and to main stream Christian tradition. Therefore, developments in both theology and sociology in the modern world demand a careful and critical reexamination of relevant passages, challenging both social myth and religious dogma on this issue.

Maahs argues convincingly that Paul is neither a chauvinist nor a liberationist, but is ambivalent on the issue of women.³⁹² In his thinking, Pauline passages are self consistent although in apparent tension because of disparate foci. John Gaden, on the other hand, contends that scripture, and Paul in particular, simply presents two opposite positions which cannot be reconciled.³⁹³ He is in favor of a pluralist stance allowing churches, parishes and dioceses to take either position without enforcing one upon all.

³⁹¹Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 40:283, 1972.

³⁹²Kenneth H. Maahs, "Male & Female in Pauline Perspective: A Study in Biblical Ambivalence," Dialogue & Alliance 2, No. 3 (Fall, 1988), pp. 17ff. Similarly, Witherington concludes that Paul is neither a chauvinist overly influenced by his Jewish past, or an early feminist. Ben Witherington III, Women in the Earliest Churches, Society for New Testament Studies, Monogram Series 59 (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), pp. 24-5.

³⁹³J.R. Gaden, "For the Ordination of Women," MOW (Melbourne, 1985); also in St. Mark's Review (March, 1986).

Most conservative exegetes, however, are set on harmonizing Pauline doctrines, while at the same time explaining away any teaching on the status of women which may be strained by current social trends and defending those which they consider to be universal and divinely authoritative.³⁷⁴ In spite of a variety of explanations of each relevant passage, they hold in common the presumption of plenary verbal inspiration of every biblical passage, whether from Genesis or Paul, as well as inerrancy and divine authority.³⁷⁵

It is the present writer's thesis that Pauline texts have been to a degree misunderstood, and certainly misapplied, all through the history of Christianity. As a whole the Apostle supports traditional male dominance, and Galatians 3:28 does indeed stand in disharmony with that religio-sociological tradition. Paul is therefore, in the words of Elaine Pagels, "a man in conflict."³⁷⁶ The tension between Galatians 3:28 and the rest of Paul's teachings are quite understandable in light of the unique dialectic of the first century, and represent an attempt on the part of the

³⁷⁴David Peterson, "The Ordination of Women-Balancing the Scriptural Evidence," St. Mark's Review (March, 1986), p. 20.

³⁷⁵These critical factors are certainly the root of the dilemma on the status of women, and will be addressed in Chapter Six as a conclusion.

³⁷⁶Elaine Pagels, "Paul and Women: A Response to Recent Discussion," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 42:544, 1974.

Apostle to construct a harmonious atmosphere within the Christian community to allow development and maturation of the principles of the Gospel. But the traditional elements of his teaching must be regarded as a concession to inferior social norms, much like Moses' concession to divorce, and not to be taken as divine mandate for all generations.³⁹⁷ In fact, Paul seems to have found himself in a strait between the ideals implied in the Gospel and the practical realities of life in a complex culture.³⁹⁸

Conclusions

The attitude and teachings of Jesus concerning women seem revolutionary and directly opposed to the androcentric views of his contemporaries. In a variety of subtle ways he demonstrated his opposition to injustice and bias against women, while encouraging their open expression of religious sentiment and their participation in his ministry. They find a place of equality in his precepts, discourses, social relationships, and find approval in various types of religious expression, even as messengers of the Good News.

³⁹⁷Jesus considered the Mosaic toleration of divorce a concession to human weakness; Matthew 19:8.

³⁹⁸Conservatives like David Field denounce this idea in the strongest terms. "It is difficult to take such a suggestion very seriously. Apart from the grave implications it has for the authority and inspiration of scripture it effectively makes Paul seem either an idiot or a muddle-headed communicator." Field, "Headship in Marriage: the Husband's View," Shirley Lees, ed. The Role of Women (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), p. 50.

Likewise, the status of women in the earliest Christian community appears that of remarkable elevation. Women responded to the Gospel and were baptized, and spiritual gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues were evident among them with no form of discrimination. Women appear to have rendered a variety of forms of service in the church, and there is substantial evidence also that women were appointed to certain positions of responsible leadership. They preached, taught and prayed, both publicly and privately, and in some places may have served as overseers and counsellors. This evidence does not represent any sort of fully developed doctrine, but simply the elemental and natural response of early Christians to the principles of the Gospel of Christ in their own time and locality. Although the bulk of Pauline doctrines concerning the status of women support traditional patriarchy, Galatians 3:28 is a long range projection of the ecclesiastical implications of the Gospel in terms of female equality. It therefore becomes a concise canon for measuring social traditions and religious dogma concerning the status of women, and against which various paradigms traditionally defended as divinely authoritative are exposed as myth.

In spite of efforts by certain feminists to dilute Pauline teaching on the status of women so as to accommodate modern thinking, the essentially patriarchal nature of relevant Pauline texts is undeniable. Of the two

possible explanations for this anomaly, neither is very palatable to conservatives.

The first is that much of Paul's thinking on this and other issues was shaped by his staunch Hebrew background, and on the subject of women Pauline literature represents the very traditional thinking the Gospel seeks to overthrow.³⁹⁹ Paul was Jewish, his understanding of the Old Testament was largely that of a Jewish rabbi, and he never fully escaped the constricting forces of that cultural heritage. He and other writers who followed or developed his beliefs simply shaped church doctrine to conform to traditional Jewish thinking on the status of women. This is very likely the case with the writer of the Pastoral Epistles, and certainly some residual rabbinism is detectable in Paul.

A second possible explanation for the apparent duplicity in Paul is that the restrictive elements in his teaching were a mere concession to inferior norms in order to preserve harmony among believers and to protect their positive influence in the community. Caird appropriately lauds the Apostle Paul as a champion of female liberty in spite of his sensible compliance with social expediency:

Some of Paul's teaching on the position of women appears to us out of date only because he addressed himself to the social condition of his own day, and because we sometimes imperfectly

³⁹⁹Doris Franklin, "Impact of Christianity on the Status of Women from the Socio-cultural Point of View," Religion and Society, Vol XXXII, No. 2 (June, 1985), p. 46.

understand the problems with which he had to deal.⁴⁰⁰

As Tavad points out, Paul found himself in a stressful predicament because he could see clearly the implications of the Gospel, but cultural and traditional factors made it impossible to promote fully with regard to the status of women.⁴⁰¹ Therefore he offered temporary solutions, hoping that in time the church and society would grow beyond the limitations of traditionalism.

The possibility of certain concessions and occasional accommodative language in biblical literature should not be difficult for conservative Christians to accept. The Law of Moses, which Christians typically attribute to divine inspiration, includes the concession of divorce for reasons which Jesus described as catering to the hardness of the human heart. But Jesus stated that from the very beginning this was considerably less than ideal.⁴⁰² The Old Testament is pregnant with examples of substandard behaviour on the part of judges, kings and prophets, much of which is glossed over with no hint of God's displeasure. The Law of Moses itself is generally viewed by Christians as an inadequate and inferior substitute for the ideal covenant enacted through

⁴⁰⁰Caird, p. 281.

⁴⁰¹Tavad, p. 27; Robert M. Grant, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 28-42.

⁴⁰²Matthew 19:1ff.

the ministry of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰³ Clearly Pauline teaching on master and slave relationships was a concession to inferior and undesirable social conditions.⁴⁰⁴ Likewise the advice sent by the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 to the Gentile Christians in Antioch was largely a matter of concession to the narrowmindedness of Jewish Christians who had not yet grown to the point of relinquishing their iron grip on the Law of Moses, and who refused to accept uncircumcised Gentiles as equals in the daily communal affairs of the church. Even the silent perseverance of early Christians under the fires of persecution, without thought of protest or organized rebellion, is beyond that to be found in most believers today. But all these concessions were both natural and essential for the time.

Perhaps the same is true of the restrictive elements of the New Testament teaching on the status of women. Tavad is of the opinion that Paul saw the implications of Jesus' liberation doctrine and wanted desperately to teach it fully, but shied away because of its revolutionary implications for society.⁴⁰⁵ It becomes evident that certain problems which

⁴⁰³Hebrews 8:7.

⁴⁰⁴This portion of the Haustafel appears in Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1. But Paul's exhortation to fairness and just treatment of servants, as well as his admonition to Philemon to consider Onesimus "more than a servant" suggests a certain degree of practical change in relationship between masters and slaves because of the compelling spirit of Christ.

⁴⁰⁵Tavad, p. 202.

existed in the first century would not find a practical solution till centuries later. Observing this anomaly Stendahl is emphatic that the New Testament contains glimpses which point beyond and even against the prevailing view and practice of the New Testament church.⁴⁰⁶ This means that while in principle the New Testament might oppose slavery, racism, tyranny and other forms of social injustice, it appears to advocate or at least tolerate such undesirable concepts in practice simply because the time had not come for their overthrow. Perhaps many early Christians understood the long range implications of the New Age.⁴⁰⁷ But it would take years, in fact centuries, of growth on the part of the church and centuries of advancement of social mentality for such to become reality. Yet eventually, if Christianity would have any impact at all, it would influence the world toward peace, justice, and the recognition of human rights, including abolishing slavery and liberating women.

William Goode, a traditionalist lamenting developments in modern feminism, acknowledges that this was inevitable:

. . .the crucial crystallizing variable-
i.e. the necessary but not sufficient
cause of the betterment of the Western
woman's position- was ideological: the
gradual, logical, philosophical
extension to women of originally

⁴⁰⁶Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics, Emilie T. Sanders, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 32-34.

⁴⁰⁷This may have been the meaning of Paul's admission in I Corinthians 13: 12, "we look into a dim mirror. . ."

Protestant notions about the rights and responsibilities of the individual undermined the traditional idea of "women's proper place."⁴⁰⁸

But there is ample evidence that such advancements in human rights were not rooted in mere social ideology, but in the Gospel itself. What he saw as a sad result of Reformation heresy was in fact the long awaited inevitable fruit of the Spirit of Christ. And the notion that the Gospel only went so far as to extend to women spiritual equality with men, but failing to address the issue of social inequity, is clearly a myth. And those biblical teachings which are contrary to that principle must be viewed as inferior, transitory, and irrelevant to Christianity today.

⁴⁰⁸William Goode, World revolution and Family Patterns (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1963), p. 56; Freeman, p. 13.

Chapter Three

WOMEN IN CHURCH TRADITION

Medieval Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation are part of a long historical bridge between the first century church and modern Christianity.¹ In the previous chapter the teaching of the New Testament on the status of women has been discussed in the light of cultural backgrounds, and as a principal source of doctrine in later Christian tradition. But for the purpose of this thesis it is necessary to determine the developmental course which the status of women followed in church doctrine from the time of the Apostolic fathers till the present, giving special attention to those factors which influenced the interpretation of scripture in support of female subordination and which formed the theology of womanhood which is the crux of today's dilemma.

I. NOTABLE WOMEN

During the early centuries of Christianity there were many women of renown in the church whose lives and deeds represent the spirit of freedom and equality evident in the Gospel. Thecla of Thamyris was not mentioned earlier since she does not appear in the New Testament. But she does

¹Distinct historical periods include the Apostolic Fathers (before 100 A.D.), the Ante-Nicene Fathers (100-325 A.D.), The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (325-606 A.D.), the Middle Ages (606-1450 A.D.), and the Protestant Reformation (the 1500's). The Middle Ages include various distinct periods also, such as the Missions in Britain, the Break Between East and West, the Crusades, and the Renaissance.

feature prominently in the apocryphal work The Acts of Paul and Thecla, ascribed by Tertullian to a presbyter in Asia who allegedly compiled the work out of adoration for Paul.² Thecla was converted at Iconium and is credited with teaching, preaching and baptizing. And until recently scholarship in general has concluded that these claims are exaggerated, if not totally fabricated.³ But what we know about her clearly attests the prominence of women in evangelism during the early history of the Christian church. Another example is Drusiana, heroine of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. To these might be added numerous famous martyrs such as Perpetua, who died for the faith in North Africa during the persecution of Severus of Carthage in A.D. 203, and Felicitas, put to death in Rome with her seven sons. Both were considered to be prophetesses.⁴ Other women were famous for their religious accomplishments. Paula (A.D. 347-404) was a wealthy Roman noblewoman who assisted Jerome in translating the Vulgate, in addition to founding a monastery,

²J.P. Kirsch, "Thecla, Saint" Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 14 (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1912), p. 564. Hoy Ledbetter, "The Prophetess," Integrity (June, 1973).

³W.M. Ramsay, The Church in the Roman Empire, eighth edition (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), pp. 375-428; Asiatic Elements in Greek Civilization, The Gifford Lectures in the University of Edinburgh, 1915-16 (London: John Murray, 1928), p. 269.

⁴Marie Henry Keane, "Women in the Theological Anthropology of the Early Fathers," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (1987), p. 9. See Acts of the Martyrs, "Passion Perpetua et Felicitatis."

convent and hospice in Bethelhem.⁵ Melania (A.D. 383-439) was from a wealthy and aristocratic Roman family and was praised in her life of pious devotion by the Imperial family, Serena in particular.⁶ She allegedly founded two monasteries, one for women and one for men. The Life of Saint Melany was written by her disciple and devoted friend, the priest Gerontios. Eusebius tells of the ordeal of another great woman, Blandina, who died in the persecution of Vienna and Lyon under Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 177).⁷ The religious pilgrimages of Etheria throughout the Mediterranean world are also noteworthy. She visited many places of interest, tracing Old Testament history and making notes of all she found. Tavard cites her as a "very attractive type of Christian woman who meets bishops and monks on terms of equality and manifests freedom even from social conventions."⁸

Other great women of medieval Europe include Marcelina, famous sister of Ambrose, Marcella the wealthy ascetic whose home in Rome was a center for Christian influence, Gertrude of Nivelles, abbess during the period A.D. 626-653, and Radegunda, former queen of the Franks and wife of Chlothar I,

⁵Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be (Waco: Word, 1975), p. 174.

⁶George Tavard, Women in Christian Tradition (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 91.

⁷Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, V:1, C.F. Cruse, trans. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), p. 179.

⁸Tavard, p. 91.

who studied at the monastery of the Holy Cross at Portiers (d. A.D. 587).⁹

Much later in France the eighteen year old Jeanne d'Arc lead her army against the English during the Hundred Years War (A.D. 1412-31). But the church condemned her as a witch in 1431, and by persuasion rehabilitated her in 1456. In 1909 she was beatified and then canonized in 1920.

It is difficult to know whether these women were rare exceptions, or if there were many others whose significance is simply lost in historical oblivion. Adriana Valerio suggests that history is not and could never be an aesthetic and objective exercise, since each historian chooses to record what he deems worthy of recorded memory. Since history has traditionally been read from a masculine and elitist standpoint, it therefore gives attention to great figures, institutions and political events, leaving out accomplishments by radicals and nonconformists, and experiences of common people, including the poor, the insignificant, and women.¹⁰ It also portrays movements and events largely from the standpoint of mainstream thinkers. Therefore since the involvement of women in otherwise male dominated systems was not welcome it was carefully edited out

⁹Everett Ferguson, Early Christians Speak (Austin: Sweet, 1971), pp. 229-235.

¹⁰Adriana Valerio, "Women in Church History," in "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology," Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds., Concilium: Religion in the Eighties (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), p. 63.

of history, or portrayed in a bad light. Since there are at least a few outstanding women in this period, in spite of the prejudicial forces, one might conclude that there must have been others and that their invisibility in church and theology was a matter of deliberate manipulation of historical memory.

II. FEMALE OFFICERS IN THE POST-APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The presence of certain offices for females in the early church is a further indication of the spirit of the Gospel in its pristine form. But such offices very quickly became a subject of confusion and debate, in time to disappear altogether.

Deaconesses

As far as can be determined none of the Ante-Nicene fathers make reference to Phoebe as a deaconess. But Pliny, a Roman noble in the service of the Emperor Trajan, wrote a letter in A.D. 112 reporting on an investigation he had conducted among Bithynian churches. Admittedly, Pliny does not appear to be well informed concerning Christian beliefs, for he speaks of torturing two women in an attempt to extract information from them concerning their religion. Whether hoping to find evidence of cannibalism, incest or some other lurid crime we do not know, but what we learn is that they were recognized by the church in some way as deaconesses.

Pliny writes:

I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of fortune, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses; but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition.¹¹

Here the Latin term which Pliny uses is ministrae, which could have been rendered either "servants" or "ministers," rather than "deaconesses." In either case the typical New Testament use of the term suggests some kind of official status.

Further evidence appears in various works of Clement of Alexandria, written in the late second century. In his treatment of I Corinthians 9:5 where Paul discusses the right of apostles to "lead about a wife who is a sister" Clement makes reference to the role of deaconesses. Although his interpretation of this particular passage seems incorrect he does express an awareness of deaconesses in the early church, whose role he defines as assisting the apostles to bring the doctrine of the Lord into women's apartments, eliminating suspicion of blame if men were to do so. Clement also discusses the role of deaconesses in his Stromata stating that the service they render has to do with showing hospitality, menial service for others, and various

¹¹Pliny, Letters, X, 96 (LCL, II, p. 405).

supportive roles in teaching and evangelism.¹²

Other than the references of Pliny and Clement, there is silence concerning deaconesses till the late third century. The silence is broken by a very lengthy treatment of the subject in the Apostolic Constitutions, a compilation of Syrian material from various sources. Of this collection the seventh book, known as the Didascalia Apostolorum, or Teaching, dates from the third century. The remains of the Constitutions is thought to have been written no earlier than the fourth century and no later than the fifth. In these works, written primarily to regulate various church orders and liturgy, the office of deaconess is clearly defined and appears to be a prominent feature of church organization.¹³

Few authorities attempt to explain the long literary silence on the subject between the New Testament and the Apostolic Constitutions, but the office either existed continuously from the apostolic era with little occasion for mention, or was suddenly revived in the third century due to changing needs in the church. Either explanation presupposes an order of deaconesses in the first century church. This is not to suggest that it did not change or become more technically defined. It is certain that all church offices

¹²Clement, Stromata III:6 (ANF, II, p. 390-91); G.W.H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), p. 353.

¹³Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 388

went through considerable evolution after the apostolic era, in some cases drifting away from the original concept. Schaff recognizes that in post-apostolic times the bishop came to be elevated above the presbyter, the presbyter developed into the priest, and the deacon "became the first of three orders in the ministry and a stepping-stone to the priesthood."¹⁴ Observing these and other significant changes in church dogma it becomes difficult to accept that the third century order of deaconesses was maintained unaltered from the start.

According to the Apostolic Constitutions, deaconesses were ordained by the laying on of hands, as were deacons. The same is suggested in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (AD 170-235). In the case of a deacon, however, a prayer was made that he might achieve a higher standing, no doubt referring to the eldership.¹⁵ At that time it seems that deaconess was the highest office in the church obtainable by a woman. This ministry involved numerous practical duties in the daily life of the community and in certain religious ceremonies, but appears to be confined almost totally to caring for the needs of other women, benevolence, keeping orphans, and teaching. Deaconesses assisted women with baptism by keeping the doors, anointing and receiving after

¹⁴Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1968), p. 500.

¹⁵Apostolic Constitutions, III, 3:18-20 (ANF, VII, p. 492)

immersion, but not performing the baptism itself.¹⁶ They also stood by the doors of the worship assembly to keep order among the women, serving as intermediaries between lay women and other church officers. It seems also that widows were expected to hold them in high esteem as they would male officials.¹⁷

It is strange, however, that the Teaching, which is the oldest portion of the Constitutions, makes no mention of deaconesses or any female officers in its section concerning the ordination of church officials.¹⁸ This might indicate that the office of deaconesses became recognized in the eastern church only in the early fourth century, after the Teaching was completed. In support of this suggestion is the fact that the first appearance of the word *διακονισσα* in Christian literature is in the canons of the Council of Nicea, A.D. 325, and even there cautions are issued to the effect that deaconesses should not be considered as among the clergy. In the Apostolic Constitutions this rather advanced and technical term appears only in Book VIII, which is the latest of the materials dating from the fourth to early fifth centuries.¹⁹

¹⁶Ibid., III, 2:16 (ANF, VII, p. 431).

¹⁷Ibid., II, 7:62 (ANF, VII, p. 424); II, 4:26 (ANF, VII, p. 410); III, 1:7 (ANF, VII, p. 429).

¹⁸Ibid., VII, 2:31 (ANF, VII, p. 471).

¹⁹Ibid., VIII, 3:19, 20, 28 (ANF, VII, p. 492-3).

After this era references to deaconesses are more plentiful, and most writers assume the order to have originated in the New Testament continuing up to their own day. The first patristic reference to alleged deaconesses in I Timothy 3:11 is made by John Chrysostom:

Some have thought that this is said of women generally, but it is not so, for why should he introduce anything about women to interfere with the subject? He is speaking of those who hold the rank of deaconess.²⁰

It is difficult if not impossible to trace accurately the changes in definition of the role of deaconesses as well as the changes in attitude toward them. By the fourth century restrictions were being placed on the appointment of deaconesses, especially with regard to their ordination. The sacramental concepts associated with ordination in the minds of church officials set it above the worthiness of women. The Apostolic Constitutions indicate that deaconesses could be married, stating that they should obey their husbands since it was official church doctrine that "the man is head of the woman."²¹ It advised that deaconesses should not go to the public baths, and generally avoid the mores of pagan

²⁰Chrysostom, Homilies on Timothy, XI, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. XIII, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1969), p. 441.

²¹Apostolic Constitutions I:8; which does not make sense if a deaconess had to be either a virgin or a widow.

women.²² Women were forbidden to teach in the church or usurp any priestly function, for women were not allowed to have any authority over a man. Nor were women allowed to baptize, Christ having not granted them that power.²³

In Syria deaconesses were ordained by the bishop in the same way as deacons, but later sections of the Constitutions outlawed women from sacred functions, and this view became the universal norm. The Council of Laodicea in A.D.381 prohibited women from approaching the altar, implying some liturgical function to that date. The Synod of Orange in A.D. 441 forbade the ordination of women, although deaconesses still existed as a church order by 533 at the second Council of Orleans.²⁴

At about this time also special orders of nuns were developing, and their austerity and separation from association with ordinary people made them more acceptable to current theology. Therefore nuns gradually took over the role of deaconesses, and the latter disappeared from the western church by the eighth century and from the eastern church by the eleventh century.²⁵

²²Ibid, I:9

²³Ibid, III:9.

²⁴Elsie Thomas Culver, Women in the World of Religion (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), p. 71.

²⁵A. Vermeersch, "Nuns," Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 11 (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1911), pp. 164-8.

Widows

As one might expect, the "order of widows" mentioned in I Timothy 5 becomes much more elaborate in definition and function in post-apostolic history. They are discussed as a special group long before lengthy treatments of deaconesses appear. The first mention of widows by the apostolic fathers is in a much disputed passage by Ignatius, writing around A.D. 110-117: "I salute the households of my brethren, with their wives and children, and those that are ever virgins, and the widows."²⁶ Both virgins and widows come to be significant classes of women in the church at a later stage, and at the time of Ignatius it can be accepted that an "order of widows" existed in perhaps every congregation. But no mention is made by Ignatius of their functions nor the requirements for enrolment.

Polycarp wrote to the Philipppians in the early second century:

Teach the widows to be discreet as respects the faith of the Lord, praying continually for all, being far from all slandering, evil speaking, false witnessing, love of money, and every kind of evil; knowing that they are the altar of God. . .²⁷

Justin in his First Apology, dated around the middle of the second century, mentioned widows briefly in connection

²⁶Ignatius, To the Smyrneans, (ANF, I, p. 92).

²⁷Polycarp, To The Philipppians, 4 (ANF, I, p. 34).

with the Sunday assembly of Christians, stating only that they and orphans were among those assisted out of the funds given each week.²⁸ No mention is made of an order of widows or a special enrolment. Lucian, also of the middle second century, satirizes Christian practice in his account of the imprisonment of Proteus Peregrinus. Lucian says that Christians:

. . .left no stone unturned in their endeavor to procure his release. When this proved impossible they looked after his wants in all other matters with untiring solicitude and devotion. From earliest dawn old women (widows) and orphan children might be seen waiting about the prison doors, while the officers of the church, by bribing the jailors, were able to spend the night inside with him. Meals were brought in and they went through their sacred formulas.²⁹

From this testimony one might conclude that widows at this stage took responsibility for orphans and that they visited prisoners routinely, perhaps lingering outside in prayer. Although Lucian's work is fiction, it is based on his own observations of Christian behaviour and must be regarded as a valid witness.

Tertullian, representing the church in North Africa around A.D. 220, distinctly mentions an order of widows indicating that they had to be at least sixty years of age,

²⁸Justin Martyr, First Apology, 67 (ANF, I, p. 186).

²⁹Lucian, Death of Peregrinus, 12 (LCL, V, p. 13).

single-husbanded, mothers, educators of children and counselors to women with problems. He complains that in a certain place a virgin of less than twenty years was placed in the order of widows, much to the detriment of its purpose.³⁰

The most comprehensive treatment of widows in post-apostolic history appears in the Apostolic Constitutions. In these documents a careful distinction is made between "enrolled widows" and those widows who were merely the recipients of charity. Enrolled widows were expected to spend much time in prayer for the church, and were instructed not to run about from house to house. They also were employed to tend to the sick, instruct the younger women, and to teach Christianity to heathen women.³¹

The requirements for enrolment, the nature of duties, and the distinction between "enrolled widows" and "widows indeed" appear to have remained fairly constant from New Testament times down to the fifth century, which was not the case with deaconesses. It also appears that eventually the two became blended in the East and deaconesses replaced widows altogether in the West till both were abolished.

At the time of the Apostolic Constitutions confusion was being felt about the two orders. Deaconesses were in some

³⁰Tertullian, "On the Veiling of Virgins," 9 (ANF, IV, p. 33).

³¹Apostolic Constitutions, II, 4, 25 (ANF, VII, p. 397, 408); III, 6,7 (ANF, VII, p. 428).

sense considered church officers, being appointed by the imposition of hands, but this was not so of widows. They were clearly distinct groups, with widows subject to the authority of deaconesses. However, the Council of Nicea speaks of deaconesses as the only recognized female order in the church, while the Council of Orleans, around A.D. 533, speaks of "widows who are called deaconesses."³² Concerning the two orders Lighfoot says: "Whatever confusion there may have been in later times, in the apostolic age and for some generations after Ignatius they were distinct."³³

Prophetesses

An intense desire to maintain the spirit of the early church contributed to the rise of various prophetic movements, of which Montanism is of note, representing varying degrees of spiritual fervour. Since charismatic gifts had all but disappeared by the middle of the second century female prophetism in this movement contributed heavily to its opposition by the church as a whole. Two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, were very close to Montanus himself and were considered to be very special instruments of the Holy Spirit. Both Hippolytus and Epiphanius considered the movement to be heretical because of

³²Schaff, p. 374.

³³J.B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers, Part II, Vol. II (London: Macmillan, 1890), p. 322.

its female bishops and openly named Maximilla a false prophet.³⁴

Irenaeus of Lyon (A.D. 130-202) however had been sympathetic to the prophetic movement, seeing in it opposition to Gnosticism, and understood I Corinthians 11 to refer to both men and women prophesying in the assembly. And Tertullian, representing the Montanist position, saw it the same.³⁵ Yet Tertullian, and later Cyprian of Carthage, were clear in their denunciation of women speaking in public.³⁶

However, as Ruether points out throughout church history the concept of prophecy continues to have a close relationship with the renewal of women's ministry in the church. As late as the twelfth century the Waldensians included women in public preaching, based on their equation of preaching and prophecy.³⁷

Therefore, whatever official roles women may have played in the first century church very quickly became issues of heated controversy, and remain so for the next several centuries. Those female offices which did survive remained

³⁴Hippolytus, Philosophoumena VII:12 (ANF, V, 9-153); Epiphanius, De Haeresibus XLVIII:2 (857); XLIX:2 (881).

³⁵An excellent survey of patristic opinion on women; Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Role of Women in the Church (Chicago: Moody, 1958), pp. 97-137.

³⁶Tertullian, De Baptismo, 17; Cyprian, Book III, 46.

³⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Prophetic Tradition and the Liberation of Women: A Story of Promise and Betrayal," p. 3. A Paper read at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, August, 1989.

clearly under the dominance of males and were considered secondary in significance. Concerning prophetesses, what appears to be an acceptable and essential element of the earliest church, and a sign of the New Age, becomes a mark of heresy and apostasy within a few generations. And only a few marginal groups in the Church were able to see the significance of first century female prophecy in terms of participation of women in public ministry and evangelism.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION

Concerning the general attitude and teaching of the church fathers on the status of women a number of works have been published in recent years, taking a variety of approaches. Ryrie, for example, summarizes patristic works chronologically and geographically.³⁸ Tavard and Ruether are far more insightful, analysing major socio-philosophical trends and influences over a much longer span of time.³⁹ Heine, however, is interested only in tracing Gnostic influences through a number of patristic writers challenging

³⁸Ryrie, The Role of Women in the Church, pp. 97-135. He divides them into the following categories: The Apostolic Fathers, The Apologists, Non-Christian Literature, The Alexandrian Fathers, The African Fathers, and the Third Century Church Orders.

³⁹George Tavard, Women in Christian Tradition; Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed. Religion and Sexism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

certain claims of contemporary feminists.⁴⁰ In the present thesis our concern is not only to discover the views of various church fathers on the status of women and their interpretation of pertinent biblical passages, but also to trace their influence in shaping the church's theology of womanhood. All of the above mentioned works are valuable in determining and analysing the sources of common religious traditions, regardless of their specific approach.

There were a number of factors at work during the early centuries of Christianity which help to shape the interpretation of early Christian writings and influenced the thinking of church fathers, particularly concerning women. One of the strongest influences in the development of Christianity was the continual threat of persecution which helped intensify the eschatological expectation under which Christians lived daily.⁴¹ Another was the threat of heresy, principally from Gnosticism and Montanism.⁴² There was undoubtedly also an earnest desire to hold onto those elements of the primitive Christian community which seemed to give it its power. But at the same time, church tradition was

⁴⁰Susanne Heine, Women and Early Christianity: Are Feminist Scholars Right? (London: SCM, 1987).

⁴¹Samuel Terrien, "Toward a Biblical Theology of Womanhood," Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes III, eds., Male and Female (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 24.

⁴²A good example of the patristic polemic against doctrinal heresy is Irenaeus (A.D. 182-188), Against Heresies (LCC, pp. 343-397).

shaped by a variety of factors, external and internal, which were not in accord with the tone of the Gospel and the spirit of the primitive church. And over several centuries a number of concepts concerning woman developed in an interrelated pattern, and must be noted in tracing the roots of our modern theological dilemma.⁴³ This gave rise to a slow and convoluted syncretization of doctrines and traditions concerning femininity. The following are key factors and developments spanning the period from the second century to the Reformation.

Anti-feminism in Canonization and Early Textual Transmission

Preservation and perpetuation of Christianity necessitated the long and arduous process of canonizing works deemed suitable for recognition, and the formulation of creeds and definitive traditions. Under these circumstances early church fathers had to take into account two sets of principles: first, the tone of the Gospel, with all its ideals and spiritual implications, such as love, equality, desire for spiritual fulfillment; and second, the realities of life in the secular world, including the secondary status of women, slavery, persecution, poverty, and death. In many cases the latter came to be the dominant factor. As has been suggested earlier, works such as Acts of Paul and Thecla were

⁴³Tavard, pp.48-121.

excluded, not because they contradicted accepted Pauline works but because they were out of step with predominant thinking. And in order to combat trends such as female evangelism, works clearly supporting traditional patriarchy were both promoted and associated with Pauline tradition.⁴⁴ Therefore there is ample reason to conclude that attitudes toward women played a prominent part in the selection of works to be recognized by the church as canonical.

Many scholars have observed another significant factor very early in the church in the form of "anti-feminist" editors of the New Testament text, particularly the western text of Acts represented by Codex Bezae.⁴⁵ Menoud indicates that the "anti-feminist" trend in D was more or less general in the last decades of the first century, but was not among the major concerns of the western recension as a whole.⁴⁶ But the occasions are too numerous to take lightly. Among the various texts of interest is that of Acts 17:12 where the editor gave a smoother reading lessening any importance given

⁴⁴The Pastoral Epistles with their clearly defined church order are a prime example.

⁴⁵B.M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London: United Bible society, 1971), p. 454; James Hardy Ropes, The Text of Acts, F.J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds. The Beginnings of Christianity: Part I, The Acts of the Apostles, Vol. III, p. 162ff. Ben Witherington, "Anti-feminist Tendencies of the Western Text in Acts," Journal of Biblical Literature 103:1 (1984), pp. 82-4.

⁴⁶P.H. Menoud, "The Western Text and Theology of Acts," Bulletin of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societies, II (1951), pp. 30ff.

to women in the Lukan account of conversions at Berea. In the case of Priscilla and Aquila the western text tends to reverse the names to place Aquila first,⁴⁷ and elsewhere makes various alterations including the insertion of the name Aquila without including Priscilla.⁴⁸ It cannot be stated that the New Testament was greatly distorted by such efforts, but the fact that the subordinate status of women was being defended by Christian scholars by devious and surreptitious means is significant.

Interpretation of Scripture

A matter of significance is the approach the church fathers took to interpreting scripture, both the Old Testament and those New Testament works which had been canonized. Robert Grant stresses how that these factors determined much of Catholic tradition.⁴⁹ It is almost axiomatic that once a collection of Christian works had been canonized and accepted as authoritative for church doctrine, the Pauline concept of female subjection would become irrevocable tradition. Such was the case.⁵⁰ As Keane points

⁴⁷Acts 18:18, 26.

⁴⁸Metzger, p. 467.

⁴⁹Robert M. Grant, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 75-127.

⁵⁰Even allowing for a second century date of the Pastoral Epistles, they were being circulated early enough to find a place in the canon and to have a marked effect on the thinking of major church fathers.

out, the church fathers strongly resisted the leadership of women and interpreted scripture in direct opposition to the spirit of the earliest Christian community.⁵¹ Had their approach to scripture not been so similar to the Jewish authoritative view of the Law, patriarchal thinking might not have been incorporated into Christian tradition.

Whether there was an exegetical school of thought in Alexandria is still debatable, but it is clear that Philo, Clement and Origen were advocates of an allegorical approach, which would allow for a variety of interpretations of both Old and New Testament passages. Origen saw scripture as a revelation of "intellectual truths" rather than a factual record of historical events, and the Genesis story of Creation to him was highly symbolical.⁵² This entire concept was opposed by the School of Antioch, represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom of Constantinople and others, in favour of a literal-historical method. Theophilus of Antioch also stressed adherence to Jewish exegetical methods as far as the Old Testament was concerned.⁵³ This lent support to the earlier authoritative and rigorous approach of Tertullian, which robbed the community of any liberty in

⁵¹Marie-Henry Keane, "Woman in the Theological Anthropology of the Early Fathers," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, No. 62 (March, 1988), p. 5.

⁵²Origen, De princ. iv, 2, 9 (V, 321).

⁵³This is especially significant in the light of rabbinic thinking evident in Pauline works and traditional Jewish exegetical methods; Grant, pp. 28-41.

interpretation and set the stage for both dogmatism and traditionalism.

Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430), recognized as the premier systematic theologian during the early period of church history, followed this approach also. It is evident that Augustine was converted first to Neo-Platonism rather than Christianity, and that his doctrine after ordination was infused with elements of Greek philosophy which were not parallel to the earliest Christian message.⁵⁴ It seems also that Augustine constructed a twofold view of authority, placing the tradition of the church by the side of scripture and formulating a synthesis of Christian doctrines which formed the basis of future theological development. His thinking was normative during the greater part of the Middle Ages. Building on the "Augustinian synthesis" in A.D. 434 Vincent's Commonitorium set forth the principle which became the final exposition in the Roman Catholic Church for the interpretation of scripture; namely, that the prophets and apostles must be interpreted in accordance with the tradition and norm of the church.

This has direct bearing on the present thesis in that Jewish interpretation of the Genesis Creation and various allusions to it in the New Testament become the foundation of

⁵⁴John H. S. Burleigh, ed. Library of Christian Classics, Vol. VI (London: SCM, 1953), pp. 13-15. Robert H. King, "The Task of Systematic Theology," Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, eds. Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks (London: SPCK, 1983), pp. 4-6.

the church's position on the status of women. Had the allegorical method of Alexandria prevailed the entire tradition of the church would have been altered.

The Myth of Feminine Evil

One of the factors which contributed to the incorporation of the myth of feminine evil into Christian tradition was a hermeneutical reversion to Old Testament institutions and ideas. Dionysius the Great (A.D. 190-264), Origen's second successor at the school in Alexandria, taught that women, during their menstrual period, should be prohibited from approaching the Table of the Lord and partaking of his Body and Blood, since in that time they are physically impure.⁵⁵ This was precisely the view of women in the cultus of Israel by which they were excluded from most rituals. Such myth became paramount in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, lending support to the popular association of women with other forms of evil and heresy, such as demons and witchcraft.⁵⁶ Witherington points out

⁵⁵Epistle to Basilides, Canon II; see Witherington, p. 189.

⁵⁶Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology," Religion and Sexism, Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 230ff. Other myths which became common in the late Medieval Period were that menstrual blood attracted evil spirits and demons, and that the presence of a menstruating woman could sour milk and kill grass. For this cause in that period menstruating women were forbidden to attend Communion.

that this was a step backwards and away from the picture painted by Jesus of women in the New Temple.⁵⁷ But it is clear that such notions survived even into the twentieth century, forming part of a large body of prejudicial polemic against the ordination of women in both Catholic and Protestant tradition.

It is quite clear also that church fathers consistently viewed woman as the cause and root of sin. Chrysostom wrote: "Among all the savage beasts none is found to be so harmful as woman."⁵⁸ Jerome in fact attributed to women the responsibility for all heresy in the church.⁵⁹ This view, without a doubt, had its source in the Genesis account of the Fall, giving rise to the myth that all women were insidiously linked to the sin of Eve. In the words of Tertullian:

You give birth, o woman, in pains and anxieties; and your desire goes to your husband, and he will lord it over you. And do you not know that you are Eve? God's judgment over this sex continues in this eon; its guilt must also continue. You are the gate of the devil, the traitor of the tree, the first deserter of divine Law; you are she who enticed the one whom the devil dare not approach; you broke so easily the image of God, man; on account of the death you deserve, even the son of God had to

⁵⁷It seems that during this period the church became increasingly viewed as a "temple," with focus on the structure rather than the people, ministers became viewed as "priests," the Lord's Supper as a "sacrifice," etc.

⁵⁸John Chrysostom, Discourses on Genesis (II: 54) 589.

⁵⁹Keane, p. 4-5.

die.⁴⁰

Tertullian also believed the "sons of God" of Genesis 6:1ff to be fallen angels, who he said taught women the art of make-up and seduction.⁴¹ This also explains why in Tertullian we see an obsession with dress and adornment, and the symbolic attempt to cover the female form from public view.⁴²

This doctrine concerning woman naturally influenced, and was closely related to, patristic attitudes toward sexual intercourse. Augustine represents an intense awareness of the duplicity in a spiritual male's attitude toward woman. On the one hand he loves the creature of God and desires to see her transformed and renewed. On the other, he hates in her the corruptible and mortal conjugal connection and everything in his relationship to her as husband and wife. Augustine therefore came to view sexual intercourse for pleasure as

⁴⁰Tertullian, De cultu feminarum, I, 1. See Elizabeth Carnelley, "Tertullian and Feminism," Theology, Vol. XCII (January, 1989), pp. 31-35.

⁴¹Tavard, p. 59.

⁴²Tertullian, "On Veiling Virgins." Also of interest is the statue of Mundus (Prince of this World) in thirteenth century Germany, in a portal of the Strasbourg Cathedral luring foolish maidens to perdition. His face is appealing, but from the rear his body is seen to be eaten of worms, frogs and snakes, symbolizing the mortal reality of worldly pleasure. By the next century the figure had become common, but was changed into a woman, Frau Welt, the embodiment of the seduction and sin. See McLaughlin, pp. 253-4, citing research by Wolfgang Stämmeler.

sinful, though venially so.⁴³

The Rise of Monasticism

There is very little evidence of attitudes and teachings on the subject of human sexuality during the early Ante-Nicene period. Those writers who discuss the evils of sex speak primarily of adultery and fornication.⁴⁴ But Paul's teaching on voluntary celibacy quickly gave rise to a new theology which came to dominate discussions on human sexuality for the next several centuries. Prudence under threat of persecution also rendered marriage and family somewhat impractical, and various church fathers exalted virginity and celibacy as a more spiritual level of consecration to God. Consequently it came to be commonly accepted that anyone who is truly devoted to God and mature in faith will vow to live in chastity.

The Montanists believed that it was possible for a couple to live together as husband and wife without benefit of sexual intercourse, thereby fulfilling their celibate

⁴³Augustine, De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia. I: 6-7, 21, 33. See Herbert A. Deape, The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 54-5. Ruether discusses also Augustine's own youthful incontinence, which may have produced in him either guilt, or self hatred, surfacing in his doctrine of human sexuality. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," Religion and Sexism, pp. 162-3.

⁴⁴E.g. Clement of Rome (A.D. 96), Shepherd of Hermas (A.D. 150); see Witherington, p. 184.

vows.⁶⁵ Needless to say, such a spiritual marriage was highly suspect among those of a more rigorous doctrine. There were occasional movements among ascetics in which unmarried priests, deacons and even bishops shared their beds with women consecrated to virginity, claiming no wrong doing, but this practice was condemned by leading church fathers.⁶⁶

Tertullian was Bishop of Carthage during the early third century and was a Montanist during the latter portion of his writing. Concerning his approach to life and Christian doctrine he is best described as a rigorist. He viewed marriage as a holy estate and frequently elaborates on the beauty of marital unity. But his strict doctrine on the conduct and moral purity of virgins epitomizes the excessive concern of many of the earlier fathers with almost a cultic quality of maintaining sexual purity. However, Carnelley is convinced that his rigorism resulted from his intense concern for saving women and does not reflect a hatred for them.⁶⁷

Anthony of Egypt (A.D. 251-356) is commonly called the father of monasticism. After the third century, when a special priesthood had developed, celibate life for this class became the norm for both men and women. The earliest

⁶⁵Donald F. Winslow, "Sex and Anti-Sex in the Early Church Fathers," Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes, III, eds., Male and Female (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 29.

⁶⁶E.g. John Chrysostom, Cyprian, Ambrose; see Tavard, p. 92.

⁶⁷Carnelley, p. 33.

mention of virgins as a special order in the church is the Apostolic Constitutions, where they are listed with deaconesses and widows and worthy of special honour.⁶⁸ Female asceticism was in its own right an expression of liberation within the framework of classical religion. In nunneries during the fourth century women had access to greater education, self development and spiritual recognition than that which was available to women outside.⁶⁹ Therefore, this station offered admiration and respect. But this only served the purpose of controlling the female to the end of male domination.⁷⁰ Brennan is convinced that the concept of the cloister, or enclosure, as far as women were concerned in the Medieval church was a basic means of institutionalizing the invisibility of women. Women were seeking active expression of Christian devotion, but were thwarted by prevalent androcentric traditions. To appease them the church found ways of granting recognition of service, but at the same time keeping "the temptress" away from the eyes of male celibates and keeping "the inferior female" from any

⁶⁸Apostolic Constitutions, II, 25, 26 (ANF, VII, p. 410).

⁶⁹C. Landman, "A Profile of Feminist Theology," Sexism and Feminism in Theological Perspective, W.S. Vorster, ed. (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984), p. 4. This paper, and others in this work, were read at the eighth Symposium of the Institute for Theological Research at UNISA, September, 1984.

⁷⁰Hays, p. 107.

role of recognized authority.⁷¹

Basilus of Ancyra (A.D. 366) was a medical doctor who offered an extensive analysis of human sexuality, suggesting that the difference was not only physical but spiritual as well. Woman has an innate eroticism about her which lures man to evil, and the polarities of the sexes and yearning for each other is the major distraction which affects spirituality. He concluded that souls are equal in both dignity and structure, and can only find their ideal by mortifying the flesh.⁷² Thus Basilus changed the focus from the Parousia to the ambition of achieving total spiritual freedom on earth through the virginal life. This concept is also elaborated in The Banquet, a very significant treatise on virginity by Methodius, bishop of Olympas in Lycia between A.D. 260 and 312.

John Chrysostom, writing around A.D. 381-398, though a defender of the dignity of marriage was enthusiastic about virginity for the truly dedicated. In his De virginitate he remarks that marital sex can only serve for the suppression of debauchery, since the world was already populated enough.⁷³ But Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa deal at length

⁷¹Margaret Brennan, "Enclosure: Institutionalizing the Invisibility of Women in Ecclesiastical Communities," in "Women: Invisible in Theology and Church," Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins eds. Concilium: Religion in the Eighties (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), pp. 38-48.

⁷²Basilus of Ancyra, De virginitate de St. Basile.

⁷³John Chrysostom, On Virginitate 19.

with the practical problems of marriage, and Chrysostom was at times savage in indicting certain evils such as remarrying once free, which to him was a certain indication of one's spiritual immaturity. But he and most others of their day recognized that the ascetic life was not the sole objective, but spiritual purity and the marriage of the soul to Christ.

Condemnation of Marriage

Various forms of Gnosticism as well as numerous purity sects up to the fourth century, all duly catalogued as heresy, had a dramatic influence on attitudes toward marriage.⁷⁴ But the battle against heresy also provoked certain reactions in favour of marriage, of which some of the works of Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) are an example.⁷⁵ Clement represents certain elements of Greek philosophy, acquired no doubt through Philo and the neo-Platonists. These thinkers saw woman as a very necessary part of man, drawn in part from physiological arguments that woman was half a man's body. Here the Gnostic influence on Christian tradition was significant. From excerpts from Theodotus came the syzygic mystery of the inclusion of the female in the male, and their essential return to paradisiac

⁷⁴Marcion was one of the earliest to condemn marriage as tantamount to fornication. George Blond, "Les Encratiques et la vie mystique," Mystique et Continence (Paris, 1952), pp. 117-130.

⁷⁵Clement, Stromata, II, 23 (ANF, I, p. 328).

unity in the Messianic kingdom.⁷⁶

Based on this Clement adopted the androgynous view of the original human, that Adam was created with the total elements for humanity, both male and female, and that Eve was only the female component of that whole. But Clement came to recognize that sex was an essential element of humanity, and defined the temporal destiny of woman in social terms. Her lot was dedication to her husband, to moral purity and to discretion in dress and behaviour.⁷⁷

However, it seems that Clement himself, in his attempt to refute Gnosticism, displays certain distinct Gnostic tendencies, and for this reason works attributed to him are as difficult to harmonize as some teachings traditionally ascribed to Paul. Witherington discusses statements in the spurious Exhortation to the Greeks where Clement theorizes original sin to be pleasure, embodied in woman.⁷⁸ In Stromata he links marriage to lust and evil, and describes it as an essential concession to "the disease of the body," meaning the human appetite for sex. Yet he never overtly states that marriage is evil.⁷⁹

Origen (A.D. 185-254) was a student of Clement and his

⁷⁶Tavard, p. 64. This concept was very significant to the Valentinians also.

⁷⁷Clement, Pedagogue I, IV (ANF II, p. 209-296).

⁷⁸Clement, Exhortation to the Greeks (LCL, p. 236); cf. Witherington, p. 186.

⁷⁹Clement, Stromata II, 23 (ANF, I, p. 328).

successor as head of the school in Alexandria. To him sex was a consequence of sin and woman a symbol of weakness and evil. Marriage was simply a lesser evil than fornication, a remedium concupiscentiae.⁸⁰ His self castration, prompted by a literal interpretation of Matthew 19:42, indicates the fanaticism by which he urgently exalted celibacy as an ideal state. A century later, Jerome (A.D. 340-420) concluded that if it is "not good" to touch a woman (sexually) then it is in fact "bad" to touch a woman, and therefore sex, even in marriage, is essentially evil.⁸¹

But in spite of the endless discourses on the spiritual excellence of celibacy, a few church fathers were concerned for the social inequity which persisted in their world. In this regard the inegalitarian marriage structure was a focus of attention, although little was said which truly challenged tradition. However, Gregory Nazianzen (circa A.D. 380) condemned the legal injustice in Constantinople which permitted a husband to be unfaithful to the wife, yet punishing her for the same misconduct.⁸² In this he urged for fairness and equality of moral accountability.

Ontological Inferiority

A crucial aspect of traditional thinking is the notion

⁸⁰Witherington, p. 186.

⁸¹Jerome, Epistle 48:14; Ruether, p. 178.

⁸²"Homily 37, on Matthew," (PG, XXXVI, pp. 289-292).

of ontological inferiority of women. It appears to be the ultimate explanation of all other aspects of traditional female subordination and exclusion from positions of authority in the church. Origen taught that the interior man consisted of a spirit (spiritus) which is male, and a soul (anima) which is female. The female part tended toward the natural senses and passions and was inferior, whereas the male part was both more rational and moral.⁸³ Augustine later attempted to affirm the bisexual physiology of the original human, with Adam possessing the higher spiritual image of God. Eve, having been fashioned from Adam's physical body was corrupted by the flesh, and therefore constituted the lower corporeal nature.⁸⁴

Philo Judaeus, writing in the late first century, had already introduced the idea that imago dei referred to the nature of the human spirit, and not the nature or appearance of the body, a position not finding acceptance until Thomas Aquinas.⁸⁵ But with the complex debates surrounding the spiritual status of women two centuries later it became necessary to define the bisexuality of humanity in a monistic way so as not to find the nature of God reflected exclusively

⁸³See Keane, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Augustine, de Trinitate 12:1-5 (LCC, VIII, pp. 93-4).

⁸⁵Philo Judaeus, Leg. All. I, 31-32; De Conf. 62-3.

in the male.⁸⁶ This development in tradition came from the Greek father, Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 350). He explained that the redemptive process restores males and females to a sexless angelic state, and therefore in the resurrection there is neither "male nor female."⁸⁷ The monk, one vowed to a life of celibacy, is a soul redeemed from the duality of bodiliness to return to the monism of the spiritual world.⁸⁸

Concerning woman's role as a "helpmeet" Chrysostom felt that woman's subjection to the authority of men was an element of divine providence and wisdom,⁸⁹ largely because in the fall woman proved that she cannot function responsibly unless under supervision.⁹⁰ It does seem, however, that he believed the "headship" motif in I Corinthians 11 to be that of unity, not hierarchy or authority.⁹¹ But the general consensus was that woman was designed to find her relationship with God in her subjection to a man.⁹² Augustine believed that God designed marriage to work best if

⁸⁶The term monos from which the English terms "monastic," and "monk" are derived. Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," pp. 153ff.

⁸⁷Galatians 3:28

⁸⁸Gregory of Nyssa, De Opif. Hom. 16.

⁸⁹Chrysostom, Opera III: 260.

⁹⁰Chrysostom, Genesis III:9, Homilies XVII.

⁹¹John Chrysostom, The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians (London: F and J Rivington, 1854), p. 351.

⁹²Hays p. 100.

one leads and the other follows, and these roles are determined by sex.⁹³ Augustine understood both Genesis and Paul to suggest that the purpose of woman as man's helper is summarized in procreation, and that this is God's authoritative order for all time.⁹⁴

A syncretism of all these views was passed down through church tradition to Thomas Aquinas. This thirteenth century theologian subscribed to the Aristotelian view that woman's mind is not rational, and argued that her inferior spiritual nature demands her subjection to man.⁹⁵ He agreed with Aristotle that the female was essentially a defective human resulting from an accident in the sperm:

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence. . . .⁹⁶

It was this line of reasoning which led to the predominant conclusion that woman was essentially naive and

⁹³Augustine, "The Good Marriage," Charles T. Wilcox, trans., in "Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects," The Fathers of the Church, Roy Joseph Defarrari (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 27:9.

⁹⁴Augustine, De Genesi ad Litteram, VII:3

⁹⁵Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne). See also Keane, p. 7.

⁹⁶Summa Theologica, I-XCII: 1 (pp. 275-6). See also McLaughlin, pp. 216-7.

intellectually inferior, unworthy of education and highly susceptible to heresy.⁹⁷ Thomas also viewed marital sex as a concession to lust, and resulting from the Fall.⁹⁸ But he reinterpreted patristic doctrines to a degree, transforming them into the form inherited by the modern church. Thomas departed from Augustine in that he saw the female as equally the image of God, and her body valuable and good as long as it serves the end of good.⁹⁹ But this was defined in terms quite in keeping with tradition, upholding the stereotypy of roles in marriage.

Becoming Male

A problem the fathers had to contend with was how a woman could experience spiritual redemption if she was essentially evil and possessed only an inferior soul. Clement of Alexandria was one of the earliest to address the issue, arguing that a woman would have to deny her fleshly nature and become "like a male." He derived his argument from the concept of "putting on Christ," wherein the male metaphor was

⁹⁷Pope Gregory I (PG, LIX, p. 268). See Keane, p. 7.

⁹⁸Summa Theologica, II-II: 163, 5; remedium peccati, to ease the fires of passion. One revolutionary doctrine from Thomas was his emphasis on conjugal duties in marriage; Summa Theologica, Supp. 49:2-3.

⁹⁹Summa Theologica, I: 91, 4.

seen as a model of excellence.¹⁰⁰ In the salvation process woman spiritually "becomes" a man, equal to him in the sight of God and only in that capacity capable of receiving salvatory grace.¹⁰¹ This idea is also implied in the logion "every woman who makes herself a man will enter the Kingdom of Heaven," attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas.¹⁰²

A similar idea developed in Gnosticism, which left many traces in orthodox tradition. Elaine Pagels, in her book The Gnostic Gospels, attempts to trace the roots of true Christianity through the feminine sophia of Gnosticism.¹⁰³ Women in many Gnostic communities enjoyed considerably more prominence than those in orthodox Christianity, which may have stemmed from a belief that enlightenment transformed females into the spiritual equal of males. This also may have been one reason Gnosticism was denounced as heresy and fought against so vigorously. But Susanne Heine points out that there was no unity among Gnostic groups, and many were

¹⁰⁰Galatians 3:27; Clement, Stromata, IV, 100:6. Also important to Clement was the concept of the "perfect man," teleios aner, from Ephesians 4:13.

¹⁰¹Kari Vogt, "Becoming Male: One Aspect of an Early Christian Anthropology," in "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology," Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds. Concilium: Religion in the Eighties (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), pp. 72-83.

¹⁰²Gospel of Thomas, 112 (Grant, The Secret Sayings of Jesus), p. 197. Tavad, p. 64.

¹⁰³Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (Penguin Books, 1982).

strongly misogynist.¹⁰⁴ Epiphanius had been a member of a Gnostic group in Egypt, and wrote of sexual abominations practised among them.¹⁰⁵ Yet so strong were the reactions against doctrines which seemed to deny the fundamentals of Christianity that orthodoxy found itself retreating to patriarchal structures for the good of its reputation.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, in spite of reactions against it Gnosticism may have had a greater influence upon developing church doctrine that we have thought.

Kari Vogt sees the metaphor of "becoming male" as common among Christians and non-Christians of the second and third centuries, referring to the development of an individual from a lower to a higher state of moral and spiritual perfection.¹⁰⁷ But she believes that Clement's use of the metaphor did not imply inferiority of women, as one might assume. Rather, both males and females seeking to be united with God must free themselves of the desires associated with the flesh and seek to become the "perfect man." To Clement this perfect man is the gnostic, either male or female, who

¹⁰⁴Heine, pp. 106-123. The Nag Hammadi texts, including The Gospel of Thomas, The Book of Thomas the Contender, The Paraphrase of Shem, and The Dialogue of the Redeemer speak of the station of women in very disparaging terms.

¹⁰⁵Epiphanius, Panarion II, 26:8:1-3, Frank Williams, trans. (Leiden: Brill, 1987). p. 88.

¹⁰⁶Ibid, p.144.

¹⁰⁷Vogt, " 'Becoming Male': One Aspect of an Early Christian Anthropology," in "Women: Invisible in Theology and Church," p. 72.

like the angels has transcended earthly sexuality.

A similar anthropology is found in Origen, who saw the inner man (homo interior) as consisting of the superior male spirit (spiritus) and the inferior, sin-oriented female soul (anima).¹⁰⁸ The struggle for spiritual progress, or to become spiritually mature, involves overpowering the female aspect of one's being and to become a true male.¹⁰⁹

In later monastic literature the concept develops so that a woman who attains a holy estate is considered "a manly woman." Sexuality being neutralized, such dedicated Christians could work together and enjoy social relations as "brothers" and "sisters," women being considered no longer as women, but men.¹¹⁰ Jerome, for example, speaking of the relationship between Lucinus and Theodora states that she was changed "from woman to man, from subject to equal," and that she was not just a sister but a brother.¹¹¹

Woman as a Symbol of the Church

The concept of the ekklesia as the bride of Christ in early Christian literature gave rise to much fanciful

¹⁰⁸Origen, Homiliae in Genesium I:12-14; see Vogt, pp. 75ff.

¹⁰⁹Origen, Selecta in Exodum 23:17; Homiliae in Josue IX: 8-9; Vogt, pp. 75-9.

¹¹⁰Vogt, p. 79; E. Clark, "Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement," Anglican Theological Review, LXIII (1981), p. 245.

¹¹¹Jerome, Letters 71:3, 75:2.

elaboration. The four visions of the Shepherd of Hermas involve an old lady in shining garments, identified as the celestial ekklesia.¹¹² A woman named Rode, perhaps a symbolic name for Rome, also features in the series of visions and represents the encratic elements in early patristic writings.

Origen exploited the bridal analogy and applied it to the union of Christ and the Church, and to the union of Christ and each faithful soul. Thus womanhood, in its ideal and purest form, was a vision of the great spiritual body united with God.¹¹³ This motif, however, seems to have had no bearing on the practical elements of the status of women within the church. Tavard finds this significant as a further reversion to Jewish theology, reflecting the paradoxical picture of woman in the Old Testament: first that she is in a cursed condition inherited from the origins of humanity; yet, she is the type of the heavenly wisdom which presided over the foundations of the world and was embodied in Israel as the bride of Yahweh.¹¹⁴

¹¹²The Shepherd (ANF, II, 9-55).

¹¹³Tavard, p. 67-8; also Henri Crouzel, Virginite et mariage selon Origene (Paris-Bruges, 1962).

¹¹⁴Tavard, pp. 27ff.

The Veneration of Mary

Fixation on Mary's role as mother of the Saviour and on her virginity appear as early as Ignatius of Antioch.¹¹⁵ Among the better known apocryphal works the Protoevangelium of James is significant in that it was written toward the middle of the second century and was by design for the glorification of Mary.¹¹⁶ Belief in her bodily assumption after death is traceable to Ephraem of Syria, although some have thought it to have originated in Egypt in the fourth century.¹¹⁷ During this era also Christianity was flowering with cultural imagery related to spiritual femininity, and a variety of literature was constructed around woman as a nurse, seer, revealer, and giver of life.¹¹⁸ From these roots there grew up an entire doctrine surrounding the person of Mary as the mother of God, including her sinlessness and immaculate conception.¹¹⁹ Her perpetual virginity seems to

¹¹⁵Ignatius, To the Ephesians 7:2; 19:1 (LCL, p. 193); To the Smyrnaeans 1:1 (LCL, p. 253).

¹¹⁶This work claims her miraculous birth, Davidic descent, and presentation in the Temple, and begins the tradition of her perpetual virginity. Witherington, p. 206.

¹¹⁷Ephraem, Hymns 11-12. See Herbert Thurston, "Virgin Mary; Devotion to the Blessed," Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XV, p. 460.

¹¹⁸Hays, p. 107.

¹¹⁹Stories were embellished by many church fathers, including Clement of Alexandria, Epiphanius and Ephraem Syrus. Although Tertullian took issue with the notion of Mary's perpetual virginity (Monograms, 8), this became dominant by the end of the third century.

originate with Gregory of Nazianzus in his sermons on the martyrdom of Cyprian.¹²⁰ All of this occurred in spite of an appeal by Epiphanius that she not be adored as should be the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹²¹

One of the ironies of the development of this tradition is that while woman in general was being demonized and degraded, Mary was being elevated to a "divine" status. This served a useful purpose in perpetuating male dominance, in that it offered a patronizing exaltation of womanhood on a spiritual and fantasy level, and diverted attention away from the degradation of women on a social level.

Justin of Rome (circa A.D. 165) in his Dialogue With Trypho suggested the parallel between Eve and Mary as women and virgins, with virginity itself containing the possibilities of death and life. Irenaeus drew a different parallel between Eve and Mary, finding in them a typology similar to Pauline references to the "second Adam." As Adam is the type of Christ so Eve becomes the type of Mary, and what Adam and Eve cause in the human spiritual condition through the Fall, Jesus and Mary reverse.¹²²

Interest in Mariology intensified in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, especially in the West. A number of

¹²⁰Gregory Nazianzus (PG, XXXV, p. 1181).

¹²¹Thurston, p. 460.

¹²²Irenaeus, Against Heresies III:22,4.

factors may have influenced it, particularly negative developments among monastic orders.¹²³ There developed a more human Mary, frankly erotic in many instances, and more accessible to the laity.¹²⁴ But this phenomenon was not indicative of any degree of elevation of the status of women in the Medieval Catholic Church. Instead, the cult of the Virgin displayed at every level, theological and popular, an androcentric bias that underlined the weakness, inferiority and subordination of females.¹²⁵ Therefore, the adoration of Mary as a mother had the effect of glorifying motherhood in the eyes of women, which in turn intensified their loyalty to that stereotype. Landman states that the cult had an "all male public relations mechanism, which, by stressing Mary's fertility, kept women enslaved through the ideal of blissful consistent pregnancies."¹²⁶

¹²³McLaughlin, "Women in Medieval Theology," pp. 243ff.

¹²⁴Following the development of "courtly love," and various elements of courtesy in which special honour is directed by males toward females, largely to emphasize the female role as an object and possession. John F. Benton, "Clio and Venus: An Historical review of Medieval Love," The Meaning of Courtly Love, F.X. Newman, ed. (Albany: 1968), p. 35.

¹²⁵First by isolating Mary from true femaleness (perpetual virginity, immaculate conception, etc.), and second, by attributing to her theological roles which supported popular misogyny (motherhood, quiet submission, dependency, etc.); McLaughlin, pp. 246-251.

¹²⁶Landman, p. 6.

Sacramental Exclusivity

A.D. 441 becomes the date after which one must assume that the Roman Catholic Church allowed men only to receive ordination.¹²⁷ But the roots of this decision are traceable to Chrysostom, who strongly opposed women teaching or preaching. Reacting to the Montanists and the leading role of prophetesses in that movement Chrysostom condemned women's proclivity for teaching heresy.¹²⁸ From his comments on I Timothy 2:9 it is not clear whether he believed that women could lead public prayers, although it does seem that he understood the entire context of that passage to be that of deportment in public gatherings and that women were expected to maintain subordinate demeanor.

In like manner, he (Paul) says, "I will that women approach God without wrath and doubting, lifting up holy hands. . ."
Paul however requires something more of women; that they adorn themselves "in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety."¹²⁹

It appears that in his time many women sought the right to serve as priests, and this he opposed vigorously.¹³⁰

Therefore, by the completion of the Apostolic Constitutions,

¹²⁷Synod of Orange.

¹²⁸John Chrysostom, "Homily 9 on I Timothy," (PG, LXII, p. 544).

¹²⁹John Chrysostom, Homilies on Timothy, VIII (NPNF, XIII, p. 433).

¹³⁰John Chrysostom, "On the Priesthood," (PG, XLVIII, p. 633).

it was considered "illegal" and "impious" for a woman to perform sacramental acts such as baptism, which duty could only be assumed by a male.¹³¹

Nearly ten centuries later, Thomas Aquinas reasoned that this rule is derived from the nature of a sacrament. He anticipated modern feminist challenges about the masculinity of Christ, arguing that a sexual being as the Saviour was essential in order to relate to humans realistically; and masculinity was essential because the roles of physician, pastor and defender do not fit the subordinate status of women.¹³² Therefore, by implication Thomas denied ordination to females on the grounds of their sexual incongruity with a masculine Saviour and their unsuitability to represent Him as priests. A woman can receive blessings but cannot be a vicarious instrument to transmit them to others because of her innately inferior status and state of subjection.¹³³ So also Bonaventure contended that not only can a woman not be ordained de jure but also not de facto, since the mediatorial role of a priest, a vicar of Christ, can only be played by a male.¹³⁴

¹³¹Keane, p. 9; Apostolic Constitutions, IX, 111.

¹³²McLaughlin, p. 220.

¹³³Thomas Aquinas, Treatise on the Sacraments, LXVII, 4, D, 2 (Summa Theologica, XVII, p. 129).

¹³⁴Tavard, p. 213-214.

IV. REFORMATION AND POST-REFORMATION VIEWS

The Protestant Reformation followed upon the Renaissance as a significant stage in modern enlightenment, and a step toward both the social and ecclesiastical recognition of human rights and an essential element of the Gospel message. Although the Reformers did not dwell on slavery and social injustice, their criticism of Roman Catholicism pertained to various issues stemming from social oppression and corruption in ecclesiastical government. The religious and economic situation of Germany at the beginning of the sixteenth century was critical, due largely to papal taxation, land control by monasteries, exploitation of the poor through indulgences, and clerical corruption.¹³⁵ These problems were also addressed during the Swiss reformation, although Zwingli was influenced more by intellectual and humanistic concerns than Luther. In Switzerland and in the Scandanavian lands there was a compelling desire for local self government.¹³⁶ Calvin was also highly influenced by humanism, and the reformation in and around Geneva, which had begun before his time, sprang mostly from political concerns and a vision of both civil and national government free from Roman imposition.

¹³⁵Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1959), pp. 301ff.

¹³⁶Ibid, pp. 321; 344. Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. VIII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), p. 62.

But the reformers themselves failed to see the implications of their charges with regards to slavery, which would become an important issue in Britain and America in the eighteenth century, or more specific aspects of social injustice. Nor did their approach to reformation truly address the historical sin of female subordination. In fact, in Geneva Calvinism very quickly led to a form of local government which was as oppressive as Roman Catholicism. By 1537 the Council of Two Hundred in Geneva was enforcing stern regulations upon the conduct of citizens, requiring assent to the Confession of Faith in the Church of St. Peter, and banishing all who would not take the oath. Schaff observes that it was a glaring inconsistency that those who had just shaken off the yoke of Rome as an intolerable burden subjected their conscience and intellect to another oppressive human creed.¹³⁷ So burdensome was this new system that some women were imprisoned for appearing in public without proper head coverings.

However, the Protestant Reformation had a profound impact on attitudes toward sexuality. Whereas the fathers had extolled virginity and celibacy, the reformers redirected the focus of spirituality on common people and daily living. Vice and immorality were denounced in the strongest possible terms. They rejected the double standard of celibacy for those who were truly dedicated to God, and marriage for those

¹³⁷Ibid, p. 357.

who were less committed. The universal call of all believers to spiritual commitment in routine living led to an exonerated concept of the family and work. The home replaced the monastery as the center of Christian virtue, and marriage was granted a status of dignity, even for the clergy.¹³⁸

But in terms of the social status of women and a formal theology of womanhood, the Reformation changed little. Landman comments that the Reformation gave women back their sexuality, but not equality with men.¹³⁹ In this mode of thinking the role of Christian mother became a special vocation. Raising children, teaching, keeping house and all the elements of domestic life became a special form of martyrdom. By eliminating the option of sisterhood, that is serving God as a nun according to Catholic tradition, they reduced the definition of a godly life style for a faithful Christian woman to one simple option, namely marriage.

Martin Luther's picture of woman is full of paradoxes. His focus on divine sovereignty, with God as essentially good and wise and man essentially evil, led to a basic acceptance of traditional models of the status of women. Luther saw Adam as a beautiful creature, needing sex in Paradise purely for procreation. But in his present state, corrupted by sin, man has a more comprehensive need for woman; a companion in

¹³⁸Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Women and the Continual Reformation," Religion and Sexism, R.R. Ruether, ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 292-318.

¹³⁹Landman, p. 5.

his mundane pursuits and a manager for his house, plus an agent of sexual gratification. Luther considered sex to be man's medicine. He also thought of woman as weaker than man and full of vices, but her usefulness to man compensates for her deficiencies.¹⁴⁰

Concerning the Genesis Temptation and Fall, Luther believed that Satan attacked where humanity was the weakest. He wrote: "I believe that had Satan first tempted the man Adam would have gained the victory."¹⁴¹ Woman, then, bears the brunt of God's curse for sin, placed under man's power and compelled to obey him.¹⁴² True to tradition, he defended the myth that man's rightful role is to rule, wage war, till the soil, build, plant and defend his possessions, while woman, by God's design and command, must submit to male domination. Lacking the ability to administrate affairs outside the home and that concern the state, she should devote her energies to her husband and children and not venture further afield. He also thought it natural for women to rebel and complain against this order of things.¹⁴³

Luther speaks representatively of those views on sexual

¹⁴⁰Douglass, p. 297.

¹⁴¹Martin Luther, Luther's Commentary on Genesis, J. Theodore Mueller, trans. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), p. 68.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁴³Martin Luther, Lectures on Genesis, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., Luther's Works, Vol.I (St. Louis: 1958), p. 115.

typology which survived Roman Catholic Tradition and multiplied through all Reformation denominations:

Men have broad and large chests, and small narrow hips, and more understanding than women, who have but small and narrow chests, and broad hips, to the end they should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children.¹⁴⁴

Likewise John Calvin offered little to change the medieval concept of womanhood, except for stressing moral aspects of feminine behaviour. In reaction to the moral decadence of the Renaissance Calvin proposed high ascetic ideals, in fact imposing them upon the citizens of Geneva. However, he taught that woman was intended to be man's companion, and not merely a mechanism for sexual release. He saw Adam as being completed in Eve, and in marriage a male and female become symbolically one body and one soul.

But he still viewed the wife's status as subordinate to the husband. And while both he and Luther felt that husbands and wives had a mutual obligation to fidelity, in his commentary on the Mosaic law he reveals a clear assumption of male superiority. He readily justified the ancient practice of killing an adulterous wife by stoning, while an unfaithful husband received lesser judgment. This to Calvin was justifiable because of the dishonour an unfaithful wife brought to her husband's name, and the possibility of

¹⁴⁴Martin Luther, "Table Talk" DCCXXV, 1569.

defiling his posterity.¹⁴⁵

Among the significant benefits which the Reformation did provide for women, that of public education is probably the most significant.¹⁴⁶ Changes in marriage laws also granted women the right to divorce on grounds of adultery, although remarriage was frowned on.¹⁴⁷

However, in reality the Reformation, although directed at the plight of common people, did little to elevate the status of women. Lysken Dirks, for example, was an Anabaptist imprisoned for her faith in Antwerp in 1550. Monks asked her why she meddled in scriptures instead of sewing as a woman should. Her reply: "Christ commands us to search the scriptures, and Christ should be obeyed rather than man." For her answer she was drowned.¹⁴⁸

Eleanor McLaughlin feels that the Anglican church and Protestantism actually had a negative effect on the religious

¹⁴⁵Andre Bieler, L'Homme et la femme dans la morale calviniste (Geneva, 1963); Tavard, pp. 175-7.

¹⁴⁶Also from the fifteenth century onwards, various humanists favoured the education of women in the classics; e.g. Bruni, Domenichi, Elyot, Bercher and Vives. See William H. Woodward, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance (1400-1600) (New York: 1965).

¹⁴⁷Ibid, pp. 303-4; divorce was seldom granted, and when it was remarriage by either party was viewed as adultery. The Geneva Marriage Ordinances of 1561 granted equal right of divorce to a woman whose husband committed adultery.

¹⁴⁸Eleanor C. McLaughlin, "Male and Female in Christian Tradition," Barnhouse and Holmes, p. 49-50.

life of the church by depriving the community of the dynamic female service maintained for centuries in the pre-Reformation church:

One must insist that we miss the innovative, formative and reforming roles taken in the community by women like Hulda of Whitby, Brigid of Sweden, Joan of Arc, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Angela of Merici (founder of the Ursulines) and Madame Guyon, the controversial seventeenth century French mystic.¹⁴⁹

The Reformation destroyed, she insists, the one structure within the institutional church where men and women functioned as equals before God, the monastic life, leaving the church to be led by an all male clerical order.

At least one Reformer, John Knox the Scot, was also very critical of women's involvement in politics, although it appears that various factors gradually increased this possibility.¹⁵⁰ Knox believed that women are by nature: "weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe; and experience hath declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment."¹⁵¹ The stigma of evil and inferiority which women had carried throughout the ages remained upon them as an integral part of Reformation doctrine. John Donne expressed it

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Douglass, p. 301. Specifically in reference to Queen Mary, of England.

¹⁵¹Douglass, p. 301.

poetically:

We are borne ruinous. For that first
marriage was our funerall; One woman at
one blow, then kill'd us all.¹⁵²

V. THE CHURCH, SEXISM AND SLAVERY

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the world saw many advances, resulting largely from American colonialism, world exploration, industrialization and scholasticism. Christianity also experienced a remarkable spread through world missions, and significant diversity of doctrine among Protestant denominations. Two significant social and theological issues began to surface: slavery and sexism. The evil in both was becoming a self evident truth among all advanced cultures, and the church found itself in the anomalous role of defending them in the name of God and Tradition.

Slavery is presupposed in the Old Testament, both as a matter of historical record and by religious sanction.¹⁵³ The same is true of the New Testament, specifically in those

¹⁵²John Donne, First Anniversary. Donne, a poet and later preacher and religious leader, left the Roman Catholic Church and was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church in 1615

¹⁵³Exodus 21:2-6; Deuteronomy 15:12-18; Leviticus 24:44ff. Kitchen states that generally a more humane spirit breathes through the Old Testament laws and customs than were evident in surrounding cultures. K.A. Kitchen, "Slavery," New Bible Dictionary, J.D. Douglas, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 1197.

portions traditionally attributed to Paul.¹⁵⁴ While New Testament spokesmen, and more significantly Jesus himself, encourage submission to government officials even if they happen to be evil and their form of rule tyrannical,¹⁵⁵ the underlying principles of New Testament theology clearly oppose tyranny and injustice in any form. In time, where these concepts would permeate society they would gradually eliminate various forms of social injustice in spite of the fact that fundamentally the New Testament teaches Christians to tolerate and submit to the less desirable social order.

However, a tenacious adherence to the literal teachings of the New Testament would never allow for the overthrow of slavery or tyranny, and would perpetuate in the name of divine truth an inferior and essentially anti-Christian ideology. Yet through the centuries it has been difficult for churchmen to apply biblical principles in such a way as to urge upward social change. It seems that Jesus' teaching of suffering in silence, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, and such like have been easily used as tools to maintain traditional inequity, just as the Law of Moses became a weapon of the religious elite among the Jews. Even during the Reformation, Luther's intent of placing the Word of God in the hands of the common people did not reach down

¹⁵⁴Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22; Philemon; I Timothy 6:2.

¹⁵⁵Jesus, "render unto Caesar. . ." (Mark 12:14); Paul, "Be subject to the higher authorities. . ." (Romans 13:1ff.).

far enough in terms of practical social justice. This is demonstrated in his response to the German peasants who asserted that priesthood of all believers made them equal to their landlords. In a tract entitled Against the Thievish and Murderous Hordes of Peasants Luther urged nobles to use brutal force to quell the peasant rebellion, using Romans 13 as supportive text. But to the peasants he reiterated Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount to endure hardship without complaining.¹⁵⁶

Sixteenth century Spanish theologians found it necessary to develop a new theology of inequality in order to justify enslaving the Indians in the Americas. They declared that every person has an appropriate social function, some to work and serve, others to organize and rule. This condition, they suggested, is best for all concerned, including the enslaved. Similarly, Christians in America's Colonial South justified owning and trading black slaves, limiting their obligations to saving their souls. As one nineteenth century churchman said in defence of slavery:

Our design in giving them the Gospel is not to civilize them, not to change their social condition, not to exalt them into citizens or free men; it is to save them.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 34-37; V.H.H. Green, Luther and the Reformation (New York: Capricorn Books, 1964), pp. 137-9.

¹⁵⁷Thornwell, "The Rights and Duties of Masters," quoted by Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 203.

It is quite clear that the term "save" here suggests spiritual regeneration, as it typically does among some Christians, with no responsibility for promoting civil rights or social welfare.

The issue of slavery in South Africa's Cape settlements in the early 1700's was debated, not on moral but economic grounds. Some thought that slave labour should be avoided because white workers were more reliable and productive. But the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie decided to the contrary and the Cape society subsequently continued to develop along caste lines.¹⁵⁸

The anti-slavery movement in Europe during the 1700s was born of the French Revolution, and therefore was rooted in humanism and a general philosophical awakening. In England and America a similar movement developed from a religious impetus; that putting an end to slave trading was the duty of Christians. In 1772 Granville Sharp became a leading spokesman against slavery as a great moral and social evil, and the movement which followed was supported by the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, as well as strong contingents from the Quakers and Baptists.¹⁵⁹ However, it must be noted that during this time slavery was defended by many churches in the Southern States of America, and the

¹⁵⁸T. R. H. Davenport, South Africa; A Modern History (Bergvlei: Southern Books, 1977), p. 21-22.

¹⁵⁹C.J. Stille, "Slavery," NSHERK, Vol. X, pp. 452-3.

social, political and economic aspect of this issue became a primary factor leading to America's Civil War.

Similarly, the church was a strong opponent of assertive women, whether for voicing opinions on slavery or for advocating women's rights. In colonial America, Elizabeth Hooten was a Quaker missionary with unyielding views on human rights. At age sixty she was flogged by local church members to improve her theology. When Quaker Abby Kelly spoke out against slavery she was denounced by ministers as the Jezebel of Revelation 2:20. Sarah and Angelina Grimke are known to historians for their role in promoting abolition in the 1830s and were quite vocal against sexual exploitation of black women. But clergymen issued a letter denouncing them because of the unspeakable facts which they had made public. At times churchmen have resorted to ridiculous arguments to defend traditional patriarchy and to stop the mouths of vocal advocates of change. Christians were known to argue against the use of anasthesia in childbirth, contending that on the basis of Genesis 3:16 God wants women to suffer pain in giving birth.¹⁴⁰ And many have opposed the education of women using I Corinthians 14:35 as a divine mandate that women should learn whatever they need to know from their husbands, or from a male familial head. Hays writes that among other absurd arguments against educating women was the

¹⁴⁰A.D. White, The History of the Warfare of Science and Theology in Christendom, Vol. II (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), p. 63.

claim that blood directed from the womb to the brain in intellectual pursuits rendered women infertile.¹⁶¹

All through the great mission movement of the nineteenth century women were very involved, but against continual opposition from church leaders. Over one hundred years ago a young Anglican lady wrote:

I would have given the church my head, my hand, my heart. She would not have them. She told me to go back and do crochet in my mother's drawing room.¹⁶²

Florence Nightingale had to change countries and churches in order to find the training and encouragement she needed to serve God.¹⁶³ Today every country and every church would like to claim her. In recent years the claim that Christianity has done a great deal to elevate the status of women in society has been a persistent shibboleth. But this no more justifies the subordination of women than would the provision of better work conditions to a slave justify slavery. As one journalist pointed out nearly two decades ago, "Churches are one of the few important institutions that still elevate discrimination against women to the level of principle."¹⁶⁴ Concerning the posture of the church throughout history Scanzoni and Hardesty write:

¹⁶¹H.A. Hays, The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil, p. 99.

¹⁶²Russell Prohl, Women in the Church, p. 77.

¹⁶³Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 178.

¹⁶⁴New York Times, May 17, 1970.

Christians must honestly face the historical fact that the church has erected many barriers- socially, legally, spiritually, psychologically- against women's advancement. By propagating the notion that God ordained women to be passive and dependent, lacking initiative and assertiveness, confined to kitchen and pew, the church has hampered growth and fostered low self-esteem in women. It has not challenged women to recognize their God-given gifts, encouraged them to fully use their talents, or helped them to gain a natural sense of personhood.¹⁴³

There can be no doubt that in the past century, in spite of periodic surges of growth, the general decline in membership by mainstream churches can in part be attributed to the virtually unanimous position of clergymen on this issue. Resultingly, most Protestant denominations have slowly severed that element which through the centuries has proved the most loyal in support and service, namely its women. According to Martin Marty in Righteous Empire, this massive loss has been either to Unitarianism or to fringe Christian groups where they could fulfill their honest and intense desire to serve God.¹⁴⁴

One of the first to recognize a connection between slavery and sexism was Frederick Douglass, the great

¹⁴³Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 202.

¹⁴⁴Martin E. Marty, Righteous Empire (New York: Dial Press, 1970), p. 98.

abolitionist.¹⁴⁷ He attended the first convention on women's rights in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, lending his support to the controversial resolution on women's suffrage. Three years later at a similar convention in Akron, Ohio a black woman and former slave by the name of Sojourner Truth delivered her now famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman?" Starting at that point western society began to awaken to the realization that sexism and racism were shackled together by human injustice, and that black women were victims of both. Furthermore, it was becoming painfully obvious that mainstream Christianity had not only failed to offer assistance, but had been the chief advocate of traditional injustice.

During this era of awakening Professor O.S. Fowler wrote a book on the sexes, vigorously supporting female suffrage, equal pay for equal work and inclusion in the clergy. He recognized that many sincere Christians had been blind to various forms of tyranny, perhaps because the Bible had become nothing more than a guardian of tradition and human prejudice. But social advancement was rapidly tearing off the mask of hypocrisy, revealing the wolf in sheep's clothing. In 1860 Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote:

Prejudice against color, of which we hear

¹⁴⁷James H. Cone, For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1985) p. 123; Benjamin Quarles, "Frederick Douglass and the Woman's Rights Movement," Journal of Negro History, Vol 25, No. 1, Jan., 1940, pp. 35-44.

so much, is no stronger than that against sex. It is produced by the same cause, and manifested very much in the same way. The Negro's skin and the woman's sex are both prima facie evidence that they were intended to be in subjection to the white Saxon male.¹⁶⁸

Fowler made the provocative and prophetic assertion that those denominations which were not willing to recognize this need were retrograding, and would eventually disappear if they did not boldly reassess their position.¹⁶⁹

Conclusion

The elevated status of women in the first century church resulted naturally from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the implications of His ministry, and for a time was understood by many Christians to be an essential element of the Gospel message. The existence of orders such as deaconesses and enrolled widows during the early centuries of church history, as well as the prominence of numerous female evangelists and prophetesses, are indicative of a social and religious status of women in the early church which is strikingly different from that of later church tradition.

A number of factors led to a significant attenuation of the status of women in the church by A.D. 325, which was

¹⁶⁸Chafy, p. 44.

¹⁶⁹O.S. Fowler, Creative and Sexual Science, Including Manhood, Womanhood and Their Mutual Interrelatedness, Love, Its Laws, Power, Etc. (Philadelphia, Chicago & St. Louis: National Publishing Co., 1870).

perpetuated for the next twelve centuries in the Roman Catholic Church. The increasing stress on asceticism and deprecation of human sexuality during the second and third centuries resulted in a strengthening of traditional patriarchy, both in society and in the church. As the church developed a fixed doctrine and organizational structure, female elevation was consciously suppressed by Christian leaders by means of selective historical record, antifeminism in textual transmission and prejudicial canonization of Christian literature. Of particular significance was the choice by early church fathers of a hermeneutic based upon a view of received works as innerrant and authoritative for Christian life and doctrine, and later the elevation of church tradition as authoritative in itself. As Witherington correctly observes, this was a clear regression to an Old Testament image of both the church and ministry, and to patterns of secular culture which created a self perpetuating ecclesiastical order in which the subordination and silence of women was assured.¹⁷⁰

In the main, the status of women in Christianity from the second to the fifteenth centuries differed little from that of ancient Greek society. Equality with men was claimed only for a small number of the religious elite, and that was curtailed by the rigors of ascetic life. But the true implications of New Testament equality could not be satisfied

¹⁷⁰Witherington, p. 210.

as long as the emancipation of women was tied either to virginity, as an ascetic reversal of nature, or to the spiritual symbolism of Eve in the Fall and Mary in the Redemption of humanity.

In some sense later Catholic scholars appreciated the inconsistency of their doctrine, and had no choice but to defend it. Duns Scotus, Franciscan and Oxford professor in the early fourteenth century, admitted that a judgment against women consigning them to an inferior and more burdensome role is a great crime against them. But such is their station in church tradition, and sin cannot be attributed to the church. Therefore, he concluded, it could not have come from the church but from Christ Himself, and what appears to be a gross injustice falls under the inexplicable Sovereignty of God.¹⁷¹ Most of the European Catholic scholars who have written on the subject of women, such as Maertens and Gihoul, have noted the gross contradiction between church doctrine and Christian principle, but remain agnostic as to reasons or practical solutions.¹⁷² Their problem, like that of modern conservative Protestant churches, is that traditional grounds for denying full equality to women, both in the church and the home, are unacceptable. No psychological, philosophical,

¹⁷¹Tavard, p. 215; Also held the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, against the contrary opinion of Thomas Aquinas.

¹⁷²Tavard, p. 216.

sociological or theological argument is convincing, but it would seem that for most of these theologians the price of change is too great.

The Reformers no doubt believed they were helping women by abolishing monasticism and epitomizing womanhood in child rearing, domestication and submission. But this was in essence a lateral move from one structure of female subordination to another, without offering any direct benefits to women in terms of social or religious status. However, it is probably correct to assume that the impact of the Reformation on social development in various ways paved the way for the modern elevation of human rights, of which female equality is an essential part. Schaff asserts that the Reformation was a great turning point in history, giving impulse to every forward movement in modern civilization.¹⁷³

Reactions against slave trading in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided some basis for examining the social ethics of traditional Christianity against a growing body of self evident truths recognized by many academics and philosophers. In time, many churches, both Catholic and Protestant, came to recognize the evils of slavery and other forms of social injustice, and have taken a stand against them.

However, because of certain commonalities with slavery,

¹⁷³Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), p. 1.

the historical sin of sexism also surfaced in the western social conscience, and has continued into the twentieth century as a point of grave social and religious concern. But longstanding patriarchal structures are firmly rooted in social ideology, religious tradition and Holy Scripture, and have been clung to tenaciously by most Christian churches. This conflict between principle and theology has led to the contemporary dilemma.

Chapter Four

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

In this chapter an effort is made to summarize significant elements of the movement toward female liberation in recent history, with particular concern for the response by Christian churches to social change and the dilemma facing those who have been unwilling to adjust accordingly.

I. THE MODERN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

In 1787 Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John, then engaged in the Constitutional Convention of the young Republic called the United States of America, urging him not to allow unlimited power to be vested in husbands. "Remember," she said, "that all men would be tyrants if they could."¹

This sort of generalization is no less mythical than those traditional beliefs about women which are the focus of this thesis. But it does express the sentiments of millions of women who have come to perceive men as their oppressors in a social structure marked by tyranny and injustice. Feminism is quite simply a radical reaction against centuries of female oppression. This movement, which some have called "womanspirit rising" emerged at a time and place where self

¹Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle (New York: Atheneum, 1959), p. 15.

declaration for women at last had become possible.²

Modern feminism had its true beginnings with two sources; Women's Suffrage and the Holiness Revivalist Movement, both in America.³ In 1840 Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton were among the women who attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention where they were prohibited from participation and made to sit in the balcony. It was there that these women realized that they could not fight for the freedom of slaves without also freeing themselves. Early advocates of this concept included the Grunke sisters of South Carolina. Eight years later in 1848 the first feminist convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, attended by some three hundred men and women who then produced a treatise called the American Declaration of Sentiment which became the touchstone for all later feminist movements.

At a convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851 one clergyman warned women not to sell their rights of special privileges and concessions for a mess of equality pottage. "What man," he asked, "would help a political or business rival into a carriage, or lift her over a ditch?" It was this that prompted the famous speech of Sojourner Truth⁴ which not

²An expression which aptly describes the thrust of the demand for equality by women; Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

³Donald W. Dayton, Discovering an Evangelical Heritage (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 85-98.

⁴Hertha Pauli, Her Name Was Sojourner Truth (New York: Camelot/Avon, 1962), p. 176.

only denounced traditional role distinctions between male and female, but also pointed out the inequity suffered by black women who enjoyed no privileges or concessions at all:

That man over there says that women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over mudpuddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man- when I could get it- and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?⁵

At the same convention another preacher argued against women's equality, and in favour of male privilege, on the grounds of the manhood of the Saviour. Sojourner's reponse was a powerful exposure of the bias of traditional arguments: "Where did Christ come from?" she asked. "From God and a woman! And man had nothing to do with him."⁶

Within this early feminist movement a distinction has to be made between suffragists and reformists. The former were

⁵James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin (eds.), Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p. 235.

⁶James H. Cone, For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church (Johannesburg: Skottaville: 1985), p. 124; all accounts of the role of Sojourner Truth in the early feminist movement rely on Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joseyn Gage, History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. I (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1881).

interested in gaining for women the right to vote. But they had no vision for organizational needs afterwards nor a relationship of their cause to a general ideology. The latter group did. Reformists sought the vote as a means of changing society; to achieve goals such as cleaning up sweat shops, bringing an end to the exploitation of women, stopping liquor traffic, and eliminating child labour. By the time women were granted a voice in government much of this had been achieved. Jerome Skolnick stresses the fact that protest and policy change are essential political phenomena engaged in by normal people, and are essential in a truly democratic system.⁷

The feminist movement as a whole did not attack the fact of woman's uniqueness or the preference of many women for domestic life. They simply argued that women be given the opportunity to choose their own roles in life and compete with men on an equal basis. Many highly educated and influential women continued to play a role of exemplary subservience, patronizing the system to protect potential advances for the cause of women. Mary Lyons, head of the Mt. Holyoke Seminary avoided attending trustee meetings for this reason. Mary Alice Baldwin, leader of the women's college of Duke University, played the role of "Southern Lady" in homage to propriety as the essential price to pay for women's

⁷Jerome Skolnick, The Politics of Protest (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1969), p. xix.

education. Frances Perkins, the first woman Cabinet Member in the United States and Secretary of Labor to Roosevelt often endorsed the myth she in reality rejected, that woman's place is in the home.⁸

Likewise blacks in America had to play the patronizing role of "Uncle Tom" to appease whites, which included sitting at the back of busses, drinking from separate water fountains, standing with hat in hand when whites passed, and generally presenting an appearance of laziness and lack of ambition.⁹ But beneath the subservience was deep resentment of an injustice to which even traditional Christianity was blind.

And the charge leveled at society by vocal feminists was not only that of injustice against women, but also that the church had misused the Bible in defence of its tradition and as a weapon against proponents of justice and truth. At the close of the nineteenth century a number of women were very active in evangelism and became quite influential in the American temperance movement, including Amanda Berry Smith of the Holiness Movement,¹⁰ and Carrie Judd Montgomery of the faith healing Pentecostals. Frances E. Willard was president

⁸William Chafe, Women and Equality (New York: Oxford, 1977), p. 104.

⁹Chafe, p. 45-78.

¹⁰Smith was also black. In 1878 she went to England conducting a two year speaking tour. After that she spent two years as a missionary in India, then eight years in Africa. She only returned to the United States around 1890.

of the Christian Women's Temperance Union from 1879 to 1898, and is considered by historians to be the most famous woman in America during that period.¹¹

After the turn of the century there was a temporary lull in the advancement of woman's rights. Women of the 1920's inherited a legacy of independence, but the political context in which it was born was forgotten for the time. Instead of concentrating on social problems attention turned to drinking, smoking and bobbing hair. The 20's became an era of sexual revolution and gratification. There was a surge in academic interests also, suggested by the fact that a greater percentage of American PhD's went to women in 1920 than in 1960. The number of master's degrees taken by women peaked in 1930, and bachelor's in 1940. During World War II attention turned to labour to support the massive military effort.

Protests against feminism continued through all these years in various forms. In the 30s magazine articles depicted unhappy career women neglecting their families. In some American states laws were passed prohibiting married women from working. Most school systems forced female teachers to give up their posts when they married.¹²

Educated women during the early decades of the twentieth

¹¹Carolyn Gifford, "Profiles of Leadership," Christianity Today, Insert (October 3, 1986), p. 11-I.

¹²Jo Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation (New York: David McKay Co., 1975), p. 20.

century began to feel extreme disillusionment with roles which were unfulfilling, keeping women from positions where they could apply their training and skills. Many expressed themselves through organizations and movements for social advancement. Some joined clubs for leisure. Many took menial jobs just to alleviate boredom. But most continued in the traditional role where the highest station to which a woman could aspire was that of a charming wife and devoted mother. Dissatisfaction continued to increase.

By 1940 75% of working women in the USA held jobs only available to women, such as typing, stenography, various fields of teaching and nursing. They had a clear place in the work world, but for an equal number of hours they earned only half the pay as men. The rationale was that women worked to have something to do, but did not really need the money, whereas men worked to support families. This also was a myth. According to studies by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, during the 20s and 30s some 90% of working women did so out of necessity to provide either supplemental or total income for the family.¹²

After the war there was a concerted campaign by mainstream churches in the United States, using the media and political leaders, to encourage women to return to their subordinate roles. It was thought that since women had been viewed as the anchor and spiritual motivator of the family

¹²Chafe, p. 32.

some means had to be found to get them out of the factories and back at home or the whole of society would be fall into decadence. So the motto was coined: "Women must bear and raise our children and the men must support them." But in spite of it through the 50's the trend toward equality continued. By 1960 some 40% of all women in the USA over the age of sixteen worked, and by 1970 about 45% of married women were working outside the home.

In 1963, in The Feminine Mystique, Betty Frieden asked "who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves?" Within a year American Congress passed Title VII of the Civil Rights Act banning sex discrimination in employment, and the President's Commission on the Status of Women announced its conclusion that women had indeed been the victims of discrimination in the market place. But failure to uphold that Act prompted Frieden and other activists to found the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966 to increase pressure.¹⁴ Other groups also arose, such as Women's Equity Action League in 1970 to pressure the courts, and the National Women's Political Caucus was formed to push the issue in political parties.¹⁵

Although feminism is considered by some to be the most explosive religious issue of the 70's, its cause suffered

¹⁴Christianity Today, Vol. 30, No. 14, Introduction to Insert on Christianity Today Institute, p. 3-1.

¹⁵Chafe, pp. 92-3.

during that decade from a lack of conventional leadership.¹⁶ Each local women's liberation group took its vitality from the needs of the local community without unified direction or purpose. Women's liberation theorist Jo Freeman warned about the "tyranny of structurelessness," that the deliberate rejection of structure would lead to a few dominating the movement.¹⁷

Christian ministers heavily indoctrinated their congregations from Pauline texts on subordination of wives, but even among conservative Christians as women continued to broaden their perspective in the secular world there followed an increasing demand for recognition and access to more meaningful roles in church life. In spite of opposition from clergymen it can be stated that there were strong religious sentiments underlying the drive for reform in church doctrine concerning the status of women.¹⁸ Phillida Bunkle writes:

The identification of women with spirituality in revival religion. . . ultimately implied their special responsibility in the drive toward social salvation. . . (which in turn) led to the attempt to realize the ideals of

¹⁶George C. Bedell, Leo Sandon and Charles T. Wellborn, Religion in America, second edition (New York: Macmillan, 1982), p. 264.

¹⁷Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," Berkley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review 17 (1972-3), 51-64; Chafe, p. 127-8.

¹⁸Chafe, p. 24.

sanctified womanhood in social action.¹⁹

Yet within the Judaeo-Christian tradition there have been and continue to be certain factors which prove counter productive in the struggle to realize some of the most significant goals, the equity of women being a prime example. Chafe points to this perennial problem:

The entire Judaeo-Christian tradition was premised on the imperfection of human value and the tendency of people, in the absence of external restraints, to seek their own ends. Reliance on collective good wishes without resort to institutionalized checks and balances, tested severely people's ability to withstand the temptation to take advantage of others and impose their own will. Indeed, among some student radical groups, outlasting the opposition . . . provided a basic technique for controlling- and abusing-the process of participatory democracy.²⁰

Rising sensitivity to the plight of women in third world countries prompted the United Nations to declare the years 1975 to 1985 the Decade of Women, during which time great strides were made in various areas. Conferences were held in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980 and then Nairobi in 1985, of which the latter was the most productive.²¹

¹⁹Phillida Bunkle, "Sentimental Womanhood and Domestic Education, 1830-1870," History of Education Quarterly (Spring, 1974), pp. 13-30.

²⁰Chafe, p. 127-8.

²¹Inge Lederer Gibel, "The Women of the World Have Won," The Christian Century (September 11-18, 1985), p. 802-4.

Feminist Liberation Theology

Also in recent years women's studies and raised feminist consciousness have given rise to feminist theology, which according to Denise Ackermann was a necessary development when the pain of sexist oppression came to be examined critically and systematically in the light of the Christian faith.²² Various streams of feminist theology have surfaced in the western world. The "exclusive" or "revolutionary" sees sexism as the key to all social oppression, while the "inclusive," also called "reformist," sees sexism as one of the structures of oppression, along with racism, classism, and other less dramatic forms.²³ The former, of which women such as Naomi Goldenberg, Carol Christ, and Mary Daly are exponents, attacks the symbols, language and paradigms of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in favour of a feminine deity.²⁴

The key concept in the reformed strain of feminist theology is liberation, which with its concern for praxis found impetus in Liberation Theology. Although there are differences in approach in this rapidly developing field, key

²²Denise Ackermann, "Feminist Liberation Theology," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (52: 1985), p. 15.

²³Denise Ackermann, "Liberation and Practical theology: a feminist perspective on ministry," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (52: 1985) p. 33. Sally McFague, Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language (London: SCM Press, 1982), p. 152.

²⁴McFague, p. 156.

areas of concern include both biblical hermeneutics and Christian theological anthropology as a foundation for establishing a theology of partnership, as opposed to the pyramid of domination which has been prevalent in Christianity. Among the principal exponents of Feminist Liberation Theology are Rosemary Ruether,²⁵ Letty Russell²⁶ and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.²⁷

In the past decade Feminist Liberation Theology has developed rapidly with a strong force in Third World countries.²⁸ Efforts are being directed at awakening world theological sensitivity to the "historic sin" of sexism and formulating both a clear theology and a strategy for accelerating social change.²⁹ Women's rights movements in

²⁵R.R. Ruether, Sexism and God-talk (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

²⁶L.M. Russell (ed.) Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

²⁷E.S. Fiorenza, "'Emerging Issues in Feminist Biblical Interpretation," Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity, L. Weldman, ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

²⁸At the 1985 conference on "Theological Production of Women in Christian Churches" in Buenos Aires attention centered on defining the specificity of feminine identity. The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians has been working largely from the Asian, African and Latin American perspective. See Rommie Nauta, "Latin American Women Theology," Exchange 48:7-31 (December, 1987); Leny Lagerwerf, "South Africa- Women's Struggle in Theology, Church and Society," Exchange 48: 33-51 (December, 1987).

²⁹Rommie Nauta and Berma Klein Goldewijk, "Feminist Perspective in Latin American Liberation Theology," Exchange, 48, December, 1987, p. 1-5; cf. Karen O'Brien, "Feminists to Liberation Theologians Challenge Church on Sin of Sexism" Latinamerica Press 18 (1986)2, pp. 5-6.

third world countries are centered largely in urban areas and among the social elite and well educated, working to elevate and improve the lot of women without imposing their views on rural and poor women as a class. But at present there are large gaps in our knowledge of these movements, particularly the relationship of churches and female status.³⁰

It is to be expected that many feminists will over-react to traditional beliefs and institutions in their quest for liberation. Radical feminists have been inclined to reject Christianity and Judaism altogether as hopelessly patriarchal and evil. For them stumbling blocks are found in numerous essential elements of biblical theology, including the masculine identity of God, the person of Jesus Christ, and the entire package of masculine theological language.³¹ Other feminists, however, like Patricia Wilson-Kastner, have seen that there is a close relationship between feminism and Christian ideals, and that abandoning tradition altogether would prove counterproductive.³² Virginia Hearn stresses that a switch to female terminology such as "Mother," "She" and "Her" to describe God, is no improvement at all since it

³⁰John C.B. and Ellen Low Webster, eds. The Church and Women in the Third World (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), pp. 1-18.

³¹Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); Naomi Goldberg, Changing of the Gods (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

³²Patricia Wilson-Kastner, Faith, Feminism and the Christ (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

creates the problem of a totally female oriented theology.³³ The new Inclusive Language Lectionary prepared by the National Council of Churches seems a step in the right direction.³⁴ Its readings are generic, referring to Jesus as the "Child of God" rather than the "Son of God," and amplifying "God the Father" to "God the Father and Mother." Perhaps something like "God, the Eternal Parent," would be less threatening, but there still remains the problem of selecting pronouns. If the neuter "It" is not suitable scholars may have to coin an entirely new Divine Pronoun void of all sexual connotations. This would mean a return to the "Thee-Thou" language which recent generations have rejected because of its archaic and sacrosanct nature.

Also among radical feminists there has been a concern for female self awareness, and many theorize an innate perception in women of life and the world which is not only unique but deeper, and quite superior to that typically found in males. But this has brought with it a trend of withdrawal from mainstream society, exclusivism, even lesbianism, as a declaration of self sufficiency and the androgyny of the whole person.³⁵

³³Hearn, p. 69.

³⁴An Inclusive Language Lectionary (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).

³⁵See Wilson-Kastner, pp. 12-13. On female poetic and aesthetic perception, see Carol Christ, Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest (Boston: Beacon, 1980). On special perception in life crises and Jungian

The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women, and any theology which denies, diminishes or distorts the full humanity of women is rejected as non-redemptive.³⁶ In simple terms the commitment of feminists has been "to end male ascendancy in society and religion."³⁷ But Fiorenza points out that today the primary interest of feminist theology lies in calling for a general reconceptualization and revision of accepted theoretical assumptions that are based on the experiences and work of men, and in the process to eliminate patriarchal church structures which have marginalized and silenced women throughout the centuries.³⁸ Therefore, the focus of concern in feminist theology is not simply furthering the cause of women's rights, but formulating a theology from a woman's unique perspective which thus far in history has not been

psychology of the journey of life, see Penelope Washbourn, Becoming Woman: the Quest for Wholeness in Female Experience (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), and Ann Belford Ulanov, Receiving Woman: Studies in the Psychology and Theology of the Feminine (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981).

³⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk. (London: SCM, 1983), pp. 18f.

³⁷Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 16.

³⁸Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology," Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds., Concilium: Religion in the Eighties (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), pp. x-xi.

done.³⁹ Particularly among Latin American theologians consideration is being given to woman's position of "poorest of the poor" as well as her close relationship to the life-giving process, all of which has far reaching implications for her contribution to theology.⁴⁰

The World Council of Churches has been most influential in recent years as a supporter of human rights and equality of women. In January 1987 the Central Committee decided to launch an Ecumenical Decade from 1988 to 1998, called Churches in Solidarity with Women. Conferences will continue to be held as in centers all over the world to promote its objectives, which are currently outlined as:

1. Empowering women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church;
2. Affirming, through shared leadership, decision making, theology and spirituality, the decisive contributions of women in churches and communities;
3. Giving visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the work and struggle for justice, peace and integrity of creation;
4. Enabling the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism and classism; from teachings and practices that discriminate against women;

³⁹Leny Lagerwerf, "South Africa-Women's Struggle in Theology, Church and Society," Exchange Vol. 16, No. 48 (December, 1987), p. 36.

⁴⁰Elsa Tamez, "Women, Church and Theology," Ladoc 14 (1984) 5, pp. 2-5.

5. Encouraging churches to take action in solidarity with women.⁴¹

Global Trends

All over the world a certain tension is being felt in traditional religions because of the changing social status of women. And perhaps the tension is both timely and positive, in that at this time of transition society requires a total reexamination of its values, beliefs and customs in order to prepare for and determine its course for the future.

Anees Jung, a journalist living in New Delhi, reports that in India there is visible change in status for women in all faiths, Hindu, Moslem and even among the conservative Sikhs. Najma Heptulla, for example, is former deputy chairperson of the Upper House of Parliament and now one of the general secretaries of Congress in India. She is a Muslim of both social and economic stature, and her position is quite a contrast to that of traditional subjugation in her culture. But she states that this fact has nothing to do with Islam.

It is the distortions in society, not in religion, that have banished women behind walls. At a time when women were buried alive, treated as chattel, the Prophet provided women with a social system. They were entitled to the property of father, son and husband, and they had a say in marriage. He permitted them to go to war with their men and to nurse the sick and wounded.

⁴¹Dialogue & Alliance Vol. 2, No. 3 (Fall, 1988); cf. Women In A Changing World 23:4 (June, 1987).

The Prophet would rise to receive his daughter. His wife Ayesha became his spokesman and was heard. If a woman commanded credit thirteen hundred years ago, why not now?⁴²

This could not be said of Hinduism since supremacy of the husband is clearly supported by the Upanishads. The typical Indian woman is told, whether overtly or covertly, that she is only a true Indian woman (bharatya nari) when she toils and suffers in silence, putting her husband first, children second, and herself last.⁴³

But there is a strong feminist movement in India, and many women have shifted their devotions exclusively to female deities, to demonstrate their assertiveness and declaration of personal freedom. Among the Sikhs the most liberal elements of Hinduism and Islam are joined, stressing simplicity, freedom from ritual and equality between the sexes. This religious sect, perceived by westerners as perhaps conservative and right wing, is actually quite the opposite in these respects. But its political zeal has given it prominence as a major social force in the Middle East, particularly in Iran. Franklin suggests that in India liberation tends to be somewhat "lop-sided," thus allowing women to be partners in bread-winning but expecting them to

⁴²Anees Jung, "Modern Woman, Ancient Religions," Voque (April, 1986).

⁴³Doris Franklin, "Impact of Christianity on the Status of Women from the Socio-cultural Point of View," Religion and Society, Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (June, 1985), p. 49.

be solely responsible for domestic chores.⁴⁴

Among Indians living in South Africa there are certain religious changes resulting from westernization. At present there are at least twenty women conducting religious ceremonies as recognized Hindu priests.⁴⁵

In Judaism changes are being seen also, but there is division among various sects concerning female rabbis. The Orthodox body still opposes female rabbis, but the Reformed, Reconstructionist and Conservative Jews all train women for this role. Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk of Hebrew Union College ordained the first female rabbi in 1972.⁴⁶

While changes of this nature are outside the Christian community, the global trend toward recognition of female equality has a direct bearing on the church's place in society, and therefore adds to the argument against traditional female exclusion from the Christian clergy and against female subordination in general.

II. THE ORDINATION CONTROVERSY

All these developments have forced churches in the twentieth century to reexamine their position on the status of women. Female ordination has become a focal point,

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Logan Govender, "Indian Women to Become Priests," Post Natal (August 12, 1989).

⁴⁶Joseph Carey, "Women of the Cloth: How are They Faring?" U.S. News and World Reports 97;76 (December 3, 1984).

symbolizing either the acceptance or rejection by churches of the entire change in the status of women in modern society.

Churches Approving Female Ordination

In the 1880s many mainstream churches started making essential doctrinal and organizational adjustments on this sensitive issue, and men like John Wesley, A.J. Gordon, Charles Finney and B.T. Roberts played a leading role in affirming full freedom of women in all areas of ministry.⁴⁷

By 1973 there were around six thousand clergywomen in all American denominations and today there are over sixteen thousand, which is approximately five per cent of the total clergy. At least eighty Protestant denominations are now ordaining women. In 1986 a woman was elected as the commanding general of the Salvation Army.⁴⁸

The first woman to be ordained in the Congregationalist Churches was Antoinette Brown, in 1853. Significantly, in the ordination sermon by Luther Lee justification for this action was found in identifying preaching with prophecy in the first century church.⁴⁹ The United Church of Christ

⁴⁷Hestenes, p. 4.

⁴⁸Roberta Hestenes, "Women In Leadership: Finding Ways to Serve the Church," Christianity Today (September 3, 1986), 4-1.

⁴⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Prophetic Tradition and the Liberation of Women: A Story of Promise and Betrayal," p. 3. A Paper read at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, August, 1989.

also began ordaining women in the late 1800's, and today has about a thousand clergywomen among its 1,7 million members.

The United Methodist Church granted licences to preach to women in 1919 and ordained them in 1924. In 1956 the final formalities were completed which granted women equality with men as members of annual conferences.⁵⁰ Today this church has fifteen hundred female ordained ministers; two of its forty six bishops are women and one of them is black. Dr. Marjorie Mathews was the first female bishop in history, installed in 1980. The Methodists are also credited with sanctioning women as foreign missionaries very early, and the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, now called the United Methodist Women, has been one of the largest women's movements in history boasting a membership of over two million around the world.⁵¹

The Episcopal Church (the American branch of the Anglican Church) has been ordaining women to the office of deacon since 1970 and in 1973 ordained eleven women to the priesthood, although the latter was not sanctioned by the General Convention until three years later. As of June 1,

⁵⁰Melvin E. Dieter, "Women and Ministry in the Methodist Tradition," The Asbury Seminarian, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1985), pp. 3-7. Dieter also mentions a number of powerful and influential women in the history of Methodism, including Susanna Wesley, Mary Fletcher, Barbara Heck and Antoinette Brown, the first woman regularly ordained in America. But in 1880 the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church took a drastic stand against the ministry of women in the church, which delayed ordination of women some seventy years.

⁵¹Franklin, Ibid.

1987 there were 1,167 ordained women, of whom 371 were deacons and 796 were priests, including 110 rectors. At this point Barbara Harris of Massachusetts, a black divorcee and former civil rights activist, is the only female bishop. Although the church has declared it acceptable, many bishops still openly oppose it and several other women have stood unsuccessfully for election elsewhere around the country. The issue still is very sensitive among the 120 Episcopalian dioceses and some feel it will end in a split.⁵² But generally women are being accepted as effective leaders in the church. At the 1985 General Convention 202 of the 912 Deputies were women, and 11 of the 40 members of the Executive Council are women.⁵³

The United Presbyterian Church also voted to ordain women in 1956. Today there are over a thousand women in clerical positions in that church, including executive presbytery.⁵⁴ The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) has 120 member churches worldwide, including Presbyterian, Congregational, United and Reformed Churches, of which 92

⁵²James Bone, "Radical Trailblazer," Woman's Weekly Supplement to the Natal Mercury (Thursday, March 9, 1989), p. 2. Also discussed at the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, held at Canterbury, England, 1988.

⁵³Susan M. Cole-King, "Women Priests and the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A." A paper distributed by the Episcopal Church Center, New York, 1987.

⁵⁴Hestenes, p. 5-I.

member churches are now ordaining women.⁵⁵⁵

The American Baptist Convention adopted a resolution in 1965, which was affirmed in 1980, stating that there should be no differential treatment of men and women in the church, family or society and that there should be equal opportunity for full participation in the work of God. Churches were urged to engage in study and action which would result in implementation of this resolution internationally.⁵⁵⁶ As of May, 1987 there were only 147 women pastors, which is three per cent of the total number of pastors in American Baptist Churches. However there were 114 Ministers of Education, and 124 in positions of associate pastor, interim pastor, youth and music minister. Over two hundred were serving as missionaries outside the United States, and about forty served as chaplains and pastoral counselors. Ten were classified as educators in colleges and seminaries.⁵⁵⁷

The Free Will Baptist churches in America can be traced to the influence of New England Baptists of Arminian persuasion, as opposed to those holding Augustinian-

⁵⁵⁵Henny G. Dirks-Blatt, "The Ordination of Women to the Ministry in Member Churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches," The Reformed World, Vol. 38, No. 8 (1985), pp. 434-43; Her paper contains a good summary of developments in Reformed tradition from the 1880's.

⁵⁵⁶American Baptist Church, General Board Reference # 8019: 10/81.

⁵⁵⁷Statistics provided by Women in Ministry, American Baptist Churches, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1700, New York, N.Y. 10115. Cf. Mary L. Mild, ed. Watchword, Vol. 9, No.1 (September, 1985).

Calvinistic views on the sovereignty of God. This fellowship of churches allow each other considerable latitude in certain aspects of doctrine and practice, and offer no legislation on the status of women. Throughout the years some women have been ordained, but there seems to be a trend toward a more conservative posture at the present time.⁵⁰

The Assemblies of God are, like other Pentecostal groups, considered to be conservative. Following traditional views of marriage they believe the husband to be the head of the house and the wife subordinate to his authority. However, on the matter of women's role in the church they have adopted a position which to their satisfaction retains a value for the authority of scripture and at the same time allows for female leadership. The General Council Bylaws state:

The Scriptures plainly teach that divinely called and qualified women may also serve the church in the ministry of the Word (Joel 2:29; Acts 21:9; I Corinthians 11:5). Women who have developed in the ministry of the Word so that their ministry is acceptable generally, and who have proved their qualifications in actual service, and who have met all the requirements of the credentials committees of the district councils, are entitled to whatever grade of credentials their qualifications warrant and the right to administer the ordinances of the church when such

⁵⁰Melvin Worthington, Executive Secretary, National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc., 1987. Cf. A Treatise of the Faith and Practices of Free Will Baptists, revised edition, 1981.

acts are necessary.³⁹

According to Joseph R. Flower, General Secretary for the General Council, the Assemblies of God in 1986 had a total of 3,718 women with ministerial credentials, including 1,588 whom they recognize as ordained ministers. The larger number comprises nearly 14 per cent of the total credentialed ministers in the Assemblies of God, although only 276 of these women pastor churches. It is also noteworthy that 1,534 of that total are married to credentialed ministers. Over 700 have husbands who are not ministers and 671 are single. Another 728 are widowed.⁴⁰

The Brethren In Christ Church, like the Assemblies of God, continues to uphold the traditional hierarchy of marriage as ordained of God, but has granted the right to women to engage in any form of ministry and to be ordained to positions of church leadership.⁴¹ The Moravian Church has also made changes in spite of internal tension. According to a doctrinal statement adopted in 1981 by the Unity Synod of the Unitas Fratrum, this brotherhood recognizes the call to ordination of women as well as men. Apparently in recent

³⁹Bylaws, The General Council of the Assemblies of God, paragraph k; cf. Joseph R. Flower, General Secretary of the General Council, "Does God Deny Spiritual Manifestations and Ministry Gifts To Women?" an unpublished paper.

⁴⁰Flowers, p.1-2.

⁴¹So stated in a letter from Glenn A. Ginder, Bishop of Brethren in Christ Church, Midwest Regional Conference; December 18, 1987.

times some congregations were only prepared to accept women as associate pastors, but a statement from the Southern Province of the American Moravian Church makes it clear that candidates for all positions must be considered without discrimination.⁴²

The Disciples of Christ (Christian Church), which is the liberal cousin of Churches of Christ and has roots in the American Restoration Movement of the early 1800s, also has officially recognized the ordination of women.⁴³ This movement was in its earliest stages fundamentalist, but with this and other decisions has moved considerably to the left.⁴⁴

The Seventh Day Adventists are also undergoing changes in spite of their dedication to a literalist interpretation of scripture. John C. Brunt, dean of the School of Theology at Walla Walla College argues that among Adventists a literal and fundamental interpretation of relevant New Testament passages cannot disallow the ordination of women simply because such is not the issue in the literal and historical

⁴²The Ground of the Unity (Herrnhut, German Democratic Republic, 1981), p. 3; The Moravian Covenant for Christian Living, Southern Province, p. 27.

⁴³Hestenes, p. 6-I.

⁴⁴Inspiration was a major point of difference that led to the split between Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. Randy Fenter, "Do Not Go Beyond What Is Written (Part 2), Image, Vol. 5, No. 9 (September, 1989), pp. 8-11.

context.⁴⁵ Although the issue has been controversial, the key role of Ellen G. White in their movement paved the way to a broader and more progressive understanding of the role of women than in most other conservative groups. Today Adventist churches are accepting women in the roles of pastor and elder.

Churches Rejecting Female Ordination

There are other churches, however, which are still refusing to approve the ordination of women, in spite of social and theological trends. The subject is a point of heated debate in most of these churches, and their reasons for holding to tradition are as a whole redundant and unconvincing. These churches are of great significance to this thesis in that their specific positions concerning the status of women constitute the crux of the current dilemma.

a. Roman Catholic Church.

Professor George H. Tavard of the Methodist Theological School in Delaware, Ohio has written a scholarly work on women in Christian tradition. Concerning the position of the Roman Catholic Church today he writes:

. . .since religious institutions are generally of a more conservative bent than secular organizations, the theological mind has evolved more slowly

⁴⁵John C. Brunt, "Ordination of Women: A Hermeneutical Question," Ministry (September, 1988), p. 12-14.

than its secular counterpart. For these reasons, the contemporary ideas about women that are assumed in Catholic theology have preserved substantially the same principles as the theology of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas.⁴⁴

Contemporary Catholicism has put forward several of what Tavard calls "models" for womanhood to cope with their changing social station. In October, 1965, during the Second Vatican Council, two American bishops submitted to the relevant commission suggestions concerning the church's position on women, and their suggestions represent two completely different philosophies.

The late Archbishop Paul Hallinan of Atlanta confessed that the church has been very slow in denouncing the degradation of women to a form of slavery, and offered four proposals to help rectify this injustice:

1. That the Church redefine liturgical functions of women to allow them to serve certain sacraments, and in essence reestablish the ancient order of deaconess.

2. That the scheme include women in the instruments to be set up after the council to further the lay apostolate.

3. That women have representation in present and post-conciliar agencies and other interests.

4. That opportunity should be given to women, both as sisters and laywomen, to offer their talents to the ministry

⁴⁴George H. Tavard, Woman in Christian Tradition (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 126.

of the Church.⁴⁷

In contrast, Bishop Fulton Sheen offered a perspective which defined the proper role of women in terms of "purity, protection of the weak, sacrifice, procreation and the sustaining of human life," all of which correspond to the tender motherly instinct and which he sees as essential in counterbalancing the masculine administrative rigidity. He then outlined a broader role for Christian women in the economic, social and cultural realm which might be thought of as merely an extension of the traditional role, and concluded that every woman, without exception, is morally obligated to live one of these forms of motherhood.

He concerned with promoting women in the Church and the first suggests basically an idea which the

attributes to Jesus, that "every woman who will enter the kingdom of heaven;" that

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, p. 202.

Von Le Fort, which seems to have originated in Aristotle and was transmitted into the Middle Ages through Thomas Aquinas. The image of Mary is spiritually intertwined in Christian womanhood, wherein there is the dual mission of protecting virginity, symbolic of virtue in general, and of devoted motherhood. Woman is from design an essentially receptive and passive entity. Her anonymous role in history as the transmitter of life, the passive instrument of nature and man, gives woman a spiritual significance reflective of the Holy Spirit and therefore in a sense greater than that of the male.⁶⁸

A fourth came from Pope Paul VI who also extolled motherhood, but admitted that defining her role in terms of the home and family is given added significance because of the special social problems of the modern world.⁶⁹ Thus, in the training of children, teaching of religious traditions and in guarding social virtue through influence in the home, women are glorified as the shapers of the future. Beyond this, in an address delivered in 1966 the Pope painted a moving vision of womanhood which found her greatest importance in symbolism.⁷⁰ In woman, he stated, is to be

⁶⁸Gertrude Von Le Fort, The Eternal Woman (Milwaukee, 1954); the French text La femme éternelle (Paris, 1946); Willi Moll, The Christian Image of Woman (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1967); Suzanne Cita-Malard, Les Femmes dans l'Eglise a la lumiere de Vatican II (Paris, 1968).

⁶⁹Osservatore Romano, December 10, 1965; Tavard, p. 147.

⁷⁰La Documentation Catholique, 1966, no. 1482, col. 1923.

seen the purest reflection of the creator in that she is the source of life. She represents ultimate moral purity. In her self-giving she is man's closest companion. She is especially sensitive to cultural and social values, and by nature aspires to be religious, and in all these is both the image and vision of ideal humanity.

More recently, Pope John Paul II has issued perhaps the most passionate espousal of women's equality ever by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. In an apostolic letter entitled Mulieris Dignitatem, issued September 30, 1988, the pope takes up the language and sentiments of the women's rights movement, going so far as to denounce all discrimination against women in everyday life as sinful but reaffirming Catholicism's centuries old ban against women priests. He defines motherhood and virginity as the two major vocations for women. But since Jesus had no women among his chosen Twelve it should be concluded that the priesthood is a special role for which only men are suited.⁷¹

However, the pope does break with earlier Catholic models for womanhood in that he sees the dominion of the husband over the wife as a disturbance and loss of stability and fundamental equality in the ideal marriage union, a problem linked to original sin. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,

⁷¹This argument is made by most Catholic scholars who oppose female ordination. A response is given below in connection with similar Anglican arguments; pp. 310-11.

described the 120 page letter as a "permanent interpretation" of church teachings, unlikely to be changed.⁷²

An essential problem in Catholic doctrine is a theology which renders woman unsuitable for any sacramental function,⁷³ and incapable of receiving the "indelible character" which their holy orders confer.⁷⁴ One Roman Catholic theologian explains it in these terms:

The reason. . . for denying women the right to teach is a reason that is absolute and universal, based on the natural condition of inferiority and subjection that is the position of women.⁷⁵

All the above Roman Catholic models fail to deal with the real issues of inequity which tradition supports. Both Paul VI and John Paul II did little more than patronize, giving woman dimensions of grandeur meaningful only as

⁷²The English title is "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women." The letter, issued on the occasion of the Marian Year, carries the authority of church doctrine, but not the infallibility of a papal encyclical. Sarie Gilbert, "Papal Letter..." Lutheran World Information, 28/88, p. 11-12. On the strength of Canon Law in the Roman Catholic Church, see Clara Maria Henning, "Canon Law and the Battle of the Sexes," R.R. Ruether, ed. Religion and Sexism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 267-291.

⁷³Nicolae Chitscu, "The Ordination of Women," in Concerning the Ordination of Women, p. 58; cf. Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 171.

⁷⁴Leonard Hodgson, "Theological Objections to the Ordination of Women," The Expository Times 77 (April, 1966), pp. 212-213.

⁷⁵Catherine Benton, "Does the Church Discriminate Against Women on the Basis of Their Sex?" Critic 24:22 (June-July, 1966).

visions and symbols without compromising the inequity which persists in realistic terms. Tavad describes recent Catholic models as openly "schizophrenic," seeing woman as weak and the symbol of evil while attempting at the same time to idealize her as the symbol of transcendent goodness. Persistent efforts to praise and idealize the Virgin Mary are equally contradictory in terms of dealing realistically with modern Christianity. In one way or another all current Catholic models glorify the same sexual polarization, still confining women to traditional roles and viewing them as inferior, subordinate and tainted with evil.⁷⁶

Not only do many Catholics feel that full ordination is in order for women but they also believe that priests and nuns should have the privilege of marrying. But since Catholicism claims to be the oldest and truest line of the Christian Church, tradition has a solid foothold. Since 1966 the number of Catholic women in religious orders has dropped a full third, from 180,000 to 120,699. According to Sister Marjorie Tuite, a Dominican nun and coordinator for the National Association of Religious Women, a major complaint is that while women outnumber men in offices of the dioceses in the United States they have no access to the Roman Catholic institutional church structure. "The Pope can talk with Lutheran bishops," she says, "but he cannot sit down and dialogue with women who have given their whole life to the

⁷⁶Tavad, p. 149-50.

church."⁷⁷

Since Vatican II there has been little progress in the status of Catholic women, except in terms of heightened interest and concern among Catholic bishops. But organizations such as the Leadership Conference of Women Religious continue to push for change at every level.⁷⁸ The most recent and most comprehensive statement from the feminist element of Catholicism is a collection of essays entitled "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology" in Concilium.⁷⁹ Mary Zimmermann argues that the new code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, does not really change the age old Catholic legislation which in practical terms declares women neither suitable for the clergy nor eligible to enjoy all the prerogatives of members of the laity. Within the Catholic Church functional rights and power (sacra potestas) belong only to baptised males, whether married or celibate.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Margaret Brennan charges that

⁷⁷Roberta Green, "Cutting Across Convention," United Evangelical Action (January-February, 1984), p. 6.

⁷⁸Mary Luke Tobin, "Women in the Church Since Vatican II," America (November 1, 1986), pp. 243-6.

⁷⁹Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Collins, eds. Concilium: Religion in the Eighties (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985). Writers include Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary Collins, Marie Zimmermann, Margaret Brennan, Marjorie Proctor-Smith, Adriana Valero, and Mary Boys, all well known in the Catholic feminist movement and all noted academicians and theologians.

⁸⁰Marie Zimmermann, "Neither Clergy Nor Laity," in "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology," pp. 29-37. See The Code of Canon Law, English Translation (Grand Rapids:

Canon Law is very carefully structured so as to keep women silent, invisible and powerless. The activities of women in ecclesiastical communities, designated as "women religious," remain controlled by means of cloister (enclosure) as they have been for centuries, and are regulated by prescriptions in Canon Law covering Institutes of Consecrated Life.⁸¹

Therefore, it seems that the Roman Catholic Church has developed and maintained a complex system of laws and orders designed to protect its tradition and to keep its women under control. And even today there is hardly a hint of official intention to change.⁸²

b. Anglican Church.

It is ironic that the Anglican Church still holds to tradition concerning the status of women, since discussion on this issue began over a century ago.⁸³ In 1898 a petition signed by 1,100 women was presented to the Upper House of the Canterbury Convocation protesting the exclusion of women from

Eerdmans, 1983).

⁸¹Margaret Brennan, "The Invisibility of Women in Ecclesiastical Communities," in "Women: Invisible in Church and Theology," pp. 38-48. See Code of Canon Law, III:1.

⁸²The entire community of nineteen Orthodox churches, including the Greek and Russian Orthodox, are identical to the Roman Catholic Church in their tradition and doctrine concerning women.

⁸³A concise history of women's ministries in the Anglican Church is presented by Mary Tanner, "The Ministry of Women: an Anglican Reflection," One In Christ, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1985), pp. 284-292.

parochial church councils. And Charles Gore, Bishop of Oxford (1911-19), gave strong support for the participation of women in the government of the church until it was granted in 1919.⁸⁴ But even then opponents contended that eventually it would lead to the ordination of women. In 1944 Bishop R.O. Hall of Hong Kong ordained a woman, deaconess Florence Li Tin Oi, because of the urgency of a war situation.⁸⁵ But this was an exceptional case, and debate concerning the ordination of women continued throughout the next four decades.

Between the Lambeth Conference of 1968 and 1978 the diocese of Hong Kong, the Anglican church of Canada, the Episcopal Church in the United States, and the Church of the Province of New Zealand all duly elected to admit women to the presbyterate.⁸⁶ Since then eight other member churches, including Kenya and Uganda, have either approved in principle or stated that there are no theological objections to the ordination of women to the three fold ministry of the church.

Today the Anglican Church determines policy by a two thirds vote in three houses, namely the bishops, the clergy

⁸⁴Alan Wilkinson, "Three Sexual Issues," Theology (March, 1988), p. 124-6.

⁸⁵Nomathamsanqa Tisani, "Christ the Liberator: The Attitude of the Church to the Oppression of Women," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, No. 66 (March, 1989), p. 80.

⁸⁶The Report of the 1978 Lambeth Conference (London: Church Information Office, 1978), resolution 21:1.

and the laity. In 1986 the ordination of women failed in all three, although it did receive a majority vote. This failure came in the face of the Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie's firm declaration that he would support it and his prediction that if not approved now it was certain to come in the future. But it is also certain to drive a wedge between the provinces of Canterbury and York, since the Bishop of London, Dr. Graham Leonard, is a major opponent. At present there are 1,75 million active lay members of the Church of England.⁸⁷

In 1988 the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church, conducted at Canterbury, England, focussed on the ordination of female bishops and failed to resolve the problem totally. However, bishops at the conference voted to respect decisions made by each autonomous province of the church.⁸⁸ In Australia the issue continues to be hotly debated, the prevalent view being that the New Testament prescribes the headship of Christian men in both the family and congregation.⁸⁹

In May and June of 1988 the status of women was the

⁸⁷Kenneth Slack, "No Women's Ordination for Anglicans, Yet," Christian Century (August 13-20, 1986).

⁸⁸The Anglican Church is a loose communion of 28 independent denominations world wide. Lutheran World Information, 28/88, p. 10.

⁸⁹David Peterson, "The Ordination of Women- Balancing the Scriptural Evidence," St. Mark's Review (March, 1986), p. 20.

topic of discussion at the 26th Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa, held in Durban. After the failure to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority vote to grant ordination to women, Chris Ahrends, chaplain to the Archbishop of Capetown, Desmond Tutu, asked to be dismissed from the priesthood to serve only as a deacon as an act of solidarity with women.⁹⁰ South African Archdeacon Anthony Kriels said that in this country the church is still not ready to change this deeply rooted tradition.⁹¹ Females were admitted to the diaconate in December, 1985, but no further progress has been made since that date.

Anglican arguments against the ordination of women begin with the same passages of scripture discussed earlier, appealing to the headship of male over female established in Genesis and reiterated in Pauline tradition. But like the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican community embraces doctrines which are more complex than the biblical passages upon which they are founded. Anglican tradition sees woman as unfit to consecrate the bread and wine of communion and to give absolution, declaring that these priestly duties can only be performed by those who, like Jesus Christ, are of the masculine gender.⁹² This argument is derived from

⁹⁰Chris Ahrends, "Woman as Priest," Leadership (July, 1989).

⁹¹Natal News, October, 1988; Cross Times (May-June, 1989).

⁹²Ahrends, Ibid.

traditional definitions of the priesthood and its link with the masculine revelation of God as the Father and Christ as the Son, concluding that a masculine ministry in the church is established by divine revelation.⁷³

Paterson suggests that one important thing the debate over the ordination of women has accomplished in the Anglican community is to clarify what the church means by "ordination." In the past ordination has been understood, at least in part, to refer to the status of representing the person of Jesus Christ, both in a historic and an eschatological sense. This representation has been epitomized in the eucharist and other sacraments in which there is required a vicarious agent of Christ, which must be male. Therefore, in order for women to fill this role the essential meaning of "ordination" must be changed.

Traditionally, Anglicans have agreed with Roman Catholics that since no women were included in Jesus' Twelve disciples nor in the Apostles of Acts, by implication women are unsuitable for ordination to the priesthood.⁷⁴ However, many scholars fail to see any merit to such an argument. First, there is very little to link discipleship or apostleship with the traditional doctrine of priesthood and

⁷³Torquil Paterson, "The Ordination of Women: A Contribution to the Debate within the CPISA," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, No. 66 (March, 1989), p. 28.

⁷⁴Jill Holen, "One in Christ: Split at the Pulpit," Cross Times (May-June, 1989).

the concept of administering sacraments, and the absence of women among Jesus' special disciples or among the Apostles has, in the opinion of many scholars, no bearing on ordination. If the limitation of the Twelve to males implicitly excludes women from ordination, then, presumably, it could be argued that the only suitable candidates for priesthood would be Jewish males from the province of Galilee.

But clearly this line of reasoning is void of theological substance, and an explanation for an exclusively male membership in the Twelve must be sought in cultural and sociological factors at the time. Besides, as suggested in Chapter Two, women were among the most faithful of Jesus' followers, and there is strong evidence that in the early church many women were active in evangelism and various ministries which would warrant ordination in most churches today.

Advocates of female equality within the Anglican community insist that the essential identifying characteristics of God's image are not found in gender but in the qualities and abilities in individuals, and that Christianity presents a theology of personhood which calls both males and females to minister without discrimination.⁷⁵ In order for Christ to be human he had to have gender, and neither maleness nor femaleness relates in any way to the

⁷⁵Ahrends, Ibid.

spiritual essence of his ministry. Paterson argues that the continued clinging to a belief in individual sacerdotal power is a reflection of human sin, and a reversion to the Old Testament priestly model. The chief New Testament fulfillment of the the Jewish priesthood is Christ himself, which is passed on to the entire body of Christ through redemption.⁹⁶ Therefore, ordination should pertain only to ordering the liturgical assembly, and should not imply the performance of vicarious works of Christ or any other tasks suggestive of a status beyond that implicit in baptism.

Clearly, the debate concerning female ordination in the Anglican community is complicated by the close relationship of this with a number of other doctrinal and traditional issues, such as the nature and definition of priesthood and the concept of sacraments. Therefore, it would seem that the reluctance on the part of conservatives to concede is due in part to their unwillingness to deal with the implications of such a decision for other aspects of church doctrine.

c. Southern Baptist.

There are a number of rather large conservative Protestant churches which oppose female ordination, but whose reasons are less complicated than those of Anglican or Roman Catholic tradition. Southern Baptists, for example, believe in the priesthood of all believers and do not define the role

⁹⁶Paterson, p. 33.

of the clergy in terms of administering sacraments or absolving sins, which in Catholic tradition has been limited to males by association with the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, for Baptists the debate rests totally upon the immediate New Testament suggestions that women should be silent in church and have no authority over men. In the light of the original context of relevant New Testament passages, discussed in Chapter Two, Baptist arguments against female ordination are unconvincing.

According to some reports, over three hundred women have been ordained in Southern Baptist churches. But in October of 1986 the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention voted to disallow women from ordination, upholding traditional discrimination against them in terms of church leadership. Feminists in that group were both outraged and defiant. At a meeting in St. Louis the Steering Committee agreed that "women will continue to answer God's call, and God will continue to choose whomever God wills, regardless of the vote of a board of fallible human beings."⁹⁷ Conventions in Oklahoma and California have struck from their membership those churches which have ordained women as pastors or deacons. Jimmy Draper, president for the Southern Baptist Convention, has stated that the issue should not be a test of orthodoxy. And it seems that much of the debate has more to

⁹⁷Susan Lockwood Wright, "SBC Women Ministers Break Their Silence," The Christian Century (November 12, 1986), p. 998.

do with whether the Convention has a right to tell a church whom it can ordain.⁷⁸

d. Plymouth Brethren.

Much the same is true of the Plymouth Brethren. These churches have no formal organization or creed, but base their doctrine on a conservative interpretation of scripture. However, Davis Duggins, publisher of Interest magazine and a representative of this group in public relations, says that the subject of women's ministry is currently a major topic of discussion among them. He writes:

The traditional position has been to interpret the restrictive passages of Scripture very literally. Hence, women did not participate vocally in public meetings, nor hold official leadership positions. In addition, most brethren churches encourage women to wear a head covering during public meetings.⁷⁹

Duggins goes on to explain, however, that in recent years some Brethren churches have modified these positions, and changes are still occurring. They do not have ordination, in the same sense as other denominations do, and only recognize God's individual calling into areas of full-time Christian service. Women might be commended, but their work will never include public preaching or administrative duties usually associated with the traditional concept of minister, pastor

⁷⁸Green, p. 6.

⁷⁹Davis Duggins, personal correspondence, December 28, 198

or priest.

e. Evangelical Churches.

The term "evangelical" can be applied to a large number of churches, many of whom are members of organizations that overtly use that name. Their doctrine borders on fundamentalism though generally evangelicals do not like that label, preferring to see their roots in Barth's "neo-orthodoxy."¹⁰⁰ The Evangelical Free Church has ordained women in the past but now does not. According to Kenneth Kantzer, president of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, the issue will not be resolved within evangelical circles for at least another generation.¹⁰¹ Virginia Hearn states that the evangelical feminist movement in North America is still comparatively small. At the 1973 meetings of Evangelicals for Social Action caucuses were formed to promote feminism, resulting in The Evangelical Women's Caucus formed in 1978. But only a fraction of evangelical churches are associated with it today.¹⁰²

Traditionalists among the Evangelicals appeal to the same arguments as do other conservative and fundamentalist

¹⁰⁰Milton V. Backman, Jr. Christian Churches of America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), pp. 223-6.

¹⁰¹Green, p. 6.

¹⁰²Virginia Hearn, "Christian Feminists in North America: The Experience of Evangelical Women," Dialogue & Alliance, Vol. II, No 3 (Fall, 1988), p. 68.

Protestant churches, and therefore are not unique in their stance. However, many Evangelical scholars have emerged as leaders in the current Christian feminist movement in America.¹⁰³ Roberta Hestenes, for example, is an associate professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. Rosemary Radford Ruether, although a Roman Catholic, is Professor of Applied Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Other Evangelical feminist writers who are worthy of note include Nancy Hardesty, Judith Steinmetz, Katie Funk Wiebe and Letha Scanzoni.

f. Black Churches in America.

James H. Cone, professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, points out that black women in the church had a burden even greater than the double jeopardy of racism and sexism suffered by black women in general, in fact a "triple jeopardy." From the beginning of women suffrage black churches in America agreed with Sojourner Truth, Ida Wells and Harriett Tubman regarding white racism, but it did not support their views on women's rights.¹⁰⁴ Black attitudes toward women ministers remained similar to that of

¹⁰³Hestenes, p. 6-1; Virginia Hearn, "Christian Feminists in North America: The Experience of Evangelical Women," Dialogue & Alliance, Vol. II, No. 3 (Fall, 1988), gives a thorough treatment of today's feminist movement from an Evangelical view point, starting in 1974 with the roots of the Evangelical Women's Caucus.

¹⁰⁴Cone, p. 126.

white denominations, and for similar reasons.¹⁰⁵

The African Methodist Episcopal church is a prime example. Largely because women were insisting they also had a calling from God, the AME church created the offices of stewardess in 1869 and deaconess in 1900. But in spite of its progressive nature, as compared to other black churches, the AME church had difficulty in granting the right to women to preach. Although some women were granted license to preach this denomination did not make it official until 1884, and even then it was limited to the subordinate office of "evangelist." Bishop Henry McNeal Turner was publicly reprimanded for ordaining a woman, stated clearly by the General Conference in 1888:

Whereas Bishop H. M. Turner has seen fit to ordain a woman to the order of a deacon; and whereas said act is contrary to the usage of our church, and without precedent in any other body of Christians in the known world; and as it cannot be proved by the scriptures that a woman has ever been ordained to the order of the ministry; therefore be it enacted that the bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church be and hereby (are) forbidden to ordain a woman to the order of deacon or elder in our church.¹⁰⁶

In spite of general opposition the nineteenth and early

¹⁰⁵An exception is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (the Black Lutheran Church), which as of 1980 has ordained women.

¹⁰⁶Jualynne E. Dodson, "19th Century AME Preaching Women," H.F. Thomas and R.S. Keller (eds.), Women in New Worlds (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), p. 287.

twentieth centuries saw a number of outstanding black female preachers, the most famous being Jarena Lee of the AME church.¹⁰⁷ But today there are still no female bishops, general officers, college presidents or pastors of major churches in the AME church.

Cone argues convincingly that the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and '70s reinforced sexism in the black community, particularly in the church. The attitude of black males remained harshly traditional, suggested by the alleged words of Stokely Carmichael: "The only position for women in the SNCC is prone."¹⁰⁸ Black preachers during that era became strong advocates of women's inferiority. Cone states:

As some white male ministers began to retreat in the face of emerging power of the woman's movement in the seminary and church, black clergymen laughed at white men's inability to keep women in their place. At the same time they mimicked white antifeminist conservatives by preaching about the value of the American family in which wives are subordinate to their husbands. This was the sanctimonious- supposedly biblical- version of the male revolutionary's demand that black women stand behind their men.¹⁰⁹

The black movement in the USA was largely controlled by black theologians and ministers. The only woman asked to sign the "Black Power Statement" issued by the National Conference of

¹⁰⁷Cone, p. 127.

¹⁰⁸Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

¹⁰⁹Cone, p. 132.

Black Churchmen in 1966 was Dr. Anna Hedgeman, author and staff member of the NCC commission on race and religion. Black male theology was criticized by a few significant women, such as Pauli Murray, an Episcopal priest and lawyer, and Theresa Hoover, an executive of the board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church.¹¹⁰

Matters began to change in black theology in the middle 1970s, but only after confrontation. Cone reflects upon his caution in presenting a paper at Union Theological Seminary in October of 1976:

If my paper can be compared to that of a southern white liberal, the reactions of many black male seminarians were similar to those of most reactionary southern white racists. They quoted the Bible to justify that women should not be ordained, and some even insisted that they should not even be in the pulpit.¹¹¹

Cone was shocked, but his black female colleagues were not. It was this reaction which made clear the need for a black feminist theology, which is today developing under the leadership of women like Pauli Murray, Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, Kelly Brown and Cheryl Gilkes.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Pauli Murray, "Black Theology and Feminist Theology: A Comparative View," Anglican Theological Review, January, 1978, pp. 3-24; Theresa Hoover, "Black Women and the Churches," Alice Hageman (ed.), Sexist Religion and Women in the Church (New York: Associated Press, 1974), pp. 63-76.

¹¹¹Cone, pp. 134-5.

¹¹²Cone's work, as well as black feminist theology in America and Africa, is discussed by C. Landman, "A profile of feminist theology," Sexism and Feminism in Theological

During the past decade as black female theologians from the USA have encountered women of various third world countries, for example at WCC and other ecumenical gatherings, they have been struck by the realization that triple jeopardy of black American women is but a shallow image of the global plight of women, both within and without the Christian tradition, and which requires a solidarity with black women.

g. Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa.

The family of churches categorized as "Dutch Reformed" in South Africa are Protestant in theology and therefore do not hold to the sacerdotal priesthood characteristic of the Roman Catholic and Anglican church communities. Their religious authority is found in sola scriptura, and therefore adherence to Pauline teachings as they are traditionally understood forms the basis their arguments against female ordination. Therefore, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, which is the main body of the church with white membership, as well as the Indian community called the Reformed Church in Africa, both take a very conservative position offering neither ordination nor any official ministry status to women.

The issue was discussed at the Synod of the Nederduitse

Gereformeerde Kerk van Natal, held in Pietermaritzburg, October 13, 1987. The Agenda and Report for that Synod outlines the church's position and arguments, which are essentially the same as those of other conservative Protestant churches.¹¹³ Various Pauline texts, as well as the literal details of the Garden of Eden narrative, form the basis of the church's theology of womanhood, which therefore hinges upon order and rank in creation. Woman was created as man's helper, equal to him and of the same spiritual value. But because she was taken out of him and made for his benefit, she is therefore of a lower rank and subject to his authority. Paul's doctrine of headship, the Synod states, does not just apply to the husband over the wife, but suggests the subordinate status of females to males in general. For this reason men should take the lead in all matters of the church.

There are, however, a number of contradictions in the Synod's position. The argument is made that Eve's sin resulted from taking on herself a leadership role, which in turn brought upon her and womankind the loss of spiritual equality with man. As a result man was made her ruler. This does not make sense if man was already her "head" and ruler from creation. It is further argued that in Jesus Christ woman is redeemed from this historic sin, in that she regains

¹¹³Agenda en Verslae van die Een-en-Taagtigste Vergadering van die Sinode van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Natal (Pietermaritzburg, 1987), pp. 430-459.

her spiritual relationship with God, participates in the spiritual kingdom, receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, and becomes an agent of prophecy. But the consequences of the original sin remain upon her, which includes pain in childbirth and domination by the male. If this is so, it seems that a woman experiences only a partial redemption in Jesus Christ, defined in nebulous if not totally meaningless terms. And if she remains excluded from positions of responsibility in the church, there is nothing about her status in the Christian church which is in any way superior to her status in the ancient Jewish synagogue.

Further, the Synod argues in one place that the prohibition of women to teach or hold a position of authority over a man pertains only to the church assembly, and not to situations outside the church. But elsewhere the argument is made that the hierarchy of male authority over females is a general social order, applicable to males and females as classes and not just to husbands and wives or to a specific category of women in the church. If this is true then Paul's doctrine would prohibit a Christian female from holding a position of authority over a male in any aspect of secular life. Therefore, these two arguments seem contradictory.

The Synod justifies Old Testament prophetesses on grounds that they worked outside the temple. But concerning the prophetesses of I Corinthians 11 the Synod concludes that Paul indeed permitted them to speak in the assembly of the

church, provided that they wore a sign on their heads of the male authority over them. These two arguments are inconsistent. Furthermore, until recently the Dutch Reformed Church required headcoverings for its women on the strength of this passage, but it has never viewed that practice as a token by which women might speak in the church.

As a result of the 1987 Synod the Commission for Learning and Current Matters was assigned the task of researching the status of women more thoroughly.¹¹⁴ Many leaders in the Dutch Reformed Church favour change on this issue, and there is considerable debate concerning the soundness and sensibility of the church's traditional position.¹¹⁵ The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sengingkerk, which is the Coloured branch of the church, as well as the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, have already granted women the right of ordination as ministers or pastors,¹¹⁶ and the

¹¹⁴Agenda and Report, pp. 451-459.

¹¹⁵Dom. Andre Franken, of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in Durban, stated in a personal conversation that he was in favour of female ordination and sees Pauline instruction as irrelevant for today as a paradigm for church organization. He added that his congregation was lacking in qualified males to serve as elders, and the membership had approved in principle, by popular vote, appointing women to that office.

¹¹⁶This is also true of the South African Unity churches, namely the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational bodies, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa. D.M. Ackermann, "The role of women in the church- certain practical theological perspectives," Sexism and feminism in Theological Perspective, W.S. Vorster, ed. (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984), p. 64.

Gereformeerde Kerk has an office of "diaken" to which women may be appointed, although this is clearly distinguished from other offices involving teaching and ruling. As a whole, the Dutch Reformed community in South Africa is under pressure from academic quarters to change its position on the status of women, and the subject is scheduled for careful review in 1990.¹¹⁷

h. Church of Christ.

The Churches of Christ are a fundamentalist Protestant group which emerged out of the Campbell-Stone Movement in early nineteenth century America. Their earliest major document is the famous Declaration and Address by Thomas Campbell with whom Churches of Christ are commonly identified.¹¹⁸ In that work Campbell denounced denominationalism as a great evil which divides the body of

¹¹⁷Ackermann, p. 64. Other than the UNISA publication, Sexism and Feminism, very little on the subject of women in Christian tradition has been published in South Africa. Landman, pp. 22-3, notes the absence of any substantial feminist theological voice. She also mentions the paradox that of the four female theologians on the staff at UNISA, none are ordained because of the current position of the churches of which they are members (two Roman Catholic, and two Dutch Reformed). They train ministers in a professional academic capacity, but cannot speak in the church assembly.

¹¹⁸Bedell, Sandon and Wellborn, pp. 463ff. This reference to Declaration and Address appears in a discussion of the Disciples of Christ, a smaller but better known group than the Church of Christ. The two are the result of a split around 1900 in the original Stone-Campbell movement. Alexander Campbell, son of Thomas, is a principal figure in this movement.

Christ, and urged believers to return to the Bible as sole authority in matters of faith and practice and the basis for unity. He coined the watch words still quoted today by many members of the Church of Christ, "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." Some of the key doctrines stressed by this movement are baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, plural eldership in each congregation, acapella singing, the Lord's Supper each Sunday, autonomy of each congregation, and opposition to written creeds. Leaders typically take a strong vocal stand against any doctrine they perceive as "unscriptural,"¹¹⁷ and in weekly preaching dwell on "the evils of denominationalism." An intense sectarian spirit has caused endless feuds and squabbles among congregations, each accusing the other of dangerous and heretical practices. And while having been born of a movement which sought to restore unity among believers, Churches of Christ paradoxically have contributed to a greater division simply through a hermeneutic which makes unity impossible.

Doctrinally and traditionally Churches of Christ remain conservative in the extreme. They have no physical headquarters, and despite having no official creed they have

¹¹⁷For ties with the watchword ad fontes of early Renaissance Christian Humanism, as well as Reformation appeal to sola scriptura and pattern theology in English Puritanism see Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ (Abilene: ACU Press, 1988).

managed to perpetuate a body of dogma, with only slight variations, for over a hundred years. Members of this group have the reputation for believing themselves to be the only true church, the restored church of the New Testament, and consequently the only body of saved people among all Christian denominations. Even though they acknowledge members of the Christian Church to have experienced salvation upon baptism, their use of instrumental music in worship is considered to be heresy which then robs them of that grace.

Biblical hermeneutics for the Church of Christ is governed by a plenary verbal view of inspiration and a ardent devotion to the authority of scripture. Consequently, prevalent interpretation of biblical passages concerning the status of women is quite traditional.¹²⁰ Churches of Christ today number over 13, 000 in the USA, the largest being Madison Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee with over four thousand members.¹²¹ They have perhaps three million members total, although figures are difficult to obtain from outside the United States. There have been many fragmentations also, each having little or no recognized

¹²⁰Rejection of deaconesses in early church; Burton Coffman, Commentary on Romans (Austin: Firm Foundation, 1973), p. 508; Sees Galatians 3:28 as spiritual equality, Coffman, Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, p. 66; Rejects possibility of female prophetism or public prayer in the early church, Coffman, Commentary on I and II Corinthians, p. 165-79; etc.

¹²¹Mac Lynn, Where the Saints Meet (Pensacola: Firm Foundation, 1987).

fellowship with the others. One group uses a common cup for the Sunday observance of Communion, and rejects those churches that use multiple cups. Another group opposes having Sunday School, and another is opposed to church cooperation in funding orphan's homes and such like.¹²²

Women in Churches of Christ are characteristically very active in the life of the church, serving and working in many capacities. But what they are permitted and assigned to do is overshadowed by the principle of subjection. Interpretation of pertinent scriptures is essentially the same as that of the Plymouth Brethren, with the exception of the head-covering. There a few very conservative churches that require veils for women, or hats similar to those common in the Dutch Reformed Church. But this is rare.¹²³ It is becoming more common for Church of Christ exegetes to understand I Corinthians 11 to deal with hair length, rather than a veil, but no attempt has been made to regulate hair length.¹²⁴ Women do not preach, teach mixed adult classes, lead singing or prayers in a public assembly, nor do they hold any recognized church office or perform any duties which

¹²²Commonly called "Anti" groups because of their opposition to various practices.

¹²³Also common among the "Anti" group.

¹²⁴Dickson, p. 454.

might be interpreted as having authority over a man.¹²⁵

Today many members of the Church of Christ are aware of the inconsistency of their church doctrine concerning women. Many women in the church have master's and doctor's degrees, serve on school boards, teach in universities, hold executive positions in business, and make authoritative public statements, with no repercussions in the church. But a problem arises with the concept of "religious authority" and with leadership in "public worship." In this connection women must be silent and in subjection.

How this is interpreted and applied is quite arbitrary, and hopelessly inconsistent. Women can prepare the elements for the Lord's Supper, but they cannot serve them during the assembly. They may sing as part of the congregation and say "amen" at the end of prayers, but they cannot lead a public prayer, sing a solo, direct a choir or lead the entire congregation in song. They can ask questions in a Bible class, read scripture aloud and even make comments, but they cannot make announcements to the whole congregation or read scripture in that part of the assembly designated "the worship service." Further inconsistency exists in the fact that Churches of Christ commonly have secretaries who handle a major part of the office management, and deacons' wives

¹²⁵James O. Baird, "God Assigned a Special Role for Women in the Church," Introducing the Church of Christ John Waddey, ed. (Ft. Worth: Star, 1981) pp. 121-125; Roger E. Dickson, International New Testament Study Commentary (Church of Christ: 1987), p. 454, 465, 593.

who do some or all of their husbands' work for them. But they are not permitted to be called ministers or deacons.

The matter is not just enforced by men, however. The women are very sensitive about what they understand to be their proper place. At this stage many, perhaps most, would not lead a public prayer if so permitted. It would be embarrassing and a burden on sensitive consciences. In most cases should a boy of twelve be baptized his Sunday school teacher will feel uncomfortable instructing him and will insist on his being removed to an older class with a male teacher. Should a man wish to sit in on a ladies' class the teacher will either insist on his leaving, or will ask him to teach in her stead. A woman will not pray in front of a man. Many will never lead prayers at the family table; only at their children's bedside.

In recent years many members of the Church of Christ have become openly critical of the "brotherhood" for its inconsistency both in hermeneutics and practice, particularly with regard to the status of women. In the mid seventies Hoy Ledbetter, Norman Parks, Bobbie Lee Holley and a few others were quite vocal on the issue of women in the church, although their message was strongly denounced.¹²⁶ However Parks, now in his eighties, is more confident than ever that Churches of Christ will make changes on this issue with

¹²⁶Hoy Ledbetter, "The Prophetess," Integrity (July, 1973); Norman L. Parks, Woman's Place in Church Activity (Grand Blanc: Integrity, 1975).

time.¹²⁷ Stephen Sandifer, minister for a large church in Houston, has recently published a work examining the continual discussion in history concerning deaconesses, largely from the standpoint of Church of Christ tradition. His purpose is clearly to urge changes, and he concludes optimistically:

In years to come, one congregation will have no deacons, another will have deacons, and another will have deacons male and female. Hopefully these congregations will respect the autonomy of each other and the attempts of the leadership to be true to the Word in their ministry for God.¹²⁸

But it is quite obvious that Sandifer still writes from the perspective of traditional male domination. He acknowledges the existence of deaconesses in the primitive church and the acceptability of this role of service today, but he is careful to declare that even deaconesses are not ordained officers or evangelists and that they have always been under the authority of men.

There are a few churches taking slow but certain steps away from this exceptionally narrow tradition.¹²⁹ Several

¹²⁷Personal phone conversation, December, 1987.

¹²⁸J. Stephen Sandifer, Deacons: Male and Female? (Houston: Sandifer, 1989), p. 193. It is noteworthy that no brotherhood publisher was willing to publish this work, so Sandifer undertook the venture on his own. That is typically the case on controversial issues.

¹²⁹The lead in this movement seems to be coming from Texas churches, those in the deep South being much more conservative. Richland Hills in Ft. Worth, Texas has a woman

churches are considering appointing deaconesses, although at first they will be called something innocuous like "special servants" to lessen the outcry.¹³⁰ But the practice of "withdrawal of fellowship" among Churches of Christ has provided the organization an incredible defence against anything considered to be "heresy." Hence anyone who becomes too vociferous on a delicate issue is either silenced, pressured to leave or is officially excommunicated. By this means, along with controlling financial aid, the conservative element of the Church also manages to censure the academic voice from various colleges and universities. The practice of congregational autonomy among Churches of Christ, with no form of central headquarters or conventions to determine policy, makes significant change all but impossible. Furthermore, local church elders are for the most part "laymen" with little or no biblical, theological or ecclesiastical education. More than sixty per cent of Church of Christ ministers are non-degreed, holding diplomas from church financed schools of preaching. Consequently, control

as Benevolence Minister and is currently engaged in dialogue about deaconesses. For a time Bering Drive in Houston had women praying, reading scripture and serving the Lord's Supper, but have recently reverted to traditional format. Bammel Road in Houston has a Women's Minister (Maryanna Long), Burke Road in Pasadena has a female Youth Minister, and Lake Highlands in Dallas has a woman teaching an adult Bible class.

¹³⁰Unpublished transcript of a panel discussion by Bill New (elder), Jon Jones (minister), and Eldred Echols (minister of missions) at Richland Hills Church of Christ, November 13, 1988.

of brotherhood thinking lies with schools of preaching and various conservative publications, both of which tend to serve as tools of indoctrination rather than education.

Nevertheless, as worded by James E. Howard, minister for the White Station Church of Christ in Memphis: "The next great issue in the church will most certainly be that of the role of women."¹³¹ Since this is the church of which the present writer is a member and has been a minister for over twenty years, conclusions reached in this study will hopefully find some degree of acceptance and will assist those who are willing to undertake positive change.

Conclusion

The difference between "liberal" and "conservative" churches is difficult to define, although it generally relates to their views on inspiration of scripture and how literally and fundamentally biblical teachings are thought to apply to life today.¹³² For the sake of this study such a distinction is important in order to understand the means by which a church has been able to change its official policies and traditions. It is clear that the "liberal" churches have been able to adjust to change more easily than the conservative ones, and were the first to take positive steps with regard to the status of women.

¹³¹Cover statement, Sandifer, Deacons: Male and Female?

¹³²Bedell, Sandon and Wellborn, pp. 224-284.

It is interesting that some conservative churches have changed their position on women also. But as a rule such is accomplished either by reinterpreting relevant passages in order to eradicate the basis for previous church doctrines, or by simply declaring those passages irrelevant to today's context because they were addressed to situations which no longer exist. In either case, the result is a radical doctrinal change without reconsideration of the basic hermeneutical approach by which their theology is defined. Such seems to be a serious contradiction.

Generally, the issue of ordination tends to be a focal point simply because conclusions reached on that issue both represent and determine conclusions on all others specifically related to women in the church and society.¹³³ It is also clear that the dilemma is more critical among churches with a more sacramental and cultic concept of priesthood, such as the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Churches, and the large community of Orthodox Churches. For them the issue of ordination pertains to the spiritual relationship of the male Christ to the female Church, which is His Bride. This relationship is facilitated by male priests who stand in the place of Christ in administering

¹³³Phoebe Swart-Russell, "Towards Our Liberation: A New Vision of Church and Ministry," Journal Of Theology for Southern Africa, No. 66 (March, 1989), p. 34.

sacraments.¹³⁴ Therefore, changing their position on the status of women will require perhaps radical changes in their entire theology.

Foregoing analyses of historical backgrounds to the New Testament teaching on the status of women, as well as exegetical studies of relevant passages, suggest that female subordination is a social ideology upheld by Judaism and by Christian tradition as a whole, but opposed in principle by the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, it must be concluded that objections by modern feminists to traditional patriarchy, with all its ramifications, are quite valid and there is no compelling reason for the church to perpetuate the tradition of female subordination in any form. There is, in the view of the present writer, no theological justification for debarring women from ordination, from any other office or ministry of the church, or from participation in any function in church assemblies traditionally reserved for men. Nor is there justification for insisting upon or promoting male authority in marriage based upon biblical prescriptions.

These essential conclusions become a major premise for further tasks and conclusions which have immediate relevance to the lives of Christians, both in the home and in the activities of the church, and these will be set forth in the final chapter of this thesis.

¹³⁴Denise Ackerman, "Women barred in Christian Church," Seek (June-July, 1989), pp. 8-9.

Chapter Five

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Today we live in a world of exceptionally rapid advancement and unparalleled freedom for women, not just in the west but in most developed countries as well. In advanced cultures female elevation is evident in economics, science, politics, and education. Although it is less pronounced in poorer societies, even in Third World countries liberation theology is becoming a springboard for the advancement of women's status. In every sphere of life women are discovering a new identity, with self expression and acceptance as the equals of men.

But religion in general, including Christianity, not only has failed to keep pace but has been a major hindrance to women's advancement. Resultingly, a grave dilemma is being faced by traditionalists. Craig Bird, features editor for the Southern Baptist Press in Nashville, stated one practical problem succinctly: "You've got a lot of highly educated women coming out with Master of Divinity degrees, having mastered Hebrew and Greek, and having no place to go."¹ A survey conducted by Christianity Today among evangelical seminaries in the United States reveals that today one fifth of the students are female, and the

¹Roberta Green, "Cutting Across Convention," United Evangelical Action (January-February, 1984), p. 7.

percentage is increasing each year.²² Many are trained to assume positions their churches are not prepared to give them.

Some churchmen see the Holy Spirit's call to minister as one of the most powerful legitimizing factors in today's feminist movement in the Church.²³ It must be recognized that the concept of divine calling is also a questionable notion among scholars, especially because there is no legitimate means of testing, verifying or denying personal religious experiences. Neither a priori assertions nor subjective faith carry as much scholastic weight as tangible evidence and scientific verification. Yet the religious experience is largely subjective, or existential, and one's conviction of a personal calling, whether or not it is by a dramatic supernatural means, remains significant. Like the charismata of the first century, the present feminist movement possibly heralds a new spiritual awakening. And who can deny its power? In the words of Seventh Day Adventist John C. Brunt, recalling Peter's response to a similar dilemma, "Can anyone keep these women from being ordained?

²²Beth Spring and Kelsey Menehan, "Women in Seminary: Preparing for What? Christianity Today (November 5, 1986), pp. 18-23.

²³Elsie Gibson, When the Minister is a Woman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 34-59; Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Proceed With Care," Christianity Today, Vol. 30, No. 14 (October 3, 1986), p. 14-I.

They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."⁴

The present feminist movement also is considered by some scholars to be a very significant element in social evolution.⁵ It is quite evident that continued social advancement will see women gaining more and more ground toward genuine equity, and that this will apply persistent pressure on all religions to adjust accordingly. As Roberta Hestenes points out, rapid advancement in the status of women, their changing life styles, and increasing pressure from the feminist movement worldwide have all combined to force churches to rethink their official positions.⁶ Harold H. Oliver comments that feminism is the greatest challenge ever to confront the church, since it opens the door for serious and radical rethinking of both the religious experience and the entire Christian tradition.⁷

Tavard argues that the changing position of society on the status of women is irrelevant to theology.⁸ Before, the

⁴John C. Brunt, "Ordination of Women: A Hermeneutical Question," Ministry (September, 1988), p. 14.

⁵Dean Pederson, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; Spring and Menehan, p. 19.

⁶Roberta Hestenes, "Women in Leadership: Finding Ways to Serve the Church," Christianity Today, Insert (September 3, 1986), p. 10. Cf. Hestenes, The Next Step: Women in a Divided Church (Waco: Word, 1987).

⁷Harold H. Oliver, "Beyond the Feminist Critique: A Shaking of Foundations," The Christian Century (May 1, 1985), p. 446.

⁸George Tavard, Women in Christian Tradition (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 218.

church unwittingly followed society in restricting women, using scripture as its authority. To reverse its position now, again following society, obliterates its claim to divine authenticity and invalidates its purpose of making known to the world the manifold wisdom of God. The church, he says, should come to conclusions independent of social trends.

His point is valid in one sense, but clearly also naive and idealistic. Regardless whether churches take the lead in this element of social change or find themselves tagging along behind, the total issue is very much a theological one and must be dealt with on a theological level, as well as a practical, sociological level.⁹ Edwards correctly observes that only recently have we come to appreciate the close inter-relationship between socio-cultural factors, biblical interpretation and the current doctrine of God.¹⁰ In a variety of ways the Church and Christian tradition have been led to enlightenment by certain positive social trends and through religio-social revolt, beginning perhaps with the Renaissance. Failure to recognize this possibility results in hermeneutics infused by preconceptions and prejudice.

The issue of the status of women comes at a time in which Christian theology is undergoing serious self

⁹Roger Haight, "Women in the Church: a Theological Reflection," Toronto Journal of Theology, Vol. II, No. 1 (1986), pp. 108.

¹⁰F. Edwards, "God from a feminist perspective," Sexism and Feminism in Theological Perspective, W.S. Vorster, ed. (Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1984), pp. 36-7.

examination and radical paradigm shifts away from classic systematic, historical and metaphysical approaches toward a religious pluralism and a search for meaning in the God-consciousness of humanity as a whole.¹¹ This means that feminist theology, and the entire issue of the status of women in the church, is a significant element of a much broader movement in world theology. And the issue is much deeper than most realize, lying at the very core of the Christian faith and pertaining to the very foundation of all church doctrines and Christian beliefs. The status of women in the church is but a part of the very complex paradigm of patriarchy which has prevailed in all cultures throughout recorded history till the present. It is most evident in the traditional marriage hierarchy, in which the male holds a position of authority and the female a station of subordination and subjection. And for Christians, the issue hinges very largely upon the authority of scripture. Therefore it is almost axiomatic that dealing with a problem of this magnitude requires that the church come to grips with a number of deeper implications.

Paterson states that accepting the ordination of women is in fact a symbolic change which reflects the psyche's awareness of a transition in socio-sexual relationships. It is logical, therefore, that those who accept or support

¹¹Robert H. King, "The Task of Systematic Theology," Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks (London: SPCK, 1983), pp. 21-27.

these social changes will also support the ordination of women, and those who oppose them reject the ordination of women.¹² And it follows also that conclusions on this issue have ramifications in every aspect of male and female relations, and in certain respects cutting to the marrow of each specific denominational identity. As Haight suggests:

Theological reflection should do more than remove theological obstacles to the ordination of women. It should offer a positive theological affirmation that supports the Christian vision of the freedom through liberation and equality through salvation of human beings.¹³

Paterson adds that the ordination of women is "a symptom of a veritable morass of confusions, and is just one of the many signs of the present theological transition in a confused world."¹⁴

For this reason the thrust of this thesis is determining the theological implications of the present dilemma for all churches in the light of the mass of historical and exegetical studies in recent years. It is one thing to establish the status of women in the ancient world, or to determine exegetically the meaning of biblical teachings in their original context. But interpreting those teachings in terms which are meaningful and relevant to the contemporary

¹²Torquil Paterson, "The Ordination of Women: A Contribution to the Debate within the CPSA," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, No. 66 (March, 1989), p.25.

¹³Haight, p. 109.

¹⁴Paterson, p. 24.

church is quite another matter. Therefore, conclusions to be drawn from this study are many, and each presents further problems for future theoretical and practical exploration.

1. SCRIPTURE: INSPIRATION, AUTHORITY AND HERMENEUTICS

Perhaps the most critical issue underlying the dilemma concerning the status of women is the entire concept of inspiration of scripture.¹⁵ Stated in simple terms, until the rise of modern scholarship the Bible has been viewed as fully and totally "God-breathed," and therefore inerrant and infallible.¹⁶ Accordingly, the Genesis account of creation has been understood as accurate and factual history, and all its implications concerning the station of women taken as undeniable testimony of God's design from the beginning.¹⁷

We have noted that many have tried to deal with the enormous difficulties posed by modern feminism by explaining away any traditional sexist implications in both Genesis and Pauline writings. But in the end such efforts fail against the obvious patriarchal and androcentric overtones of most ancient literature, Pauline works included. It becomes unavoidable that the only genuine solution is to be found in

¹⁵Pivotal verse is II Timothy 3:16-17.

¹⁶James Barr, Escaping From Fundamentalism (London: SCM, 1984), pp. 1-7.

¹⁷The implications of this rationale are explored by E.E. Ellis, Paul's Use of the Old Testament. See also D. M. Beegle, Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

a reexamination of the conservative approach to scripture, and an abandonment of the plenary verbal view of inspiration.¹⁸ Conservatives must give more careful attention to the common use made of the Old Testament by Jesus and by New Testament writers such as Paul.¹⁹ It should also be considered a possibility that Paul believed the Adam and Eve story to be literally true, though it was not, and that neither inspiration nor apostleship made him infallible as a writer or evangelist. Works such as I Timothy appear to form only a part of a much larger base of Christian literature from which the church selected documents which it deemed suitable.²⁰ This process eliminated works which promoted female elevation,²¹ and in turn canonized those which promoted traditional androcentricity. This traditional bias unfortunately robbed the church of a vital element of the Gospel and hindered its full expression in socially meaningful terms.

The conservative view of inspiration is challenged further by the existence of certain myths within the Judaeo-

¹⁸Perhaps the finest recent analysis of the problem of fundamentalism is by James Barr, Fundamentalism (London: SCM Press, 1973); and Escaping From Fundamentalism (London: SCM Press, 1984).

¹⁹James Barr, Escaping From Fundamentalism, pp. 8-19.

²⁰James Barr, Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism (London: Oxford University Press, 1983).

²¹E.g., Acts of Paul and Thecla discussed earlier.

Christian tradition and within biblical literature.²² In Chapter Two of this thesis it was demonstrated that many of the traditional beliefs concerning women, derived from or supported by biblical literature, are in fact mythical in nature.

Elizabeth Janeway observes that myth exists entirely in the present. It is essentially the world of our imagination, consisting of beliefs which influence perception of real events. But it draws from alleged events or concepts in the past which it sees as both sacred and eternal, and their relevance to the present are reinforced by means of ritual.²³ Myth in relation to role behaviour is a means of knowing and understanding the structure of our world, the way society creates and maintains itself. Therefore, myth is not without value. Around 1920 Bronislaw Malinowski wrote:

Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. . . it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. . . a statement of a primeval, greater and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of

²²Any belief or ideology which has no basis in fact.

²³Elizabeth Janeway, Man's World, Woman's Place (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 136-7.

mankind are determined.²⁴

But the problem in much church tradition is the confusion of myth with truth. Thinking about myth and woman's place requires triple thinking, involving history, values and present facts. As society changes there is of necessity a continual reexamination of its norms and beliefs against demonstrable fact, and thereby myth gives way to enlightenment. Unless a society can change more rapidly than it has in the past, inaccurate perception of reality will continue to hinder social advancement and obscure great truths which humanity as a whole needs to discover. But inevitably today's misconceptions will become tomorrow's myth. According to Janeway:

Woman's role is a good laboratory example to examine, because it has been the scene of such a struggle long enough for us to note effects and not simply beginnings. Here, roles are changing and even some of the mythology surrounding them has been shifted and replaced.²⁵

The acknowledgment of myth within scripture is not to reject scripture as divinely inspired, but to gain a new and better understanding of inspiration and the application of scripture to the human life and to changing human societies. Yet it does require an abandonment of definitions and prescriptions

²⁴Bronislaw Malinowski, Myth in Primitive Society, 1926. Quoted by Janeway, p. 42.

²⁵Janeway, pp. 133.

which are self contradictory and lead to absurd and ignoble conclusions. The concept of plenary verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of scripture have done precisely this with regard to the church's position on the status of women. Therefore, resolution of the immediate dilemma requires giving up the fallacious foundation upon which patriarchy has rested in the Christian tradition.

Authority of Scripture

Following upon these assertions there arises the need to rethink the traditional view of the authority of scripture for matters of church doctrine and practical Christian living.²⁶ The dilemma surrounding the status of women rests largely in the conservative view of the Bible which tends to predetermine the outcome of biblical exegesis regardless of other relevant factors.²⁷ The question of the status of women is perhaps the clearest illustration of the theological

²⁶This trend in modern times began with historical-critical approach to scripture, applied theologically by Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Ernst Kasemann, and others, spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this century conservatism has been defended by Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Presbyterian theologian Gresham Machen. See Louis Praamsma, The Church in the Twentieth Century, Vol. VII (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1981), pp. 226-234. Also in general by a broad range of conservative and fundamentalist churches, such as the Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Churches of Christ, Pentecostals, etc.

²⁷This is far more demanding than the plea of sola scriptura of the Reformation, which simply rejected tradition holding to the Bible alone as the source and authority for church teaching.

cul de sac created by a fundamental and legalistic approach to scripture, which has been rejected by many theologians and scholars, some even calling it heresy.²⁸ In conservative tradition there has existed a clear tendency to elevate the Bible above its claims for itself. As Fiorenza has stated, "In maintaining verbal inspiration of all passages, the Church has made the Bible into a fetish."²⁹

Bruce Waltke is representative of the entire conservative tradition in his defence of hierarchism, which he states is based on "three truths self evident in scripture." These three are: first, that man and woman are equal in bearing the image of God and in their standing before God; second, that God prescribed that the husband is the head of the wife; third, that church administration must be consistent with the home, and therefore all church leadership must be male.³⁰ To him the issue is quite simple: "the Bible says it, and that is that." In this way Christians have come to employ the Bible as the ultimate authority in defence of traditional views.

The assertion that much of the traditional teaching

²⁸James D. Smart, The Past, Present and Future of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), p. 147-52.

²⁹Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Women in the Early Christian Movement," Womanspirit Rising, Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds. (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1979), p. 85.

³⁰Bruce Waltke, "Male Headship," Christianity Today, Vol. 30, No. 16 (October 3, 1986), p. 13-1.

among churchmen on the status of women is myth does indeed affect the authoritative stance of the Bible, and the resolution of the present dilemma requires the acknowledgement of this fact by churches where the problem is most acute. It has become clear to many Christians that other self evident truths, both within scripture and without, force a reconsideration of Waltke's assessment of biblical truth. James Barr observes this very problem in fundamentalism, stating:

Against these uses (or abuses) of scripture, the majority judgment has insisted upon the balance of scripture as a whole: for instance, though there are individual passages of scripture that seem to emphasize the subservience of women, the total impact of scripture and the final implication of its entire message must be such as to counter that subservience and to work for the full equality and honour of women in the eyes of God.³¹

Therefore, a balanced view of scripture is to accept that certain doctrines taught by biblical writers, more specifically New Testament writers, might not be ideal, good, universally appropriate, or even true. The Pauline doctrine on women, for example, might be in direct conflict with the tone and spirit of the Gospel. Conversely, the ordination of women might be technically in conflict with the teachings of Paul but in harmony with the overall spirit and tone of the Gospel, and is therefore "scriptural" in a broader

³¹James Barr, Escaping From Fundamentalism, pp. 111-12.

theological sense.³² Therefore the desire for some scriptural authority for a specific doctrine need not depend upon the fundamental teachings of one or two New Testament passages or spokesmen.

In examining the rituals and customs of a variety of cultures, sociologists Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni found four ways in which religious systems have attempted to deal with the very obvious distinction between the sexes.³³ One approach stresses the antithesis, or polarity of the sexes, with a concomitant exclusion of one from the rights, privileges and status of the other. A second approach stresses the complementary nature of the sexes, each being equal to the other, a counterpart to the other, but one being active and the other passive. A third approach stresses the blending or synthesis formed when the two become one, specifically in marriage. And the fourth is a transcendent approach, overlooking or denying sexual distinction, at least as far as religion is concerned. A major source of confusion about the Judaeo-Christian tradition is that all four of these approaches can be found in the Bible, and it is the Bible which Christians claim as the basis for their faith. It is this awareness which has lead many scholars to conclude

³²Terms like "scriptural" and "biblical" are commonly used in evangelical and fundamentalist circles to describe doctrines which they deem sound, measured against an inerrant and authoritative Bible.

³³Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be (Waco: Word Books, 1974), p. 14.

that the Bible is in fact ambivalent on the subject of women, and as a whole cannot be viewed as an authoritative pattern for one or other doctrine and practice because it does not present a clear or consistent picture.

The great number of works published recently by conservative theologians on the subject of women reflects a desperation to resolve this very significant issue. There are two approaches to the status of women which are finding a large degree of acceptance. One is simply to reinterpret each relevant passage so as to extrapolate a less discriminatory doctrine, thereby preserving a conservative view of inspiration and at the same time granting to women a measure of freedom and equality which will ease the present tension.³⁴ This is what Verdesi calls "co-optation," which amounts to a token gesture with no practical substance.³⁵

The other approach is to view Pauline doctrines as inspired and authoritative, but often directed to transient cultural problems which are irrelevant today. This would

³⁴This has been the case on almost every related passage; i.e. the meaning of "head" in I Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5, the meaning of "authority" in I Corinthians 11, the meaning of "silence" in I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2, etc.

³⁵E. H. Verdesi, In But Still Out: Women in the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 22. Co-optation occurs when an organization responds to wants or demands by appointing a special interest group and assigning them informal service roles to placate them, but granting no true authority or decision making powers. D.M. Ackermann, "The role of women in the church- certain practical theological perspectives," Sexism and Feminism, W.S. Vorster, ed. (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984), p. 77.

allow Paul to instruct wives to be subordinate simply because it was the expected demeanor of the first century, but not require that Christians of another time and place follow his instructions explicitly. This has been the approach most Protestant churches have taken to the headcovering issue of I Corinthians 11 and standards of dress and modesty in passages like I Peter 3:1-6 and I Timothy 2:9-10.

The flaw in both these approaches is that they represent a search for a solution without yielding ground on invalid presuppositions, and consequently they depend on speculations, dubious theories, and conjectures, rather than following logically upon the weight of historical evidence. Furthermore, both approaches create a tension equal to that caused by traditional patriarchy by advocating a hermeneutical method which is inconsistent and self contradictory.³⁴ Madeleine Boucher assesses the very obvious failure of such methods, asserting that the real cause of the dilemma lies in traditional views of biblical authority:

Theologians are often led to fresh insights by the new factors operating in their own time, especially intellectual and social factors. Then, because they stand in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, they turn to the Bible in search of texts with which to undergird these new insights. Yet, because they are seeking to answer contemporary questions, questions unknown to the biblical

³⁴Papers published in The Role of Women, edited by Shirley Lees (from which several writers have been quoted in this thesis) are a good example of the polarity of positions among conservative scholars.

writers, they sometimes interpret the biblical texts in a way which is more true to contemporary thought than to the thought of the biblical writers. The recent discussion of the place of women in the church is an example. As said above, modern man, as a result of numerous and complex factors operating in the last three centuries, is no longer able to hold an abstract ideology of equality while refusing to translate it into practical terms Thus, a study of the New Testament teaching on the role of women leads finally to one of the important questions of theology today, that of the relationship between contemporary theology, on the one hand, and an authoritative Bible on the other hand.³⁷

Many evangelical leaders and theologians realize that this is a fundamental issue, and are fearful of a trend leading their fellows to "jump on the bandwagon" without resolving more significant underlying questions. Carl Henry, for example, acknowledges that stifling women's creative gifts is desperately wrong. But he adds:

If you're willing to move with the tide of culture without having resolved how this bears on the authority of Scripture, which the church claims to salute, it has all sorts of implications on other issues.³⁸

Religious authority has been a point of contention for for quite some time. Calvin and Luther both reacted strongly to the authority assumed by the Catholic Church in the form

³⁷Madeleine Boucher, "Some Unexplored Parallels to I Cor. 11:11-12 and Gal. 3:28; The New Testament on the Role of Women," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 31:50-8 (June, 1969).

³⁸Green, p. 7.

of tradition. But they were uncomfortable without some form of authoritative revelation of divine will. Calvin, in fact, saw authority as part of God's consideration of human need.³⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, a noted modern German theologian, concentrates much scholastic attention on several concepts of authority which he deems unacceptable, particularly that of Holy Scripture. Pannenberg is disturbed by the dangers of faith rooted in authority, and he has faulted the Reformers for identifying human proclamation with the word of God.⁴⁰

Fear of modernism in the early and middle twentieth century contributed to a revival of the apologetics of fundamentalism, led by Presbyterians of the stature of Gresham Machen, Cornelius Van Til and E.J. Young.⁴¹ The protective wall of authority erected in the last two centuries against attack by modern science brought about a crisis for modern evangelical theology. This is significant because conservative Christians, particularly fundamentalists, declare their allegiance to an inerrant Bible, including the Garden of Eden story upon which many rabbinic views of women clearly rest. This forces one to a conclusion which has become in our time socially and theologically untenable.

³⁹G. C. Berkouwer, A Half Century of Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Lewis B. Smedes, ed. and trans., p. 161.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 160.

⁴¹Louis Praamsma, The Church in the Twentieth Century, Vol VII (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1981), pp. 226-233.

For these reasons it is becoming increasingly difficult for Christians to refer to scripture for a detailed blueprint for social behaviour and religious doctrine. It has been impossible for Protestants, as it has been also for Roman Catholics, to find in scripture a clear theology of womanhood. We have demanded of the Bible as a whole what it cannot produce. As the French theologian Francoise Florentin-Smith has stated:

. . .the Bible, which provides us with recipes for nothing, will not give us, with a theology of woman, the excuse for a laziness which runs the danger of being satisfied with compelling myths and sacred or magic meanings, instead of a passionate and always approximate investigation. Instead of a metaphysical order to which we should conform, and of consolations that may be found in the sublimation of intolerable or false situations into parables, the Bible frees us from all archetypal forms to throw us forward into the ways of love, where one gropes for an acknowledgement of the contradictions and diversities which love assumes and reconciles. . . . We are therefore reduced, be it with joy, to share the uncertainties and the impatient reflection of our contemporaries on woman's becoming.⁴²

In this regard Landman expresses her rejection of "anxious exegetical methods" of evangelical feminists who attempt to plead their case, and at the same time defend a "once for all time" concept of revealed divine truth. We must

⁴²Francoise Florentin-Smith, "La femme en milieu protestant," Tatiana Struve, Agnes Cunningham, Francoise Florentin-Smith, La Femme (Paris, 1968), p. 150.

accept, she says, that God is in a continual interaction with the world, unfolding truths at the right time and in the right way. On the issue of women, the authority of the letter gives way to the ongoing work of the Spirit.⁴³ Theology today may not be that concerned with the factuality of the literary devices employed by biblical writers, but it is concerned with the validity of the principles, lessons, or ideologies which those devices communicate and their application in a modern circumstance. When biblical customs are enlisted as authoritative examples of "how things should be," the essential message of the New Testament becomes "time bound" and loses its universal and timeless thrust. Human conventions typically prove like old wineskins bursting at the seams, as the new wine of an ever unfolding Gospel strains for realization against the rigidity of human tradition. As Oliver expresses it, "if there is one truth at the heart of both Judaism and Christianity, it is that no representation of the divine- either visual or verbal- is finally adequate."⁴⁴ The Christian tradition must be seen as living and progressive, and constantly requiring self examination. It is never threatened by any sincere

⁴³C. Landman, "A Profile of Feminist Theology," Sexism and Feminism in Theological Perspective, W.S. Vorster, ed. (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984), p. 11.

⁴⁴Oliver, p 446.

critique.⁴⁵ This of necessity requires continual course adjustment. Therefore, as the church's social environment changes, so will her understanding of the Word change; and in turn, so will her response to it.

Hermeneutics

A major problem with the fundamentalist hermeneutic is the typical inconsistency of application. Many advocates of feminine equality have noticed that the rules are set aside on occasion by almost all exegetes when in their own minds there is a sensible and logical reason to do so.⁴⁶ In spite of slavish devotion to the letter in some instances, on other issues a scriptural teaching might be explained as purely cultural in nature, in which case it becomes benign and virtually irrelevant as a twentieth century doctrine. For example, only a few of all fundamentalist churches have made a ritual of footwashing, in spite of Jesus' instructions to his disciples to follow his example.⁴⁷ The reason is that most can see the symbolism in his action, and realize that its application is in daily service rather than liturgical ritual. The same is true of "lifting holy hands" in prayer (I Timothy 2:8) and the "holy kiss" (I Corinthians 16:20),

⁴⁵Edward Farley and Peter C. Hodgson, "Scripture and Tradition," Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks, pp. 35-61.

⁴⁶Scanzoni and Hardesty, pp. 17-19.

⁴⁷John 13:14-15.

although some churches have fundamentalistically applied even these injunctions. A few also try to apply I Corinthians 11 against men having long hair, although generally the same passage is not enforced against women cutting their hair short, and very few churches prohibit women from wearing jewelry, platted hair or expensive garments.⁴⁸

Many conservative churchmen have come to recognize such inconsistency in hermeneutics, which tends to create confusion, mistrust and disillusionment among lay members.⁴⁹ If the letter of the word can be overlooked in some instances because it was addressed to a transient cultural issue, why can this not be so with regard to the status of women? To recognize this possibility with regard to all New Testament restrictions on the status of women is perhaps the simplest solution to the conservative dilemma in that it avoids compromises on the basic view of inspiration. But a hindrance lies in the ubiquitous question "where then does one draw the line?" The fundamentalist hermeneutic generally seeks to define, codify and delineate rather than allowing subjective issues to remain moot, since compromises weaken the concept of authority upon which such a hermeneutic rests. Virginia Hearn summarizes the problem concisely: "the hermeneutical

⁴⁸I Timothy 2:9; I Peter 3:3. Such strict applications can be found among certain Pentecostal and Holiness groups, the Amish in the Northeast United States, the Church of the Latter Rain, and others.

⁴⁹Brunt, p. 13.

question for evangelicals arises over how to distinguish between what is universal and timeless and what was local and particular in Paul's statements."⁵⁰

The most consistent and sensible hermeneutic, therefore, is one which remains flexible, allowing the principles within scripture to speak to each human circumstance and allowing for many variations in human response and application. With particular reference to the status of females, at least three principles must govern the interpretation and application of the Bible to a modern context: (1) Recognition that traditional subordination of women is contrary to certain cardinal truths undergirding the Christian message, and therefore any hermeneutic which forces an interpretation or practice in opposition to those basic truths is to be rejected. (2) Any hermeneutic which absolutizes a given historical social order or hierarchy is to be rejected. (3) Any hermeneutic which fails to allow equal response to divine calling and which limits the roles of Christian service on the basis of nationality, class or gender is to be rejected.⁵¹ These criteria simply cannot be met through any form of literalism or fundamentalism.

Among members of Churches of Christ there is an

⁵⁰Hearn, p. 62.

⁵¹James Bodensieck, "Theological Principles Determining the Role of Christian Women in Church and Society," Lutheran Social Ethics Seminar, Valparaiso University (December, 1955), p. 1; see also Russell Prohl, p. 18-19; Scanzoni and Hardesty, p. 20.

increasing awareness of both the inconsistency and shallowness in brotherhood hermeneutics, and efforts are being made to bring about change.⁵² Such a change of necessity will affect conclusions concerning the status of women.

II. TRADITION, CHANGE AND SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT

Another hurdle which many churches face is the sacrosanct aura around religious tradition. Each group, and indeed the membership as a body, must learn to feel comfortable with changes in doctrine and policy to suit human needs in an ever changing world. The Roman Catholic Church for centuries has claimed divine authority for its tradition. Judaism also has survived over the centuries largely because of an ardent devotion to tradition. But today we are discovering that changes in world view and styles of life render many customs and traditions meaningless and out of touch. Jesus himself was critical of human traditions simply because of their tendency to supplant concern for human welfare and to be elevated to a status of eternal truth.⁵³

There is nothing wrong with traditions. Family and

⁵²Larry Chouinard, "The Hermeneutical Question," Image Vol. 5, No. 4 (April, 1989), pp. 6-7; Mac Lynn, "Interpreting Scripture," pp. 21, 30. Thomas H. Olbricht, "Hermeneutics: The Beginning Point" (Part 1), Image Vol. 5, No. 9 (September, 1989), pp. 14-15.

⁵³Mark 7:1ff.

cultural traditions can be very positive and valuable, creating a certain bonding effect ranging from small units to entire nations. The problem lies in what might be called "traditionalism," which is the undesirable result of tradition becoming a constricting force, a ruling mandate which binds or discriminates without latitude for personal choice or adjustment to social change. It is for this reason that marriage customs have changed in most of the free world. Modern society can no longer abide traditions in which couples are assigned to each other by familial contract without personal consent. Love and courtship have taken the place of patriarchal selection and blessing, matchmaking and political alliances through token marriages.

Reexamining Relevant Traditions

Therefore, change in the status of women demands the reexamination of the religious impetus for relevant traditions. A good example is the complex religious symbolism based on sexual polarities which has been taken for granted for centuries in mainstream Christianity, and which has unquestionably contributed to the patriarchal structure of the church. To Swart-Russell the "male" God's relationship to the "female" church (the bride of Christ) and the "male" priest's relationship to the "female" laity seem particularly threatened by current theological trends, and must be carefully reexamined. Also, the entire concept of a

sacerdotal priesthood is called in question by the possibility of female priests, since traditionally "priesthood" has been defined so as to link the privilege of administering sacraments with a masculine vicar of Jesus Christ or God the Father.⁵⁴ Therefore, the possibility of female priests creates a theological contradiction derived not from scripture, but from tradition, and which must be resolved.⁵⁵

However, these are but illustrations of the many church traditions which pertain to and are affected by changes in the status of women. Susanne Langer writes:

We are faced with an unintended, unguided, but irresistible revolution in all human relations, from the marriage bonds and family controls whereby personal life has traditionally been ordered, to the religious and patriotic loyalties that were wont to rule people's wider activities. Such a change in the human scene requires and effects a change in the concepts with which we operate practically and intellectually, but few people realize that their basic social conceptions have changed. . . . Our profoundest metaphors have lost their moral import.⁵⁶

Making application of exegetical and historical

⁵⁴Swart-Russell, pp. 38-39. For an insightful outline of the theological requirements for liberating the church from sexism, see pp. 40-47.

⁵⁵This definition of priesthood is theoretically denied by the "priesthood of all believers."

⁵⁶Susanne K. Langer, "The Growing Center of Knowledge," Philosophical Sketches (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), p. 147.

discoveries to a modern context, especially if it involves change in established religious traditions, is never a simple task. Iconoclasts generally face ostracization by the establishment and often by their peers. But even when attempts are made to maintain harmonious relationships while change is brought about slowly, confrontation often is forced by the incompatibility of ideology and tradition. In order to face the dilemma positively conservative Christians should accept that New Testament theology, as well as the form of the ekklesia, must remain flexible. And both must experience continual reassessment to keep pace with the advancing human situation. In Tavad's words:

One cannot build a theology in historical isolation any more than in the abstract. Consideration of woman today will avoid abstraction. Insertion of our thought in the continuity of Christian tradition will avoid isolation. What we see and think of woman today is necessarily tied to what was seen and thought formerly. The difficulty comes when we try to assess what in this tradition remains normative and what was too influenced by local or temporary conditions, by contingent cultural patterns, by human prejudice and by philosophical bias to be valid today.⁵⁷

The Gospel message is not static, but in a continuous flow of unfolding and finding new applications within the flux of

⁵⁷Tavad, p. 187-8.

what has been called "history becoming."³⁸ In accord with this view, G. C. Berkouwer has written:

The Word has to be free to remake and reform the Church over and over again. The moment the Church loses interest in working the mines of the Word because it thinks it has seen all there is to see, that moment the Church also loses its power and its credibility in the world. When the Church thinks it knows all there is to know, the opportunity for surprising discovery is closed. The Church then becomes old, without perspective, and without light and labor and fruitfulness.³⁹

Facing the Trauma of Change

There is a difference between collective protest and social change. Protest is a verbal and physical expression of disapproval, arising from inequity and injustice when the level of tolerance is exceeded. Such protest can reach a level of violent revolution. But this is not to be equated with change. Change is the desired result of protest. Yet, such results are not typically realized by correcting documentation or modifying methodology. It begins there, perhaps, but it must eventually extend deep into human

³⁸The concept of "word event" in an unfolding flow of history was pioneered by Martin Heidegger and developed by Gerhard Ebeling, Ernst Fuchs and others. See Robert King, "The Task of Systematic Theology," Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks, Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, eds. (London: SPCK, 1983), p. 23.

³⁹G. C. Berkouwer, "Understanding Scripture" Christianity Today 14 (May 22, 1970), p. 40.

attitudes and social views by replacing old ideologies at a grass roots level. It is one thing for slaves to be declared free, but quite another to overcome the spirit of racism and discrimination. It is one thing for a country to declare its independence from colonial rule. It is another thing to shoulder the responsibility for independence, to develop a government and economic structure whereby individuals may personally experience the privileges of freedom. Likewise, it is one thing to declare women the legal and social equals of men, but another to break down time hardened traditions enabling them to enjoy relationships and roles which truly reflect theoretical equality.

It is a mistake to think that religious change is easier in more advanced societies. A survey among Reformed churches by Henny Dirks-Blatt offers evidence that changes in the status of women in the Christian church have been more difficult in the western world than among churches in Africa, Asia, South America and Australasia.⁴⁰ The separation of church and state protects religion on the one hand, giving each group latitude to do good as it sees fit, but at the same time allowing it to perpetuate antiquated and counterproductive ideologies and sheltering it from invasion by opposing religious views. Perhaps one of the hindrances to change among conservative churches in America has been that

⁴⁰Henny Dirks-Blatt, "Women Ministers of WARC Member Churches on the Ordination of Women," Reformed World, Vol. 39., No. 1 (1986), pp. 490-1.

technically the United States Constitution protects their right to practise discrimination against women, since this constitutes an elementary facet of their doctrine based on their understanding of Holy Scripture.⁴¹ In the same way churches have the right to debar from membership homosexuals, divorced persons, or any others whom they deem morally unsuitable and impenitent.

The process of change is unavoidably traumatic. But opposition from tradition characteristically increases the level of trauma by resisting to the point of revolution. The church has been prone to such resistance, as much so as dictatorships and imperialistic governments.

There are several reasons traditionalists oppose change. One such reason is fear of disastrous consequences. Many believe that feminism will destroy the home and damage the process of nurturing our children in a godly fashion.⁴² But now that sufficient time has passed to observe and test the results of traditional models in the modern context, specifically those pertaining to male headship and the confinement of females to domestic chores, myths are giving way to more relevant and realistic models.

Others oppose change simply because it is uncomfortable. Shaking the foundations of faith is as traumatic for some

⁴¹Elmer T. Clark, The Small Sects in America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1949), p. 13-20.

⁴²Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Proceed With Care, Christianity Today, Vol 30, No.16 (October 3, 1986), p. 15-I.

people as having no foundations at all. A common argument against change is simply: "Some people will not like it." People are naturally prone to static conditions and are conservative with regard to collective patterns. Change does not occur without a disruption of the norm and a concerted effort to dispel mythical beliefs, which of necessity creates discomfort.⁴³

That this is so among conservative Christians on the issue of women is undeniable. One church elder commented to the present writer of his feelings of uncertainty about the future of Churches of Christ. "We have to change our beliefs about the role of women," he said, "but our people are too set in their ways to accept it gracefully."⁴⁴ He added that hopefully change can be stalled long enough that we can leave it to the next generation to deal with. A test conducted at a Lectureship in Durban, 1988, illustrates the sensitivity among Churches of Christ to changes in the status of women. For the first time a special choral group sang under the direction of a woman. This simple advancement, which in many churches might be taken as a matter of course, created a furor which was debated and discussed for an entire year.⁴⁵

⁴³Jo Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation (New York: David McKay Co., 1975), p. 13, 16.

⁴⁴Bill Patterson; Elder, Military Parkway Church of Christ, Dallas, Texas, 1987.

⁴⁵Lectureship, Queen Mary Avenue Church of Christ, July, 1988. Choral director Hildegard Kemp.

In this regard it should be stated that once the major theological questions have been answered concerning the status of women in the church, including ordination, further arguments represent nothing more than resistance to change. For example, many churchmen insist that women are unsuitable for church leadership because they are sexually appealing to men and therefore become a distraction. If this argument is valid, one must ask whether such has been prohibitive in the secular world where women are capably filling responsible positions and overcoming the barriers created by "sex appeal." Surely the same could be said of female psychologists, university professors, attorneys, and physicians. Yet mature people recognize their responsibility to control their sexual urges, regardless of their attraction to an individual in a leadership position. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that women also are commonly sexually attracted to men, especially men in leadership positions. Clergymen are continually in this precarious situation and must guard against unwholesome relationships which might easily arise in counselling or from close working associations with female members of their churches. Professional ethics demands this in virtually every field. If the desirability of women categorically eliminates them as candidates for the ministry, then males, especially young attractive ones, should be categorically prohibited from pastoring churches with female members. But such are not

legitimate grounds for generalizations or prohibitions. They must be viewed as obstacles to be overcome in the performance of noble and necessary tasks.

One of the greatest hindrances to change among denominations such as the Church of Christ is the threat of withdrawal of fellowship by sister congregations. Within this group there is a prevalent notion that current brotherhood views constitute "the faith once delivered,"⁶⁶ and all other churches as well as all factions tending to change from the norm are heretical and outside the scope of salvation. There is also a prevalent belief that any protest of the status quo should be viewed as divisive, and proponents are in danger of excommunication. Traditionally, congregational autonomy has been viewed as a defence against credalism, but in reality it has proved to protect unwritten creeds by disallowing mass redirection of thought. Conservative churches have even greater fears, because they have been moulded in a tradition which is maintained by threats of disapproval and dissociation from the body.⁶⁷ Radical departures are therefore too costly for most, and devotion to congregational unity for the most part has stifled positive

⁶⁶Taken from Jude 3.

⁶⁷Based on traditional practice of excommunication of heretics.

change.⁶⁸ However, in the interest of justice and the advancement of principles rooted in the Gospel, the church should play a key role in assisting its members to adjust, rather than complicating modern living by demanding allegiance to antiquated and inferior ideologies or by balking and stalling the process of change.

III. THE REALIZATION OF EQUALITY BETWEEN MALES AND FEMALES

Restructuring Male and Female Roles

Many churches have upheld mutually conflicting ideals concerning roles and relationships in the home. While on the one hand they encourage attitudes of sharing, mutual support and understanding between husbands and wives, on the other hand they hold to a biblical pattern of the wife's subordinate role and husband's headship. These two principles are realistically incompatible and contradictory.⁶⁹ In the

⁶⁸One example, however, is the Central Church of Christ in Irving, Texas which has stated its desire to remain a part of mainstream churches while also declaring its freedom to set its own course. The signboard states its posture boldly, "An Ecumenical Fellowship," which very concept has brought strong criticism and threats of withdrawal of fellowship from numerous Churches of Christ in the area. Richland Hills in Ft. Worth has been "disfellowshipped" by several other churches of Christ because of its "liberal" policies, including the endorsement of progressive thinking on the status of women.

⁶⁹D.M. Ackermann, "The role of women in the church, certain practical theological perspectives," Sexism and Feminism in Theological Perspective, W.S. Vorster, ed. (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1984), p. 79.

attempt to build more stable homes fathers have been urged to spend more time with their children, share in domestic chores and interests, and such like, yet they are instructed to shoulder their responsibility as familial head. Wives, in turn, may be encouraged to obtain education and develop skills which often place them beyond many other men, even their own husbands, yet they are taught that happiness and fulfillment are to be obtained by submission.

For some time it has been apparent that the rising divorce rate is directly related to the stress of conflicting ideologies. While conservatives advocate a return to the "husband as head of the wife" paradigm, the real solution is to be found in individuals learning to live free of the "power down" structure of relationships supported by traditional patriarchy. Perhaps some degree of conflict is to be expected in the early stages of ideological transition. There is a growing emphasis on marriage in which each partner sees the other as an equal, in a mutually inter-dependent relationship void of power, headship, and overtones of authority characteristic of traditional marriages. Such relationships will prove superior because they are void of competition, feelings of threat, neurotic dependency, and low self esteem due to the ego gratification of an overbearing domineering mate.

But to assist in these changes churches should actively engage in an effort to promote the concepts of love,

cooperation, and partnership in marriage, without attempting to defend female submission and male headship. Opportunities for such guidance are especially plentiful in the context of marital and premarital counselling. With time, the superior ideologies will supplant antiquated tradition.

But it would seem that the future of equality depends as much on personal relationships as on legislation, social approval and church doctrine. As Chafe points out, it is a reciprocal process taking place between cultural values, social institutions, individual life choices and interpersonal relationships. Therefore the personal becomes both social and political. What he says as a historical perspective concerning the most recent decades of women's liberation is appropriate for the continuation of advancement:

In this respect it was likely that what occurred in personal relationships would affect the external environment so that outside forces would determine interpersonal dynamics. Since most men and women continued to participate in relatively stable heterosexual relationships, it seemed that the prospects for equality in those relationships would affect significantly the chances for equality in the society at large.⁷⁰

Therefore, it seems that the success of the church in assisting its members to learn equity in heterosexual relationships can and will have a marked affect on the

⁷⁰Chafe, p. 155.

attainment of justice and equity on a social level, and the development of healthier personal and interpersonal relationships.

It is likely that divorce trends will reverse as the present stress of conflicting ideologies gives way to a new norm. Studies of marital stability since the 1930s suggest that where both partners in a marriage work or remain intellectually active, with neither significantly more successful than the other, the relationship is likely to have balance and stability.⁷¹ Chafe states that a significant factor in attaining equality is a willingness on the part of both to sacrifice some of society's present obsession with individualism in order to be mutually supportive.⁷² The future is likely to see a revival of the concept of shared vision in marriage, a characteristic of many marriages in pioneer, colonial, medieval and various ancient cultures, allowing the husband and wife to work together in the same career and provide mutual support in individual pursuits without overt male domination.

Definitive Steps in Religious Formalities

Mary Van Leeuwen states that throughout the modern feminist movement some churches have cushioned the negative effects of social change by operating as extended families,

⁷¹Chafe, p. 163.

⁷²Ibid, p. 165.

including encouraging women to minister and to improve themselves, to whatever degree they find acceptance.⁷³ But the most difficult aspects of this change have been pushed back, awaiting some clear definitive action. Clearly, at some point a visible change has to be made. And this cannot take place so slowly that no one notices. The church must avoid "co-optation."⁷⁴ While this might seem to be a step in the right direction, the process is likely to get bogged down in patronization and token gestures.

The best approach is simply to outline a programme for genuine change, with clear objectives, goals and a definitive modus operandi, all leading to a structure void of discriminatory mechanisms and regulations. This must include placing women into those positions which represent genuine expression of equality. Maitland describes such an approach as "process theology," which is best defined in terms borrowed from popular psychology: "we do not think ourselves into better ways of acting; we act ourselves into better ways of thinking."⁷⁵

Genuine change can only occur through genuine action. As Dirks-Blatt points out, "learning by doing" is essential in this kind of change, and churches, as well as the men and

⁷³Van Leeuwen, p. 12.

⁷⁴See above, p. 335, fn. 33.

⁷⁵Sara Maitland, A Map of the New Country: Women and Christianity (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 191.

women who comprise them, will only be able to adjust to participation by women once those changes are enacted.⁷⁶

Someone must take the first step. Even among conservative fundamentalist churches like the Church of Christ, with all the unpleasantness and fear of change, someone will eventually initiate it. Adapting a scenario suggested by Nancy Sehested,⁷⁷ one Sunday morning somewhere a congregation will assemble, and all the signs of change will be visible. The marquis will still read "Church of Christ" but certain aspects of structure and assembly format will be different. A woman will conduct the adult Bible class, another will lead the opening prayer, and perhaps three others, along with three men will serve the Lord's Supper. The pulpit minister of this particular congregation might still be a man, but on this Sunday there is a guest speaker, a minister from another church across town. . . .

trained in the same school of preaching, holding the same degrees and the same recognized paid position. . .but this minister is a woman. Further differences appear on the church bulletin where the names of elders and deacons usually appear. Now the term is "shepherds," and there are three men and two women. Instead of deacons and deaconesses the bulletin lists twenty five "ministry leaders," perhaps eighteen of whom are women. This is how it must be, yet it

⁷⁶Henny Dirks-Blatt, Part I, p. 443.

⁷⁷Sehested, p. 71.

will never be until definitive steps are taken to make it happen.

Changing Self Perception in Women

Clearly female liberation is not merely a battle against male chauvinism. It is also a battle against a traditional orientation in women themselves. In a letter to the women of the Anglican Community, Pamela Chinnis refers to some important matters which must be addressed:

It may be that the most blatant forms of bias are behind us, but they were the easier ones to fight. Now the most significant obstacles may be the inner barriers- inner barriers for men and women both that have been bred into us by generations and acculturation.⁷⁸

Letha Scanzoni states that liberation should be defined as a "state of mind" in which woman comes to see herself as Jesus sees her.⁷⁹ This means that in the process of change each woman who has been locked into the traditional model of subjection will face a personal struggle to view herself and other women differently. In some ways women will suffer for a time because of the absence of role models.⁸⁰ But this also will be overcome only through positive and visionary

⁷⁸Pamela P. Chinnis, The Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017 (September 15, 1987).

⁷⁹Scanzoni, p. 12.

⁸⁰Kelsey Menehan, "Women in Seminary: Preparing for What?" Christianity Today (September 5, 1986), p. 20

participation in change.

In many churches opposition to change in church leadership has come from women as strongly as from men. This is not surprising, for several reasons. Many women feel threatened by feminism. The old view of women at least provides the traditional housewife with a certain degree of security, as long as she remains in submission. Her glory has been in whatever role her husband has found success and acceptance. She has basked in his limelight and has been afforded at least some share in the credit, if only in patronizing accolades such as: "Behind every great man is a great woman." To such women liberation appears to demand independence and competition in a world where they do not feel comfortable. . .where in fact many feel incompetent. Therefore, some will resist change because of timidity and fear of accepting new areas of responsibility. As Phoebe Swart-Russell points out, many women derive security from the stereotypes projected upon them and not only willingly conform, but actually fear breaking away.²¹ This is to be expected. Many men also cling to traditional stereotypes not just because they offer power and prestige, but because within the familiar structure there is security and acceptance. Such individuals have difficulty imagining a world without the comfort of those traditional structures. Therefore, assisting its members in changing self-

²¹Swart-Russell, p. 34.

perception will have to become as critical and urgent in the preaching and teaching of the church as, for example, teaching ethics, morality, family and home, parenthood, or church doctrine has been in the past.

Some women also will experience jealousy, perhaps feeling threatened by those women who are ready to take the quantum leap into liberation. For them, perhaps, church membership under the pastoral care of another woman brings personal feelings of inferiority. This, of course, betrays the same inconsistency as the whole myth of female inferiority, since in the secular world women are adjusting quite well to serving under female executives, being treated by female physicians, receiving an education under female professors, or being advised by female counselors and attorneys. But religious tradition is resilient, and the male clerical mystique will die hard in the minds of many women. Some scholars are convinced that should women be invited immediately to join the sacramental ministry, the work of changing women's conception of themselves as silent, passive receptacles of grace, will take generations.⁸²

This kind of transition is highly susceptible to over-reaction. Self-liberation from sexism is an evolutionary process which can easily lead to reverse discrimination and

⁸²Ordination of women: more debate on topic is imperative," Seek (June-July, 1989), p. 8. This article pertains to the 1989 diocesan conference on the ministry in the Anglican Church, held in Pietermaritzburg.

reverse sexism.⁸³ Ruether warns against the oppressed viewing their oppressors as the locus of all evil, which tends to lead to a salvation rooted in self righteous condemnation of the oppressor with no further responsibility for them. She says that true liberation is only possible when the oppressed first free themselves from oppression, self-pity and internalized self hatred, and, second, work toward the liberation of their oppressors.⁸⁴ Such cannot be accomplished by responding with hatred for all males who as a class are guilty of a historical sin against them. Hatred was not Jesus' way of dealing with evil. Instead their self-affirmation is to be rooted in love. This is true of oppressed groups everywhere, whether they suffer from racism, classism or sexism, and it is especially true of any process of liberation within the church.⁸⁵

IV. THE FUTURE TASK OF THE CHURCH IN ELIMINATING SEXISM

The task of eliminating sex discrimination in the church does not end with its official approval of female ordination. And in the future churches will continue to struggle with various elements of discrimination and sexism, just as

⁸³Swart-Russell, p. 34.

⁸⁴R.R. Ruether, Liberation Theology (New York: Paulinist Press, 1972), pp. 10-11.

⁸⁵Swart-Russell, p. 35.

problems persist in the secular community today. Maitland has pointed out some of the problems which still exist in churches ordaining women, such as women ministers facing longer periods of unemployment, lower salaries, less opportunity for major responsibilities, and less likelihood of appointments within their own church structure.⁸⁴ It seems that for some churches having already accepted female ordination there is still a strong resistance to women filling positions which might be perceived by the church as truly authoritative.

Theological issues relevant to female ordination are not the only future concern of the church. The World Council of Churches' Decade for Women follows upon the United Nations Decade for Women, seeking to advance the status of women in the church and world by addressing the obstacles which still stand in the way of total equity, wholeness and mutuality among the people of God. A number of specific issues face women in society in the coming decade. Among them are teenage pregnancy, abortion and surrogacy, alcohol and drug abuse, racism, and poverty among women. In spite of advances there is still a great deal to be overcome before women enjoy equal pay for equal work, and before discrimination and sexism are overcome with regard to positions of responsible leadership. Therefore, it would seem that dealing positively

⁸⁴Sara Maitland, A Map of a New Country (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1983), p. 119.

with female ordination will serve to enhance the church's awareness of the historical sin of sexism, and increase ecclesiastical participation in addressing many of these urgent sociological needs.

Tavard suggests that there has always been a tendency for the church to hold back advancement rather than taking the lead. Many progressive churches have attempted to do so in this century, but conservative churches by their very nature are reluctant to participate. The present writer was taught by church educators that on any social movement or trend a Christian should never represent the avant-garde but should change only when a new concept is fully acceptable. The rationale for this, as I understand it, is to avoid calling attention to oneself. While this is quite sensible with reference to matters of propriety, such as modest dress or behaviour, the principle does not apply to issues of ethics and justice.

For this reason Feminist Theology arises in response to desperate human need at a time when world consciousness is turned to issues such as international peace, social injustice, world hunger, and such like.²⁷ It cannot be denied that women are especially sensitive to these great social needs, largely because they as a class, and in various ways each one as an individual, have suffered what

²⁷Virginia Hearn, "Christian Feminists in North America: The Experience of Evangelical Women," Dialogue & Alliance, Vol. II, No. 3 (Fall, 1988), p. 70.

Schillebeeckx has called a "contrast experience."⁸⁸ This is an experience of events or circumstances which are essentially negative, perhaps even shocking and scandalous, producing an intuitive recognition of a moral injustice or evil. . . . that it should not exist.

The church cannot close its eyes to great social evils. But action is typically taken only when sufficient numbers of its members experience a certain form of evil to recognize it, or come to feel strongly enough to take action against it. Such action inevitably brings with it a perspective and community structure quite different from that of the previous era simply because it is born of revolution, which is in fact a collective reaction against perceived evil.

Nancy Sehested says that the liberation of women in church leadership and administration calls for a new vision of power and authority in terms of servant leadership.⁸⁹ Women are stepping into roles of authority without sufficient personal and historical experience to deal well with it. Yet it may be that because of the experience of women they will be able to bring with them a clearer perception of servanthood than men have been able to learn, and therefore offer something for which churches have been

⁸⁸Haight, p. 110; Edward Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, N.D. Smith, trans. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), pp. 136-64.

⁸⁹Nancy Hastings Sehested, "Women and Ministry in the Local Congregations," Review and Expositor, Vol 83., No. 1 (1986), pp. 71-9.

yearning. Of particular concern to Sehested is the role women need to play in determining the direction of the world, considering the vital issues before us as we approach and enter the twenty first century. The quest for liberation by financially secure women in the western world hardly compares to the "churches' complicity with a nuclear arms race that sucks the life out of our economy and threatens Armageddon for the whole creation." She continues:

I have only an indirect interest in promoting equal opportunity for women. My major concern is that women be allowed to take up equal responsibility, equal "ability to respond" to the crises of our world.⁹⁰

Some churches are in danger of choosing a destructive course, refusing to acknowledge the need for change and excommunicating all feminist sympathizers. In many churches, as has been the case over past issues, there is the possibility of large scale splits resulting in liberal and conservative branches.⁹¹ Both Protestant and Catholic Christianity are already riddled with doctrinal confusion and conflict, and an issue such as this could bring disastrous consequences where leaders do not exercise caution and patience. Therefore, great care should be taken to maintain dialogue and openness, although in some conservative churches

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 78.

⁹¹This is the origin of most Christian denominations, splits often occurring over comparative trivia.

either a split or a massive loss of membership seems inevitable.

A significant problem to be faced by the church in the present age is its loss of credibility, a problem directly related to the traditional doctrine of womanhood.⁹² Over the centuries the church as an institution has found itself fighting senseless battles while significant human needs were left unattended, largely because churchmen have taken a dogmatic stand on mistaken beliefs. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries an unnecessary warfare between science and scripture has continued. Among university students and academics in general both the Bible and Christianity have lost credibility, and many lay persons have left their traditional churches and lost faith in God altogether over relatively insignificant issues. Some denominations have lost credibility with their members because of a lack of vision and purpose, devoting themselves to the task of defending and promoting a sectarian identity without a truly meaningful reason for existing. Obsession with doctrines and issues which are without contemporary significance and are out of touch with human need renders the church ineffective and irrelevant.

Clearly the failure of the church to acknowledge the rightful place of women in society, in the home and in church leadership has seriously damaged the credibility of

⁹²Haight, p. 115.

the Bible and Christianity as a whole. Once the essential changes are made on this vital issue, the next task will be to overcome the damage the church has inflicted upon itself in the process. In the twenty first century church leaders and theologians must engage in a careful reexamination of the raison d'etre of all organizational forms of Christianity, both historically and spiritually, as well as determining immediate and long range goals. The church must rediscover its purpose, its relevance to human existence, and its objectives in human history, or it has no reason to continue. Robert King suggests that such a task is the major concern of theology today:

If there can be said to be a single overriding task for theology at the present time, it is to recover a sense of the wholeness, the unity and integrity, of the Christian witness.⁷³

Hopefully this will lead to a greater awareness and understanding of theological trends by tradition-bound churchmen, and allow a healthy assimilation of wisdom from nontraditional sources. In this process, each Christian denomination should reassess the Gospel message with respect to spiritual, political and sociological needs of humanity, and all church doctrines should be assessed in terms of legitimate value. If this occurs the result will certainly be

⁷³Robert H. King, "The task of systematic theology," Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks, Peter Hodgson and Robert King, eds. (London: SPCK, 1983), p. 26.

an enhancement of the influence of Christianity in a world of religious pluralism, as well as a degree of unification and revitalization among Christians.

Ephesians 4:11-16 refers to the church growing to maturity. This vision of the church building itself in love was merely an internalized expression of Jesus' Great Commission, in which apostles were sent into all the world with a message of hope, peace, freedom and salvation. The church has a two fold purpose of ministering to the needs of its people while at the same time ministering to the needs of the world. Such a mission is attainable only for a church with responsible spiritual perception, which demands facing change and dealing with the needs of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked: "How can we reclaim for Christ a world which has come of age?"⁷⁴ The visionary answer given by the author of Ephesians is "by means of a church come of age."

Such a church will recognize that many of its traditions and doctrines are not of divine origin, but are rooted in social ideology and therefore can be changed without destroying or detracting from the thrust of the Gospel. Such a church will acknowledge the great historical evil of sexism which has held women in subjection to the present time, and will work with conviction toward their liberation.

⁷⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers From Prison (Edinburgh: Macmillan, 1953).

Such a church will recognize the vast resources and potential for good in its women, encouraging their full participation in roles of service and leadership of which they are fully capable, for which they are equally suitable and have been properly trained, and to which they have been called by the Spirit of God.

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