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CHRISTIAN BRETHREN REVIEW

**WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

Editor: Arthur Henderson

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## Preface

“Many fanciful interpretations of these verses have been advanced, and one gets the impression that they have been rather to defend a practice than to find out the unadorned truth.” The verses in question are 1 Cor. 14:34-38 and the comment is taken from a paper on ‘The ministry of women’ circulated among a group of churches fairly similar to Brethren assemblies. The writer sets out to examine this and other ‘plain and unambiguous statements’ on the topic and comes to conclusions very similar to views which have been widespread among Brethren assemblies (except perhaps for the view that a woman may pray in public, while prophesying and teaching only in private). However, the tone is patronising to ‘dear women’, implying a male superiority; the assumption is that Paul’s prohibition applies to speaking and teaching from the pulpit, implying a common developed form of ‘public worship’; and the interpretation of Gen.3:16 is that male rule was divinely ordained before the fall, rather than predicted as a result of it. (The essence of Eve’s sin seems to be that she chose to lead, teach, and rule her husband rather than follow, learn and obey.) Fanciful interpretations do not all apparently come from the same direction!

In fact evangelical writers ‘professing sincere faith in the gospel of Christ and the bible as God’s authoritative word’ differ considerably in their interpretations of passages relating to this subject. The views expressed by such writers in fifteen works published in the preceding decade (including three reprints, one by Catherine Booth dating back to 1859) were presented in 1980 by Jack Buckley in comparative tables.<sup>1</sup> The only point of complete agreement in studies of five relevant passages from the epistles was that women in the early church prayed and prophesied, but we have seen that not all evangelicals accept that. No two of the fifteen were in complete accord in their interpretations. Can any claim with assurance to have discovered the ‘unadorned truth’?

In this symposium the contributors seek further clarification of what the scriptures meant to first-century readers to help us to discern principles which we should still apply in twentieth-century situations, without attempting to replicate outmoded or alien cultures or to require uniformity of practice. For instance, some suggested

principles of behaviour in church meetings require distinctions to be made between private and public meetings, formal and informal procedures, spontaneous and programmed expressions, or teaching and learning roles. In applying such distinctions we must allow not only for cultural differences in situations, but also for individual differences in perceptions of these social events. So, even if principles are agreed, we must allow for differences in application.

Two of the papers in this symposium (by Birney and Rogers) are reprints of earlier work published by CBRF — with some reduction in references and additions of recent comments, enlightened by extra years spent by the authors in twentieth-century cultures which in many ways are more akin to first-century cultures than the western ones of most of our readers. Two new papers (by Bruce and Evans) were presented to the CBRF seminar in June 1979. Bruce's paper is placed first because it deals with hermeneutical principles, while Evans's is placed later as it deals with particular points of interpretation raised by Birney's paper. Almlie's paper too was submitted in the light of Birney's paper, before he was appointed with assembly commendation as a full-time chaplain in a US army medical unit. A personal comment is added to his paper on his experience in this transient culture because of its relevance to the point he makes about the purposes of church meetings. Finally, the opportunity is taken to add reviews of two recent works — one from French-speaking Brethren and the other from an historian of new testament times — both of particular relevance to the issues raised in this journal.

As already indicated this is not the first CBRF paper on the subject of women in the church; nor is it likely to be the last. Further contributions to an understanding of the respective roles of men and women in the church would be welcomed by the fellowship.

1. Paul, women, and the church. Jack Buckley *Eternity* Dec. 1980.

# Women in the Church: a Biblical Survey

F. F. BRUCE

## Prolegomena

The phenomenon of cultural relativity, with the adaptations it imposes, is repeatedly illustrated within the bible itself. We see the Israelite nomads moving from the wilderness into the settled agricultural life of Canaan; we see a peasant economy giving place under the monarchy to an urbanised mercantile economy, with the attendant abuses against which the great prophets of Israel inveighed; we see the post-exilic adjustment to life in a unit of a great, well-organised empire — first Persian, then Hellenistic, then Roman. Even within the limited confines of the new testament we see the gospel transplanted from its Jewish and Palestinian matrix into the Gentile environment of the Mediterranean world. In this last respect we could pay special attention to the way in which John, while preserving the authentic gospel of Christ, brings out its abiding and universal validity in a new idiom for an audience very different from that to which it was first proclaimed.

One major concern of the scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's day was to apply to their contemporaries a code of laws originally given in quite another way of life. The sabbath law, for example, was formulated in relation to a simple pastoral or agrarian economy, in which 'work' was a clearly understood term. But what kinds of activity came within the prohibition of 'work' in the more complex situation at the dawn of the Christian era? The scribes saw that detailed definition was necessary if people were to have clear guidance in this matter: in one of their schools thirty-nine categories of 'work' were specified, all of which were banned on the sabbath.

That was one way to tackle the problem of cultural relativity; the way of Jesus was different. He preferred to go back to first principles: any kind of action which promoted the original purpose of the commandment fulfilled it; any kind of action which hindered that original purpose violated it. But it was for people to decide for themselves which actions promoted the original purpose and which actions hindered it: he would not lay down precise regulations.

The gospels exhibit the contrast between the scribal way and the

way of Jesus in the handling of the old testament. Subsequent church history, down to our own generation, exhibits the same contrast in the handling of the new testament and the varying attempts to apply its principles to changing situations. Canon law, whether it is explicitly so called or not, exemplifies the scribal way — the tradition of the elders.

Cultural relativity is certainly to be reckoned with when the permanent message of the new testament receives our practical attention today. The local and temporary situation in which that message was first delivered must be appreciated if we are to discern what its permanent essence really is and learn to re-apply it in the local and temporary circumstances or our own culture.

We take this for granted in the case of missionaries taking the gospel to lands of different traditions from their own. Even with our instant and our worldwide intercommunication, culture shock remains a reality — a two-way reality. Let us similarly take it for granted that a sympathetic awareness of the cultures in which the gospels and epistles first appeared will help us to understand those documents in their own setting and also to profit by them in our own setting.

## **I. In creation**

The basic teaching of the creation narratives is that when God created mankind (Adam) in his own image, he created them male and female (Gen.1:27).

In the narrative of Gen.1 no question of priority, let alone of superiority, arises. In the narrative of Gen.2 the female is formed after the male, to be 'a help answering to him' — not, as a later interpreter put it, 'he for God only, she for God in him'. The priority of the male in this creation narrative does not bespeak his superiority: any suggestion to this effect might be answered by the counter-argument that the last-made crowns the work — but either argument is beside the point.

## **II. In the fall**

It is in the fall narrative, not in the creation narratives, that superiority of the one sex over the other is first mentioned. And here it is not an inherent superiority, but one that is exercised by force. The Creator's words to Eve, 'your desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you' (Gen.3:16), mean that, in our sinful human condition, the

man exploits the woman's natural proclivity towards him to dominate and subjugate her. Subjugation of woman, in fact, is a symptom of man's fallen nature.

If the work of Christ involves the breaking of the entail of the fall, the implication of his work for the liberation of women is plain.

### **III. In the new creation**

#### *(a) The attitude and teaching of Jesus*

Jesus was born into a male-dominated culture. Some of its basic presuppositions he quietly and indirectly undermined. His treatment of the divorce question, for example, not only illustrates his constant appeal to first principles; its chief practical effect was the redressing of a balance which was heavily weighted against women. His male disciples immediately realised this, as is shown by their response. 'If a man cannot divorce his wife under any circumstances', they meant, 'it is better not to marry' (Matt.19:10).

Unwarranted inferences have sometimes been drawn from the fact that all twelve of the original apostles were men. But in fact our Lord's male disciples cut a sorry figure alongside his female disciples, especially in his last hours; and it was to women that he first entrusted the privilege of carrying the news of his resurrection.

He treated women in a completely natural and unselfconscious way as real persons. He imparted his teaching to the eager ears and heart of Mary of Bethany, while to the Samaritan woman (of all people) he revealed the nature of true worship. His disciples who found him thus engaged at the well surprised to find him talking to a woman: for a religious teacher to do this was at best a waste of time and at worst a spiritual danger.

#### *(b) The attitude and teaching of Paul*

No distinction in service or status is implied in Paul's many references to his fellow-workers, whether male or female. Among the latter we recall Phoebe, deacon (not deaconess!) of the church at Cenchreae (Rom.16:1f.), who by her safe delivery of the Epistle to the Romans performed an inestimable service to the church universal, and Euodia and Syntyche of Philippi, who received Paul's commendation as women who 'laboured side by side' with him in the gospel together with Clement and others (Phil.4:3). Paul uses the designation 'apostles' more comprehensively than Luke does, and he may even

include at least one woman among them, if the companion of Andronicus in Rom.16:7 is Junia, a woman (as Chrysostom understood), and not Junias, a man.

From the standpoint of Paul's upbringing he voices a revolutionary sentiment when he declares that 'in Christ Jesus . . . there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female' (Gal.3:28). Already in his time the Jewish morning prayer probably included the passage where the pious man thanks God that he was made a Jew and not a Gentile, a free man and not a slave, a man and not a woman. All three of these privileges are hereby wiped out: real as they were in the Judaism of Paul's day, they are abolished in Christ. In Judaism it was the males only who received in their bodies the visible seal of the covenant with Abraham; it is a corollary of Paul's circumcision-free gospel that any such religious privilege enjoyed by males over females is abolished. To the present day among orthodox Jews the quorum for a synagogue congregation is ten free men; unless ten such males are present the service cannot begin. (We may, incidentally, be happy that for christian meetings we have the less stringent quorum of 'two or three', with nothing said as to whether they are men or women.) Paul, on the other hand, expects christian women to play a responsible part in church meetings, and if, out of concern for public order, he asks them to veil their heads when they pray or prophesy, the veil is the sign of their authority to exercise their christian liberty in this way, not the sign of someone else's authority over them.

Nothing that Paul says elsewhere on women's contribution to church services can be understood in a sense which conflicts with these statements of principle. This applies to the limitations apparently placed on their public liberty in 1 Cor.14:34 ('the women should keep silence in the churches') and 1 Tim.2:11 ('let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness'). Critical questions have indeed been raised about the text of 1 Cor.14:34f.(which the 'western' recension places after verse 40) or the direct authorship of the pastoral epistles. The evidence is not sufficient to extrude 1 Cor.14:34f. from the authentic text; the prohibition expressed in these verses refers to the asking of questions which imply a judgement on prophetic utterances (so, at least, their context suggests). As for the pastoral epistles, we have received them as canonical scripture, and that goes for 1 Tim.2:9-15. I am disposed to agree with Chrysostom, who read the Greek new testament in his native language, that in 1 Tim.2:9f. we have a direction (developing the teaching of 1 Cor.11:2-16) that woman's dress and demeanour should be seemly when they engage in public prayer. In verses 11 and 12 of this chapter, however, women

are quite explicitly not given permission to teach or rule. The relevance of the two arguments — (a) that Adam was formed before Eve and (b) that Eve was genuinely deceived whereas Adam knew what he was doing when he broke the divine commandment — is not immediately obvious; I am not too happy with the suggestion that the former is an early instance of the principle of primogeniture, which the special rights of the firstborn are recognised.

Exegesis seeks to determine the meaning of the text in its primary setting. But when exegesis has done its work, our application of the text should avoid treating the new testament as a book of rules. In applying the new testament text to our own situation, we need not treat it as the scribes of our Lord's day treated the old testament. We should not turn what were meant as guiding lines for worshippers in one situation into laws binding for all time. (It is commonly recognised that the regulations regarding widows, later in 1 Tim., need not be carried out literally today, although their essential principle should continue to be observed.) It is an ironical paradox when Paul, who was so concerned to free his converts from bondage of law, is treated as a law-giver for later generations. The freedom of the Spirit, which can be safeguarded by one set of guiding lines in a particular situation, may call for a different procedure in a new situation.

It is very naturally asked what criteria can be safely used to distinguish between those elements in the apostolic letters which are of local and temporary application and those which are of universal and permanent validity. The question is too big for a detailed discussion here. Where the writings of Paul are concerned, however, a reliable rule of thumb is suggested by his passionate emphasis on freedom — true freedom by contrast with spiritual bondage on the one hand and moral licence on the other. Here it is: whatever in Paul's teaching promotes true freedom is of universal and permanent validity; whatever seems to impose restrictions on true freedom has regard to local and temporary conditions. (For example, to go to another area, restrictions on a christian's freedom in the matter of food are conditioned by the company in which he or she is at the time; and even those restrictions are manifestations of the overriding principle of always considering the well-being of others.)

An appeal to first principles in our application of the new testament might demand the recognition that when the Spirit, in his sovereign good pleasure, bestows varying gifts on individual believers, these gifts are intended to be exercised for the well-being of the whole church. If he manifestly withheld the gifts of teaching or leadership from christian women, then we should accept that as evidence of his will (1 Cor.12:11). But experience shows that he bestows these and

other gifts, with 'undistinguishing regard', on men and women alike — not on all women, of course, nor yet on all men. That being so, it is unsatisfactory to rest with a halfway house in this issue of women's ministry, where they are allowed to pray and prophesy, but not to teach or lead.

Let me add that an appeal to first principles in our application of the new testament demands nothing should be done to endanger the unity of a local church. Let those who understand the scriptures along the lines indicated in this paper have liberty to expound them thus, but let them not force the pace or try to impose their understanding of the scriptures until that understanding finds general acceptance with the church — and when it does, there will be no need to impose it.

#### **IV. The priesthood of women**

The recent debates about the admission of women to the priesthood in the Church of England and similar communities arise largely from a conception of christian priesthood which we do not share. In these debates it has been freely conceded by many that women may perform in church practically all the ministries performed by a nonconformist pastor. The one thing she may not do is to celebrate the eucharist.

The concept of priesthood implied in such a position is of a restricted order to which certain selected men are solemnly ordained. The exclusion of women from this order is defended by a variety of arguments, some of which are more unconvincing than others. Without the presence and action of such an ordained priest, it is held, a communion service is irregular, if not invalid.

Well, we may say, this is an issue which does not affect us: we believe in the priesthood of all believers; we do not recognise a restricted order of priests. Would it be all right, then, at one of our communion services for a women to give thanks for the bread and break it, before it is distributed to the congregation? I suspect that some of our brethren would — reluctantly, it may be — concede anything to a woman rather than this. (I apologise if I am doing them an injustice; this is the impression I sometimes get.) But why? The thanksgiving and the preliminary breaking of the bread at the table are priestly acts only in so far as the person who performs them does so as representative of the other communicants who are there exercising their common priesthood, *not* as representative of Christ, who is really present at his table and needs no one to represent him. Why should not a christian woman who shares our common priesthood perform such a representative act on behalf of her fellow-worshippers as well as

a christian man? This is not a rhetorical question; I should like to be given a scriptural answer.

At some of our women's conferences, I am told, while every other part of the programme is run very competently by women, it is thought desirable for one or two token men to be imported to conduct the communion service. This is not the fault of the conveners; they know very well, however, that some of their sisters would be discouraged from attending if their spiritual directors thought that the communion service would be conducted by women.

J. N. Darby was no feminist, but he had a strong vein of common sense. He thought it a little out of place for a woman even to start a hymn, 'but I do not object', he added, 'if she does it modestly'. But when he was asked if christian women might take the Lord's supper together in the absence of men, he said, 'If three women were on a desert island, I do not see why they should not break bread together, if they did it privately.' Herein he showed his common sense. Of course, they could scarcely do it otherwise than privately, if they were alone on a desert island; and there are other desert islands than those which are entirely surrounded by water.

## V. Brethren traditions and practices

The mention of J. N. Darby may suggest that the Brethren movement — unlike (say) the Society of Friends — has tended to be male-dominated from its inception. I do not forget that elect lady, Theodosia, Viscountess Powerscourt, but even she 'knew her place'.

Two factors have perpetuated such an attitude: one, the continuing high-church tradition in our movement; the other, the scribalism (not to say legalism) of our application of scripture.

There have indeed been outstanding exceptions. the Brethren assembly on the Hohenstaufenstrasse, Berlin, was founded by Toni von Blücher (a female descendant of Wellington's comrade-in-arms at Waterloo) and some like-minded women. When in due course a man joined their fellowship, he was (unlike themselves) so utterly ungifted that his presence made no difference to their procedure. And I know of one Brethren meeting in the north-east of Scotland — at Rhynie, Aberdeenshire — which in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century obstinately persisted in allowing liberty of ministry to women as well as men. In my boyhood I met a very old lady, Mrs Lundin-Brown, who used to spend the summer in our part of the world. Her christian activity went back well before the revival of 1859, and she enjoyed the fellowship of the Brethren despite her assiduity in the

public preaching of the gospel. By the time I knew her she was nearing her century and could no longer continue her preaching, but would not be restrained from taking part audibly in prayer-meetings in the most traditionalist Brethren assemblies in the north of Scotland. An old lady of indomitable will can get away with anything!

Such an exercise of liberty was untypical for that age in most denominations. But nineteenth-century attitudes tend to persist in quarters where they are not clearly distinguished from first-century principles.

### **Conclusion**

What was said at the beginning of this paper about relativity in earlier days applies to our own times also. We too are culturally conditioned; only we do not notice it. The women's liberation movement has conditioned not only our practices but our very vocabulary. But, in such an important matter as we are now considering, it would be a pity if we were influenced by contemporary world-movements in thought and practice rather than by the guidance of the Spirit, as he speaks his liberating word to men and women today through the ministry of our Lord and his servant Paul. That ministry, that liberating word, is enshrined for us in the pages of scripture: to use scripture aright is to hear what the Spirit is saying through it to the churches of the twentieth century as well as what he said to those of the first.

# **The Role of Women in the New Testament Church\***

LEROY BIRNEY

The role of women in the new testament church is a vital subject for any congregation wishing to derive its church order from the new testament. Many different traditions have arisen in various church groups about participation of women singing, praying, testifying, teaching and other aspects of church life. We owe no reverence to any tradition, but only to scripture. The importance of this subject in scripture is evident from the fact that the Greek word for woman is used 214 times in the new testament, 104 of these times in the Acts and Epistles. The congregation with the will to find and follow the scriptural teaching about the role of women in the church will surely be blessed and benefitted. Let us look to scripture for the principles concerning the role of women in the new testament church, and for the application of these principles (1) to the general role of women in the new testament church and (2) to the specific role of women in the new testament church-meeting.

## **I. Two basic principles**

There are two principles concerning the role of women in the new testament church. The first principle is that in standing before God, women are equal with men. 'There is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal.3:28b).<sup>1</sup> 'However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originated from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God' (1 Cor.11:11,12). Therefore, since women have equal standing before God, they share in such important truths as personal salvation through Christ ('Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ' 1 Pet.1:18,19), the indwelling of the Holy Spirit ('But if anyone does not have the Spirit

\* This paper was originally published in 1971 as CBRF Occasional Paper Number 4.

of Christ, he does not belong to him' Rom.8:9b), and the priesthood of all believers ('You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ . . . but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' 1 Pet.2:5,9).

The second principle concerning the role of women in the new testament church is that the man is to be the head of the woman. 'But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ' (1 Cor.11:3). Woman is equal to man just as Christ is equal to God, and she is to be submissive to man as Christ submits to the Father — the willing submission of an equal. It is significant that the Greek word used when speaking of the obedience of slaves and children (*hupakouein* — Col.3:20-28; Eph.6:5) is not used to refer to the submission of the woman (here the word is *hypotassesthai* — 1 Cor.14:34; Col.3:18; Eph.5:21). The reason that the woman is to be submissive even though she is not inferior is that God intended this relationship, as can be seen in the method of creation: 'For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but for the man's sake' (1 Cor. 11:8-9).

We may hold both of these principles without contradiction, for willing submission is not a denial of equality. All the passages about the role of women in the new testament church are in harmony with both of these principles. We can test an interpretation of a passage about the role of women by checking to see if that interpretation either gives a woman headship over man or denies her spiritual equality with man.

## **II. General role of women in the new testament church**

Having observed the two principles that woman is equal with man before God and that woman is to be subject to man, let us look to scripture to find the general role of woman in the new testament church. We will look for specific commands and for examples which illustrate precepts. The role of a christian woman and wife and mother is more important than is generally realised. A mother's teaching may influence the whole direction of a person's life, as it apparently did for Timothy (2 Tim.1:5). A godly christian mother is by no means 'just a housewife'. The rearing of children is considered an important role for women in the new testament, as is evident from the instructions about

widows in 1 Tim. Having brought up children was a requirement for being enrolled as a widow (1 Tim.5:10), and Paul wished the younger widows to 'get married, bear children, keep house' (1 Tim.5:14). The mother's position has been exalted by the fact that even the Son of God was 'born of a woman' (Gal.4:4), and, as Hay says, "The faithfulness and spiritual knowledge of the next generation of believers depends to no small extent upon the believing women of this generation."

The role of a christian woman as a wife is no less important, for God said at the very first, 'It is not good that the man should be alone' (Gen.2:18 ASV). Apparently it is only as a special gift that some men are enabled to live effectively for Christ without the help of a wife (Matt.19:12). A man may not serve as an elder or deacon unless his wife and family give faithful testimony (1 Tim.3:2-5,12; Tit.1:6). We also find missionary wives in the new testament, for Paul writes, 'Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?' (1 Cor.9:5). The woman's role as a christian wife and mother is vital to the progress of the church.

However, we must not limit the ministry of women to the home alone, for God's word does not do so. Women may also serve as workers for the Lord in a more direct sense. 'Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord' (Rom.16:12). The three names in verse 12 are names of women. In another letter Paul says, '. . . help these women (Euodia and Syntyche) who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel' (Phil.4:3a). These two women who disagreed (as men also have been known to do) apparently had helped Paul in some phase of evangelistic work.

Women also may be workers for a particular local assembly. 'I commend to you sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchræa; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well' (Rom.16:1,2). 'Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you' (Rom.16:6). It is uncertain whether 1 Tim.3:11, 'women must likewise be dignified, not like malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things,' refers to the wives of men workers of the church (deacons) or to women workers of the church (deaconesses), since the Greek language uses the same word for woman and wife. The widows supported by the church may have had special responsibilities to the assembly also (1 Tim.5:5,9,10).

The woman also is to teach under certain circumstances (not in the

church meeting, however, as we shall see later). 'Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behaviour, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage (margin:train) the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonoured' (Tit.2:3-5). This is quite an ambitious amount of teaching, and it could take some effort and planning on the part of the spiritual women in the assembly, probably with the assistance of the elders. Apparently a woman may also teach or help to teach a man privately, for Priscilla and Aquila (with the wife named first) met with Apollos privately and 'explained to him the way of God more accurately' (Acts 18:26). This incident may suggest a solution for cases in which a woman has more training or knowledge in some area than the men in an assembly. She could teach one or two of them privately and they could teach the entire church-meeting, as in the case of Apollos.

Hospitality is another important aspect of the ministry of women. John Mark's mother opened her house as a gathering place for prayer (Acts 12:12), and some have suggested that this may indicate that hers was the home in which one assembly met regularly. Lydia urged her hospitality upon Paul and his company when he went to Macedonia (Acts 16:15). Home bible studies, home prayer cells, entertainment of christian workers, entertainment of lonely people, and provision of a home for youth meetings are just a few of the ways to exercise this ministry today.

Women are not, of course, limited to specific things mentioned in scripture, but may engage in any good work which is in harmony with the two principles outlined at the beginning of this article. 'Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness' (1 Tim.2:9,10). Dorcas is a good example of a woman whose fame depended upon good works rather than fashion. 'This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did' (Acts 9:36b). The spirit which should characterise all of a woman's ministry and life is expressed in 1 Peter 3:3,4: 'And let not your adornment be external only — braiding the hair and wearing gold jewellery, and putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God'.

### **III. Role of women in the new testament church-meeting**

To recapitulate, we have observed two scriptural principles concerning the role of women in the church: first, that the woman has equal standing with the man before God as a christian, involving such truths as salvation, reception of the Holy Spirit, and the priesthood of all believers; and second, that the woman is to accept the headship of man. Let us now look to scripture to see how these principles are applied to the new testament church-meeting. Fortunately, in major areas it is not left to our frail wisdom to decide the application, for the scriptural application is clearly outlined by precept and example.

The main passages which we must examine are 1 Cor.11:2-16, 1 Cor.14:34-35, and 1 Tim.2:8-12. It will be our goal as we deal with each passage to interpret it with its most natural meaning, examining it first in its own immediate context, then comparing it to other passages on the same subject. We take it as basic that no scripture may be interpreted so as to contradict or nullify another.

#### **A. Three passages and the principle of headship**

In each of these three passages, the application is based upon the principle that the woman should express submission to the man: 'the man is the head of the woman' (1 Cor.11:3); let them subject themselves just as the Law also says' (1 Cor.14:34); 'but I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man' (1 Tim.2:12).

#### **B. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 — prayer, prophecy and covering**

##### *1. Application to men and women*

In Cor.11, this principle is applied to the deportment of men and women when praying and prophesying. How does it apply to men? 'Every man who has something on his head while praying and prophesying disgraces his head'(v.4) and 'For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God' (v.7a). Men converted from Judaism would be used to praying in the synagogue with a cloth on their head. Paul teaches that they should discontinue this practice (a) because their physical head symbolises the glory of God which should not be covered (v.7), and (b) because the man's only head in terms of authority is Christ his superior, so that he should not wear the head-covering which might suggest submission to some other human.

The woman on the other hand should wear the head covering when praying or prophesying, for several reasons. (a) Her head symbolises

the glory of man, which should be covered when approaching God — ‘but the woman is the glory of man’ (v.7b). (b) Man, her equal, is her head as well as Christ, so she should cover her physical head when praying and prophesying as an expression of her submission to man. This shows that she accepts God’s creation of man and woman in this relationship and her place in it — ‘For indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake. Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head . . .’ (v.9,10).<sup>2</sup> (c) ‘Because of the angels’ (v.10b). The angels are connected with maintaining the laws and limits of creation, and the covering is an expression of the order intended in creation. Angels also seem to have a special interest in the church.<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce says, “This probably means that angels are invisibly present at church meetings and can learn lessons in propriety from the orderly behaviour of the children of God.” Thus, for a woman to fail to express submission when praying and prophesying is to shock the angels as well as men.

## 2 *What was the covering?*

The covering is not the hair itself, for it could be put aside without cutting the hair (‘For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off’ v.6a). “In giving unto woman her hair as a covering nature hints that she should not uncover her head” (Zerbst). Nor is the covering a veil which covers the face, as in some parts of the East today. Zerbst speaks of “. . . the veil, or more correctly stated, of the headcloth for the text speaks of uncovered head (*kephalē*), not of uncovered countenance (*prosōpon*)”. Compare 2 Cor.3:18 which speaks of ‘unveiled *face*’ rather than ‘unveiled *head*’. The word for a veil which covers the face (2 Cor.3:13) is not used in 1 Cor.11. So the covering was a cloth over the hair, but not the face. It was the usual custom for a Greek woman to pull the upper fold or laplet of her robe on to her head so as to hang down on to the brow. One may see pictures of this general type of covering in *Harper’s Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities*, pp.676 and 1670.

## 3 *Does the chapter apply to both married and unmarried?*

Some have considered that Paul’s main purpose here is to protect and preserve marriage and that it therefore applies only to married women. However, since the demeanour of the unmarried also affects the preservation of marriage, a word about marriage is also a word about the relationship between the sexes in general. Thus it seems best to take 1 Cor.11 as generally applying to both married and unmarried women.

#### 4. *Does the context indicate a church meeting?*

Does the context indicate that chapter 11 refers to praying and prophesying in the church meeting or in some kind of family or private meeting? Several factors indicate that it refers to a church meeting. (a) There is nothing in this context to indicate that it refers to a private meeting. Furthermore, "at this early date, the distinction between public and private christian meetings — in church or in house — was very imperfectly developed" (Findlay), and it is questionable whether the headcloth would be so important for the home. (b) On the other hand, praying and prophesying are normal church meeting activities, so that one would expect some indication if the chapter applied only to some other type of meeting.<sup>4</sup> G. H. Lang, from 'the assemblies', writes, "Chapter 14:4,5,22,24,29-33 makes it unquestionable that prophesying is a gift for exercise in the public gatherings of the church." (c) The reference to angels implies a church setting. 'The purpose is that all the angelic powers should now see the complex wisdom of God's plan being worked out through the church' (Eph.3:10, Phillips). (d) There is an explicit reference in the passage to the practice of the churches: 'but if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God' (v.16). Note that the term is 'churches', referring to local gatherings, rather than 'church', referring to christians in general. (e) We also note that women prophesied publicly on the day of Pentecost, which began the church as the body of Christ united by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. 'These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:14). And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance' (Acts 2:1-4). 'But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: "And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even upon my bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of my Spirit and they shall prophesy"' (Acts 2:16-18). The fact that women as well as men prophesied publicly at the formation of the church (for both were present and all received the Spirit and all spoke) indicates that it was not a usurpation of man's headship for a woman to prophesy in a

public meeting. (f) Finally, it is evident as chapter 11 continues, that the apostle is teaching about the local assembly-meeting at the Lord's table.

It is evident that it is widely recognised that 1 Cor.11 applies to the church meeting from the fact that so many assemblies and church groups require women to wear a head-covering in the church-meeting, on the basis of this passage, since *no other passage in the new testament speaks of a head-covering*. Note that it is *while praying and prophesying* that the head-covering is especially commanded. 'Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered?' (v.13) 'Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head' (v.4-5a). Concerning verses 4 and 5, G. H. Lang notes that, "as the first clause implies that men prayed and prophesied, so as certainly does the second imply that women also did so . . . It was idle to direct how persons should be dressed when doing certain acts if in fact they were forbidden to do them at all". F. F. Bruce paraphrases verses 4-5a. 'Any man who engages in public prayer and prophesying with his head veiled does dishonour to his head; but any woman who engages in public prayer and prophesying with her head *unveiled* does dishonour to *her* head.' G. Campbell Morgan notes, "Paul recognised the right of women to pray and prophesy, but certain habits on the part of these who do it must be corrected."

### 5. Does the teaching apply today?

Finally we must ask if these instructions still apply or if they were intended only for that culture. They must still apply, for they are based upon christian doctrine, which does not change. The teaching that the woman should be submissive "is the keynote of Paul's doctrine on the subject . . . This command cannot fairly be set aside as a temporary regulation due to the state of ancient society" (Findlay). Indeed, these directions for worship do not follow the custom of the times. While the Greek women usually pulled the lappet of their robe on to their head while outside, they *uncovered* their head while sacrificing, as did the men. On the other hand, in Judaism the men prayed with a covering on the head but the women were generally, though not always, silent in the synagogue, unveiled according to Zerbst, although they covered their hair when in the street. Thus, in christian worship both men and women were given new dignity and liberty as compared to Judaism, but a proper distinction between the sexes was preserved as compared to Greek and Roman worship.

Finally, some would hesitate to let these verses apply to present meetings on the basis of the idea that such prophecy ceased in the first century. However, prophesying is not necessarily predicting future events nor revealing new truth. Rather, 'he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation' (1 Cor.14:3 RSV). Lang describes prophecy as giving "a message given by the Spirit at the time, fitting the exact need of the moment, and charged with holy unction to the hearer" and he testifies that many have experienced this.

Hence, we conclude that the regulations about the dress of women while praying and prophesying are based on christian doctrine rather than custom and are still applicable today.

### C. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 — silence

We must now give equal consideration to the statements in 1 Cor.14:34-35. 'Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.'

#### 1. 'Chattering' explanation insufficient

Some have noted that the basic meaning of the verb 'to speak (*laleō*)' used here is to chatter, and so they claim that Paul is merely prohibiting chattering during the service. This is an insufficient interpretation, for it would apply to men as much as to women. Furthermore, the verb is used over 300 times in the new testament with many different applications, such as talking, questioning, arguing, protesting, etc. In each case we must look at the context to find the significance of this verb.

#### 2. What kind of speaking is forbidden in this context?

What kind of speaking was uppermost in the apostle's mind in this particular passage? We should note that there is an emphasis on the teaching situation. "In view of the words which follow, 'let them be *subject*' and 'if they want to *learn*' . . . it appears probable that Paul is thinking of *church-teaching and authoritative direction* as a role unfit for women", according to Findlay. We should keep in mind that teaching in the synagogue and early churches was not done solely by means of a sermon or lecture but by means of dialogue and discussion. The Greek

word *dialogeō* (speak, discuss, conduct a discussion) is used of such meetings in Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8-9; 20:9; 24:12,25. The idea is interchange of thought, even of disputing, and it could be very lively. So whatever else the passage may prohibit, it appears that the primary thought is that the women were not to enter into these dialogues by which the congregation was taught, not even by posing questions, for in dialogue and discussion, questions are a part of the teaching process as well as statements. Since teaching is by nature an exercise of authority, it would be a violation of the principle of submission for the woman to enter into the teaching in the church-meeting.

The other hint of the apostle's thought is his instruction that the submission which he is commanding here is to be in accordance with the law. The law teaches that the women should be submissive to man when it records (a) that woman was created out of man and for the sake of man — Gen.2:18, 21-23 cf. 1 Cor.11:8-9; 1 Tim.2:13 — (b) that she was the first to transgress — Gen.3:6 cf. 1 Tim.2:14 — (c) that she was told 'thy husband . . . shall rule over thee' — Gen.3:16 ASV — and (d) that a man could annul a wife's or daughter's vow or pledge on the day he heard of it — Num.30:3-8. However, the submission commanded by the law did not mean that it forbade women to praise and prophesy publicly in the presence of men. Miriam was a prophetess (Ex.15:20, Micah 6:4); Deborah, a married woman, was a prophetess (Judges 4:4); Huldah, a married woman, was also a prophetess (2 Kings 22:14). Words spoken by these women were even included in the inspired word of God, with approval. Immediately after reading the law, Shaphan the scribe and other public men went to inquire of the prophetess Huldah for King Josiah (2 Kings 22:8,10,14-20). Evidently they did not consider the submission required of a woman in that law to prevent her from prophesying before men. Hannah prayed at the sacrifice before the tabernacle when she delivered Samuel to the priests, and her words are recorded as scripture for both men and women to read (1 Sam.1:24-2:10). Mary's praise also is recorded as scripture for both men and women to read (Luke 1:46-55). Anna the prophetess prayed 'night and day' in the temple, and she publicly offered thanks to God there (Luke 2:36-38). A woman healed by Jesus praised God publicly in the synagogue (Luke 13:13). Jesus was criticised for healing on the Sabbath, but the woman was not rebuked for speaking aloud at a public meeting. The law did not prohibit prayer and praise by a woman in public worship either at the tabernacle or in the temple or in the synagogue. "Praise, prayer, and prophesying in public, as moved by the Spirit, being, therefore, not inconsistent with subjection of woman according to the law, how can they be prohibited by a passage which expressly says that its

requirement corresponds to that of the law?" (Lang). That is, a command to silence *based on* the submission required by the law does not include silence in matters where the submission required by the law *permitted* speaking, but only matters which involve the exercise of authority, such as teaching, arguing, questioning, or officiating.

### 3. *The difficulty — the assumption that absolute silence is commanded*

After noting that women prophesied at the beginning of the church on the day of Pentecost, as foretold by Joel, that women joined men in public prayer, and that women praying or prophesying in that situation are instructed to wear a head-covering, Lang says, "Now all this testimony of scripture becomes confused and contradictory only when *absolute* silence is supposed to be the requirement of the words (in 1 Cor.14:34-35). Ought not the necessary rule to apply, that later statements must be construed in harmony with earlier, unless they avowedly repeal the earlier?"<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, it is widely recognised that this passage means 'be silent where submission requires it' rather than 'be silent without exception', for nearly all assemblies allow the women to join in the singing and to sing solos. This is not keeping silent, but it is no problem because it is not a type of speaking that involves the exercise of authority.<sup>6</sup> Just as we consider singing a solo as a type of speaking that is compatible with a woman's submissiveness, so the scripture seems to consider public offering of worship in prayer and prophecy as a type of speaking compatible with a woman's submissiveness. For prayer is spoken first of all to God and not to men. It is just as serious an error for a man to use prayer to preach and teach as for a woman. Nor is prophecy an exercise of authority, for it is not premeditated authoritative teaching, but the sharing of a thought, praise, or testimony at the impulse of the Spirit in a way spiritually beneficial to those present. H. L. Ellison, a scholar from 'the assemblies' says, "For me it is incontrovertible that 1 Cor.11:5 permits women to pray and prophesy under certain conditions . . . However 1 Cor.14:34-36 is to be interpreted, and there are more possibilities than most realise, it may not be used as an indirect cancellation of a permission already given." G. Campbell Morgan writes, "Evidently there were women in Corinth given to careless and contentious talk, and that is what Paul was prohibiting. Certainly he was not saying that women have no right to pray or prophesy in the church, because he had already given instructions as to how and under what conditions she was to do it."

### D. 1 Timothy 2:8-12 — teaching and the exercise of authority

Let us now examine 1 Tim.2:8-12. The first question is whether this passage refers to the church-meeting. It apparently does, for it seems to speak of a gathering in which prayer is offered, men are tempted to dissension, women are tempted to overdress, and instruction is offered. Some take 'in every place' to refer to each church-meeting, and others take it to mean everywhere there are men or christians. The passage may have a wider application than the local church-meeting, but it would certainly apply to it as well.

#### 1. *Special exhortations to men and to women*

In verses 8-10 we see special exhortations for men and for women: 'Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. Likewise I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.'

Lifting up of the hands was the usual posture of prayer in the east, and the early church seems to have adopted the same practice. Since the special command to the women concerns adornment and its relation to good deeds while the special command to the men concerns prayer and its relation to holy living, some have argued from the silence about women praying that they were forbidden to do so. Others, noting that there is no verb in verse 9, say that we should translate not 'likewise (I want) women to adorn themselves . . .' as in the version we quoted, but 'likewise (I want) women (to pray) adorning themselves . . .' However, neither position is really satisfactory, for both assume more than can actually be demonstrated from this passage of scripture. In verse 8 the position of the words in the Greek shows that the *emphasis* is on prayer rather than upon men as opposed to women. A conservative Greek scholar writes: "the position of *tous andras* (the men) forbids us from supposing that such distinction was the apostle's main object in this verse . . . As it now stands, the stress is on *proseuchesthai* (to pray)." So to hold that this verse forbids women to pray is an argument from silence, which can be held only if it can be proven from other scriptures on the subject. But it is clear from 1 Cor.11:4-5,13 and the freedom of women under the law to pray publicly that such prayer was not forbidden. On the other hand, to supply the verb 'to pray' in verse 9 and so turn it into a command that women pray publicly is also to go beyond what can be proven from the

context. So we must be satisfied to give each command its special application without pressing it to mean more than it states.

## 2. *Women forbidden to teach*

In verses 11-12 the apostle turns to the subject of teaching and instructing. 'Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.' Here we see the same principle that the woman is to be submissive and not to exercise authority over a man, and the implication is that teaching is clearly an exercise of authority. Hence, delivering the sermon or officiating at a meeting or teaching a class of both men and women is not the woman's role.

We may wonder how scripture can prohibit a woman from teaching (directly or indirectly by posing questions) but allow her to pray or prophesy (or sing) in the church-meeting. It is because the former involves exercise of authority over man, but the latter do not. We have already noted that prayer is directed toward God rather than men. (A woman to pray *to God* . . . — 1 Cor.11:13), and that it is not the proper medium for authoritative teaching. Hence, prayer in the church-meeting is not an exercise of authority. However, what is the relationship between prophecy and teaching? Since the verb 'prophesy' basically means 'forthtell' rather than 'foretell', some have used it as if it referred to preaching and teaching from the pulpit. But prophecy and teaching are two different gifts: 'All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they?' (1 Cor.12:29). "The difference between prophesying and teaching is simple and uniform. The prophet spoke by immediate impulse of the Spirit, without premeditation or preparation for that particular occasion, whereas the teacher pondered the divine oracles, the word of God, and delivered to the people the fruit of his meditations thereon." Prophecy builds us up spiritually, but it is not exposition of the scriptures. Perhaps prophecy would include speaking praise of God, testifying to how he saved one or helped in one's christian life, speaking a word of comfort or encouragement to the believers, etc. Teaching the scriptures, in contrast, of necessity implies a command to believe or to obey some precept. Hence, teaching is forbidden to women in the church-meeting because it is an exercise of authority, but prophecy is permitted because it is not an exercise of authority. Of course, when women do pray or prophesy in the church-meeting, they should do so in a modest and undomineering manner, dressed in clothes that are not extravagant or suggestive, with some kind of modest covering on the head as a symbol of submission.

### **E. The priesthood of all believers, including women**

We should consider one thing more — the connection of our understanding of these scriptures with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The writer of an Emmaus correspondence course (MacDonald) states, “All children of God are priests of God with all the privileges and responsibilities that go with such a name.” This is based upon scriptures such as the following: ‘you . . . are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet.2:5); ‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood . . . that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’ (1 Pet.2:9); ‘And he has made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father’ (Rev.1:6a).

Priests in the old testament were those who offered the sacrifices to God. We may offer as sacrifices to God our bodies (Rom.12:1), our material resources (Heb.13:16), and praise to God (Heb.13:15). The priests also *represented* the people of God before Jehovah in the tabernacle. A christian does the same thing when he prays aloud in a group gathered for worship. To permit only a certain group of believers, such as clergy, to pray or to speak praises to God in the church-meeting is to violate the practical implications of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The same is true if we limit prayer and speaking of praises to God in the church-meeting to male believers only. The new testament passages about the priesthood of believers never limit it to males only, and we are clearly taught that there is no difference between male and female believers in doctrines that concern our relation to God, as priesthood does. (There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ — Gal.3:28b). It should be noted that teaching is never mentioned in connection with the priesthood of all believers in the new testament. Rather the comparison is with the duties of sacrifice involved in worship in the old testament (1 Pet.2:5,9). Therefore, it is no violation of the priesthood of all believers that women are not allowed to teach in the church-meeting.

### **F. Some notes from church history**

Some may wish to know how the early church after the close of the new testament understood these scriptures about whether women pray, prophesy, or teach in the church-meetings. Although practice may have varied somewhat from congregation to congregation in the

post-apostolic age, it is evident that the explanation offered above is consistent with what was widely accepted and practised in the early church. A document entitled *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, written no later than A.D.399, says, "We do not permit our women to teach in the church, but only to pray and to hear those that teach." Clement of Alexandria, about A.D.193, writes in *The Instructor* that the woman should be veiled when she goes to church, 'since it is becoming for her to pray veiled'. Tertullian, about A.D.200, writes in *Against Marcion*, "When enjoining on women silence in the church (in 1 Cor.14:34) that they speak not for the mere sake of learning (although that even they have the right of prophesying, he has already shown when he covers the woman that prophesies with a veil) . . .". This gives us additional confidence that we have found the correct understanding, but of course our authority is scripture, not church history.

### Conclusion

In summary, we see two basic principles: (1) Men and women have equal standing in relation to God, including matters such as salvation, reception of the Holy Spirit, and the priesthood of all believers; (2) Woman is to be subject to man. Outside the church-meeting we find women in the roles of christian wife and mother, christian worker for a local assembly and, in a wider sense, teacher of an individual and of other women, giver of hospitality, and doer of good works. In the church-meeting we find that women (a) are forbidden to teach or otherwise exercise authority over men (1 Cor.14:35, 1 Tim.2:12), (b) are permitted to pray and prophesy but are to wear a head-covering when doing so (1 Cor.11:5,13), and (c) are to dress modestly and discreetly (1 Tim.2:9).

What about cases not directly dealt with in the bible? In those cases, we should follow general principles: Is it a violation of the headship of the man? ('The man is the head of the woman' — 1 Cor.11:3). Does it involve authoritative teaching in the church-meeting? ('I do not allow a woman to teach . . . a man' — 1 Tim.2:12). Is it a rightful exercise of the priesthood of all believers? ('A holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices . . . That you may proclaim the excellencies of him . . .' — 1 Pet.2:5,9).

H. L. Ellison, a full-time worker in fellowship with the assemblies and a well known author, quotes approvingly from a letter written to him by a missionary to the moslems. "I wish you'd let the sisters pray audibly in church meetings . . . After eleven years of experience here, where women are allowed to pray, I wouldn't like to go back to our

home tradition in which I was reared — the priesthood of all male believers.” Ellison continues: “There follow three delightful but unreproducible sketches. The first, headed ‘East’, shows a woman completely covered by a veil with the caption ‘*burqa* = suppression’ . . . The second, headed ‘N.T.’ shows her with merely a partial veil, and the caption is ‘covering, 1 Cor.11:10 = controlled expression’. The third, headed ‘West’, shows no sign of covering, and the caption is ‘unrestrained liberty’.”

Which shall we choose?

### **Postscript (added in 1979)**

After eight years of trying to put this paper into practice as a church planting missionary in Colombia, what changes would I make? Experience in five assemblies begun and continuing has shown that the women have grown spiritually as they were encouraged to verbalise their testimony and worship, but that the men have maintained leadership in both the teaching and the open meetings such as the Lord’s supper. However, some changes are in order.

First, as a result of cross-cultural experience, I would be much more open to the possibility that the head-covering is cultural. Nevertheless, I have not found a convincing dynamic equivalent which would be understandable to the average christian trying to draw her ecclesiology directly from the new testament. Therefore, I still encourage the use of the head-covering.

Second, the kind of speaking referred to in Cor.14:34-35 deserves much more research. For example, I would no longer reject out-of-hand the possibility that the problem was women shouting across the aisle to ask their husbands questions since I have seen similar interruptions in new churches in Colombia.

Third, further reflection on 1 Tim.2:9 has led me to consider that ‘to pray’ is the correct verb to supply. It is primarily a statement about how women should be adorned when in public prayer.

Fourth, I would greatly expand the section on the implications of the priesthood of all believers for women. Eight years ago the goal was simply to convince Brethren that women could speak in the meetings in some way, but in Colombia I have had to face questions such as whether women may give thanks for the bread and wine, distribute them, baptise and guide in worship. The conclusion is ‘yes’, and not just because of necessity in a missionary situation, but because these actions are a legitimate exercise of the priesthood of all believers. The real debate should be not whether some women as well as some men

may be priests, but whether all born-again women as well as all born-again men are in fact priests.

Fifth, the question of deaconesses especially deserves much fuller treatment. Phoebe, the women of 1 Tim.3:11 and probably Rom.16:6, and the widows of 1 Timothy would be in this category. If a woman may be a minister (deaconess), how may she minister, to whom, with what responsibility, and therefore with what authority? Within the scope of the two principles of spiritual equality and male headship, the concept of deaconesses suggests a much broader ministry than our traditions permit off the mission field. On the field such ministry has often been accepted but on the pragmatic basis of the scarcity of men rather than the biblical basis of the role of a deaconess. It is interesting that commendation, which is the closest the Brethren come to ordination, is as available to women as to men.

Finally, any revision would have to take into account eight years of abundant literature on this subject.

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## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.
2. 'Therefore' (*dia touto*) probably refers back to verses 8-9, with the phrase about angels added as a further reason. See Findlay, II, 874.
3. See 1 Cor.4:9, 1 Tim.5:21, Eph.3:10, 1 Pet.1:12.
4. The same objection applies to Grosheide's contention that this is a public meeting, but not a church-meeting (Frederik Willem Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp.251-252). As David J. A. Clines ('Women in the Church — a Survey of Recent Opinion', *The Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*, X, December 1965, 34), says: "the dichotomy 'public' versus 'private' is a misleading one, and . . . the only meaning that can be given to 'public' and 'private' in Corinth is 'in the street, out of doors', and 'at home, in the house'. Church meetings and family worship alike would have been private in this sense." Grosheide's position also fails to account for the other contextual evidence that Paul is speaking of the church-meeting here.
5. In a helpful personal letter, missionary Gerard Couenhoven pointed out to me that men also are commanded in 1 Cor.14 to be silent. Verse 28 says, 'but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church'. Yet we understand from the context that this means silent with respect to tongues; it does not prohibit the person from speaking in an understandable language. Likewise, verse 30, 'let the first keep silent', does not mean absolute silence, but silence while the other is talking. Similarly, the woman is to be silent only with respect to exercise of authority.
6. Lest anyone feel that singing is not a way of speaking, we note that the verb used for speaking in 1 Cor.14 (*laleō*) is the same one used in Eph.5:19, 'speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . .'.

# **A Response to L. Birney's 'The Role of Women in the New Testament Church'**

MARY. J. EVANS

Leroy Birney shows us the necessity for looking again at the scriptures to discover how far the understanding of the church today relating to the role of women does in fact stem from the teaching of scripture itself, rather than from culturally determined presuppositions which fit what scripture says into an already decided framework. He argues well and positively that women should be playing a full part in prayer and prophecy within the worship of the church, pointing out the danger of using verses like 1 Cor.14:34, which is based on the law, to forbid something which the law itself does not forbid.

However, it seems to me that Birney himself makes certain assumptions within his paper that really require further investigation and I would like to discuss here just two of those assumptions; firstly the nature of the custom relating to head-covering, and secondly the meaning of headship as used in the new testament to describe the relation between man and woman, and the relationship of this term to authority and subjection.

## **I. Head covering**

It is very clear that in 1 Cor.11 that Paul, for whatever reasons, is supporting a difference in custom, relating to hair or headgear, between men and women when they pray and prophesy. It is possible that he is stressing that a woman should exercise her authority to pray and prophesy (v.10, cf. p.35 below) as a woman and not overturn the structure of creation as two sexes by seeking to imitate the men! Birney rather takes it for granted that the custom which Paul has in mind here is the wearing of a headcover or shawl that covers the hair but not the face. Therefore he concludes that women, when praying and prophesying in worship today, should wear a similar headcover.

However, it is by no means as easy as Birney makes it appear, to identify just what the custom is to which Paul refers. There are two primary difficulties. Firstly, we do not have any conclusive evidence as to what exactly were the customs of the time regarding headgear for

men and women, nor what symbolic significance, if any, was accorded to such customs. The evidence that we do have seems to indicate that there was a great variation in custom from region to region and also from town to country. Thus we can really only speculate as to the precise custom Paul had in mind for the Corinthians.

The second and more significant difficulty is the terminology which Paul himself uses. The only time that he uses a specific word that could be translated 'veil' or 'headcovering' occurs in v.15b where he says 'her hair is given to her *instead of* a covering.' To use 'for' or 'as' here, rather than 'instead of', as we are forced to do if we assume that the custom Paul is dealing with is the wearing of a head-covering, means that we must make a deliberate alteration in the normal use of the Greek word *anti*. The terms used elsewhere in the chapter are all various forms of the same rather obscure word which has some relation to the head, and includes the sense of hanging down, but does not necessarily relate to a headcover at all. Some scholars feel that it applies to a particular kind of hairstyle and others to the length of hair. Thus it is very difficult for us to come to any definite conclusion from the passage itself as to the nature of the customs to which Paul refers here.

It has been argued very convincingly,<sup>1</sup> that whatever the custom is, it cannot be seen as the wearing of a veil or a shawl on the head. There are several reasons for this, even apart from the statement in v.15 that her hair is given her instead of such a covering. Firstly, 1 Cor. 11 is not the only place where a woman's hair is mentioned in the new testament. 1 Tim.2:9, and 1 Pet.3:3 both give instructions that a woman is not to have braided hair. Remembering that 1 Tim.2:9 is clearly in the context of worship, surely instructions relating to hairstyle would be totally redundant if it were being taken for granted that all such women would have their heads covered anyway.

Secondly, as Birney acknowledges, this would mean that Paul was apparently giving strong theological reasons for making quite a distinct change in the Jewish worship customs for men. Surely such a distinct change would have been at least mentioned elsewhere. Paul himself often took part in synagogue worship — presumably with covered head; was this dishonouring? More serious is the fact that on occasion the old testament prescribes head-covering for men in worship; e.g., the high priest's turban in Lev.16. Thus we are forced to say, if Paul really is stressing the wearing of head-covering, for women but not for men, either that the old testament was prescribing a custom which was dishonouring — surely unthinkable — or that the coming of Christ introduced a new distinction between men and women based on a differing relation to God — surely equally

unthinkable if we remember that 'in Christ there is neither male nor female' (Gal.3:28).

As then, we are not at all sure of the custom to which Paul is referring, we must be very wary of insisting on a particular custom in our worship today. What seems clear is that if a man or a woman follow a custom which is, in their society, appropriate only to the other sex, then they are in one sense seeking to deny their own sex, and this is dishonouring both to themselves and to God. This applies as much in the church today as it did in the first-century Corinthian church. Paul makes it very clear by his quotations from Genesis that sexual differentiation is part of creation, and therefore he rejects a false identification of the sexes. A woman should worship, pray and prophesy as a woman, and a man should do so as a man.

## **II. Headship, authority and subjection**

Birney begins his work by identifying two principles relating to our understanding of the role of women in the new testament church. (a) In standing before God, women are equal with men. (b) The man is to be the head of the woman. He then uses these principles as the basis for his discussion and for his exegesis of the three key passages with which he deals.

It is clear that these two principles are present in scripture, but it is not good enough to assume as Birney does that their meaning is self-evident. As far as the second principle is concerned, one must recognise that to describe the man as 'head' of the woman is to use a metaphor. Before we apply the principle we must be very sure that we are using the metaphor in the way that Paul intended it to be used, and not assume that its significance in the first century is automatically going to be identical with its use in the twentieth century. One indication that care must be taken here is the fact that in the first century it was the heart and not the head that was seen as the source of thought and reason; the head was seen rather as the source of life.

It is certainly not self-evident that Birney is justified in using the sentence, 'Woman is to be subject to man' as completely synonymous with the sentence, 'The man is to be head of the woman'. If we are to use the principle of headship as a means of testing the interpretation of a passage, then we must make certain that our interpretation of the principle itself is correct. Let us look then, firstly at the background of the term 'head', and secondly at the way in which Paul uses the term to describe the relation between man and woman — or husband and wife.

### A. *What is meant by 'head'?*

The Hebrew word for head (*rosh*) can be used in a metaphorical sense as 'chief over' and thus it is possible that, as a Hebrew-speaker, Paul was thinking in terms of a relationship of authority and submission when he used the word 'head'. However, even in Hebrew, the main idea of *rosh* can be in terms of priority rather than of authority as such. In Greek, the word for head (*kephalē*) is not normally used in the sense of 'ruler', but it is sometimes used in the sense of 'source' — in much the same way as we might describe the source of a river as its head — taking up the idea of priority. Because of this, S. Bedale<sup>2</sup> argues that the meaning of 'head' is to be seen as primarily concerned with origin rather than with lordship. Chrysostom, writing in the third century, argues strongly that we should not see 'head' as used in 1 Cor.11 in terms of 'rule and subjection', feeling that we should rather "accept the notion of a perfect union and the first principle". That is, he feels the term is being used to stress the unity between head and body rather than any idea of rule, and again he takes up the idea of origin.

Since Paul was writing in Greek to the largely Gentile Greek-speakers at Corinth and Ephesus, it seems likely that if he did wish to imply the authority/submission relation by his use of the term 'head' — as, with his Hebrew background, would be possible — then he would make this clear in the context of the passages in which the term was used. If he did not do this, then his Greek-speaking readers would not have interpreted the term as having this implication.

### B. *Paul's teaching about headship*

We will consider then the two occasions on which Paul uses the word 'head' to describe the relation between men and women.

#### i) *1 Corinthians 11:3*

'But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God'. (The AV has here, '. . . the head of the woman is the man' and as the same word is used for 'woman' as for 'wife' it is impossible to tell which is correct.) Is there anything in the context of this passage to show that we should interpret the use of *kephalē* here as indicating an authority/submission relation? In fact the word for submission does not occur in this passage. The word for authority (*exousia*) does occur, in v.10: 'That is why a woman ought to have authority on her head'. (The AV has 'power'. There is no foundation whatsoever for the RSV's translation of *exousia* as 'veil'.) However, the authority being referred to here is not that of the man over woman, but rather the

authority of the woman herself. In spite of the margin note found in some bibles, there is no parallel for taking the grammatical structure in v.10 in a passive sense, which must be done if the 'authority' is to mean authority *over* the woman rather than authority *of* the woman.

It is sometimes assumed that Paul's quotations from the creation narratives should themselves be seen as indicating the authority of the man over the woman; but leaving aside the question as to whether this concept is proclaimed in the Genesis narratives anyway, it seems more likely that the Greek-speaking readers would see the mention of woman being created from man as emphasising the idea of origin rather than as introducing the idea of authority. Similarly, it is sometimes assumed that because Christ is presented as the head of every man, and Christ clearly does have authority, then it must be authority that is the basic meaning of head. However, the idea of 'source' would fit in equally well here too; Col.1:18, where Christ is spoken of as the head in the context of his being before all things and the source of creation, would support this view. The idea of head as meaning 'source' would also make sense in the phrase, 'the head of Christ is God', and incidentally remove some of the problems of subordinationism that have arisen from this verse.

Thus one cannot assume that the context of 1 Cor.11:3 supports interpreting the term 'head' to imply the authority of man over woman.

## 2) *Ephesians 5:21-33*

In *Ephesians 5*, the headship of the man over his wife and the submission of the woman to her husband are found together, and this does appear to give support to Birney's identification of the two concepts. However, two points must be noted. Firstly, the headship of Christ over the church, used here as an analogy for the headship of the husband over the wife, is interpreted in this passage not in terms of the authority which Christ undoubtedly has over the church, but in terms of his loving and total self-giving on her behalf. Thus it seems logical that the headship of the man should also be seen in that way.

In fact, rather than seeing the subjection of the wife as a direct consequence of the headship of the husband over her, the passage sees a conflict between the two ideas. Verse 24 begins not with a 'therefore', as the AV illegitimately implies, but with a strong 'but' (*alla*). Most translators, assuming like Birney that headship is to be seen in terms of a ruling authority, have difficulty here and are forced to change the clear adversative sense by omitting the 'but' (RSV, NIV, TEV) or by replacing it with a 'therefore'. If however, we follow the analogy given in the chapter and see the headship of the husband here

as indicating that he should love his wife and give himself fully on her behalf, then the 'but' makes good sense. Though the husband is to love and serve his wife in this way, she must not forget that, as the church is subject to Christ, she too is to be subject to her husband in everything.

Thus the element of authority as such is not found in the context of Paul's use of the headship metaphor and it is by no means self-evident, therefore, that we should include this concept in our own understanding of the term.

### C. Paul's teaching about authority

Outside of the use of the term 'head', the concept of authority is found twice elsewhere in the writings of Paul in connection with the relationship between husband and wife, or man and woman. Firstly in 1 Cor.7 we are told that the wife does not have authority (*exousia*) over her own body, but the husband does. However, whatever kind of authority Paul may have in mind in this instance, the authority of the husband over the wife referred to is exactly paralleled by her authority over him. 'The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does' (v.4).

Secondly, in 1 Tim.2:12 Paul tells us that he permits no woman to teach or have authority over a man. (Or again, possibly no wife to teach or have authority over her husband.) It is not the place here to discuss whether or not Paul is giving his personal opinion or dealing with a specific situation at Ephesus, or what he meant by teaching and the implications of the illustrations he uses. All of these and other questions need further investigation before we can make certain pronouncements about what women may or may not be permitted to do in the assembly; but here we are concerned with investigating principles regarding the relationship between men and women. Two points need to be noted here. Firstly that the verb used for 'to have authority' is not the verb formed from *exousia*, but a little used verb, *authentain*, a strong word with the sense of a self-directed domineering. The AV catches something of the idea with its 'to usurp authority'. Thus Paul may be referring here to a particular kind of authority which the woman does not have and is therefore not to use. Secondly, it does seem clear that Paul is making some distinction in relationship here; but, though it may be implied, it is not made explicit that the reverse of Paul's statement is true. That is, the case would need to be argued that Paul, in stating that the woman is not to usurp authority over the man, is in fact stating that this is because the man

has authority over the woman. It may be decided that this is so, but it is not self-evident.

#### *D. Submission*

It is helpful to note, as Birney rightly does, that the word used to describe the submission of the woman to her husband is clearly distinguished from the word used for obedience, for example of a child to his parents or a slave to his master. He also emphasises the voluntary nature of this submission. It is significant that nowhere in the new testament is any ruler or authority within or without the church ever told to subject others to himself, or to take any action to ensure the submission of others. The root meaning of the word *hypotassō* is 'to order' or 'to arrange', and it can be used of ordering a military column.<sup>3</sup> There is an element of subordination, but the main idea is of 'mutual adaptation and co-ordination'. It can be seen as a voluntary putting first of the will and desires of the other. Paul in Eph.5:21 shows that for him the concept of mutual submission was by no means a contradiction in terms; in fact the special submission of wives to husbands can be seen not as a cancelling-out of this mutual submission in their case, but rather as a development of it.

It is also not clear why it should be automatically assumed that the submission called for from women in both 1 Cor.14:34 and 1 Tim.2:11 should immediately be assumed to be submission to men, rather than to the church as a whole, particularly as in 1 Cor.14 the whole context of the passage is of general church order. Eph.5 makes it very plain that there is a special submission called for from a wife to her husband, but it is not at all clear that this special submission is required from all women to all men.

It appears that much more justification is needed before one can see the principle, 'Man is to be the head of the woman' as implying the authority of the man over the woman or as synonymous with 'Woman is to be subject to man'. Certainly the possibility exists that further study might indicate the same conclusions as are inferred by Birney. But if we conclude that headship in itself does not imply authority, and bear in mind that subjection does not mean obedience as such, then it may be that when we apply Birney's two principles to the three key passages with which he deals, we shall come to a rather different understanding of their meaning and significance. This in turn would lead to a slightly different conclusion as to the position of women in worship today.

## NOTES

1. J. B. Hurley 'Did Paul require veils or the silence of women?' *Westminster Theological Journal*, 35 1972 pp.190-220.
2. S. Bedale 'The meaning of *kephalē* in the Pauline epistles' *Journal of Theological Studies*, JTS 5 1954, p.211.
3. M. Barth *Ephesians* (Anchor Bible) Doubleday, New York 1974, pp.710-711.

# **Women's Church and Communion Participation: Apostolic Practice or Innovative Twist?**

GERALD L. ALMLIE

The purpose of this paper is to present a scriptural middle position between the traditional and egalitarian extremes by harmonising Paul's seemingly contradictory Corinthian permission (1 Cor.11:5) with his prohibition (1 Cor.14:34-35). If such a middle position can be sustained scripturally, it will force careful re-examination and re-evaluation of basic assumptions.

The major difficulty of both traditional and egalitarian positions has been the assumption that Paul's Corinthian permission and prohibition operated in the context of the same church meeting. However, if Paul and his first-century readers distinguished between different types of church meetings, his permission and his prohibition can be given equal weight and authority without any necessity to assume that Paul contradicted himself, his Lord, or scripture.

## **Controls**

Do we recognise the dangers of current hermeneutical trends to pick bible teachings which are compatible with our times and culture? While there is nothing wrong with distinguishing between scriptural commands and principles meant for all people at all times from those limited to a specific time and people, the interpreter of scripture is not free to disregard commands and principles which scripture intended to be obeyed.

"Cultural understanding may illuminate the text, but it must not be allowed to contradict or set aside the plain statement of scripture."<sup>1</sup> Also moulding scriptural teaching "by contemporary human behaviour is exactly the opposite of what is intended by revelation. The bible was intended to create a culture, not to be moulded by it."<sup>2</sup> Do we rise to the level of scripture and its understanding, or do we pull scripture down to our level?

It may however be difficult to recognise the distinctive merits of the proposed middle position after sounding out or responding to theological thunder for or against egalitarian extremes.<sup>3</sup> Any middle

position draws fire from both these extremes, each having some truth to support its claims.

### Context

The proper interpretational value has not yet been accorded either to the relationship of Paul's permission (1 Cor.11:5) with his prohibition (1 Cor.14:34-35) or to their relationship with Paul's own working outline of answering the specific Corinthian questions directed to him (1 Cor.7:1-16:12). Paul's responses to the Corinthian questions are prefaced by the Greek phrase *peri de* (1 Cor.7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12). After considering *peri de* at Mark 12:26; 13:32; John 16:11; and Acts 21:25, Faw concludes the phrase was (1) a formula of reply to specific questions or problems, especially where there is a series of such; (2) in series of replies it is properly used to introduce those from the second point onward; (3) in Pauline usage it is confined to answering of specific questions or problems brought up in letters from the churches to which he is writing.<sup>4</sup>

A simple study of the above references suggests two simple conclusions: (1) *peri de* may introduce a new subject *with implied contrast to what preceded*, or (2) it may introduce a second or third response to a specific question concerning a different aspect of the same general topic, with or without any intended contrast to what preceded it. Consequently, *peri de* alone does not indicate contrast *per se* as much as is implied by the context, the change of subject matter. This preliminary information is needed to understand the positioning of Paul's permission (1 Cor.11:5 and its immediate context of 11:2-16) within its larger controlling context. Once this is done, harmonising Paul's permission with his prohibition is much easier.

There are four major possibilities of understanding the overall relationship of Paul's permission with its larger controlling context.

One view holds that all of Paul's permission (1 Cor.11:2-16) begins a new section on christian order, but it refers to gatherings *outside the normal church meeting* because it lacks vital connection to what follows. This conservative view is commendable because it seeks to give equal weight to Paul's permission and his prohibition, without assuming that he contradicted himself. However, Paul's permission is vitally linked to 'the Lords supper' section following, so that all of 1 Cor. 11:2-34 is a chiasitic unity, the proof of which must be deferred until later.

A second and common view holds that 1 Cor.11:2 with perhaps 16:3 refers to different aspects of the same church meeting, and Paul

merely noted women's participation in passing in chapter 11, deferring his express disapproval until chapter 14:34-35. It is claimed this view is supported by Paul's seeming approval of eating at a pagan ceremony (1 Cor.8:10) while deferring his condemnation of the same act until later (1 Cor.10:14-21). While the context demonstrates that Paul used two arguments concerning the same issue of eating food at pagan temples (1 Cor.8:1-10:22) different from the arguments concerning eating sacrificed food elsewhere (1 Cor.10:23-11:1),<sup>5</sup> does that necessitate Paul's treating women's participation in the same way? Of course not! This analogy assumes Paul had the same church meeting in mind for both his permission and his prohibition; this study challenges that basic assumption.

A third view holds that the *peri de* at 1 Cor.12:1 contrasts the chiastic unity containing Paul's prohibition (1 Cor.12:1-14:40) with the previous chiastic unity containing Paul's permission (1 Cor.11:2-34). Each chiastic unity with its specific church meeting is contrasted with the other rather than describing different aspects of the same general church meeting. A detailed study of the content of the two chiastic unities would reveal definite contrast.

However, there is a fourth view which may be more natural than the third view. The whole of Paul's permission (1 Cor.11:2-34) is a natural appendix to his discussion concerning christian liberty about eating in a pagan society (1 Cor.8:1-11:1). The communal meal of the Lord's supper is mentioned in both 10:16-21 and 11:20-34; both concern eating and drinking. On the other hand, the context of Paul's prohibition (1 Cor.14:34-35) is part of his distinct unity pertaining to order and the use of spiritual gifts (1 Cor.12:1-14:40). Chapter 15 concerns the resurrection and is a natural appendix to Paul's discussion of orderly use of spiritual gifts suggested by the implied doctrinal content of what is taught within the teaching meeting of chapter 14. Only in the two appendices does Paul use the introductory formula 'I delivered' (1 Cor.11:2, 23; 15:3).

In addition Paul seems to have fashioned his replies in somewhat of a symmetrical fashion which also favours the fourth view. The occurrences and placements of *peri de*, the appended chapters to the larger sections, and the relative length of the sections suggest the following symmetrical outline: A—7:1, 25 (short), B—8:1 with appended 11:2—34 (long), B'—12:1 with appended 15:1—58 (long), A'—16:1, 12 (short). It would appear Paul conceived of his permission and related chiastic unity (1 Cor.11:2-34) as an appendix or outgrowth of discussing the social issues of eating and drinking in pagan society for believers. Therefore, the controlling context is found in the chapters (8:1-11:1) prior to his permission (11:2-34), not in the

chapters following (12:1-14:40) which contain his prohibition (14:34-35). The *peri de* of 12:1 introduces a new subject.

Of the views presented, the fourth is the most probable, but the third is also possible. Either harmonises Paul's Corinthian permission with his prohibition on the basis of two different apostolic church meetings: (1) the Lord's supper in which men and women participated equally as priests, and (2) the teaching meeting in which only a limited number of men participated. Now these claims must be sustained by specific evidence.

### Chiasmus

While chiasmus or introversion is defined as two or more words, phrases, ideas, or subjects presented together and then repeated in reverse order, it seems to be a term remembered from training as a hermeneutical tool but thereafter forgotten or confined to technical journals.

Yet chiasmus may prove extremely helpful for accurate interpretation. For example, the well-known introverted pattern A B B' A' of Matthew 7:6 clarifies the interpretation: the dogs (A) turn and rend (A'); the pearls before pigs (B) will be trampled under foot (B'). "What may be obscure in one member may be clear in its corresponding member."<sup>6</sup>

Not only one verse but also many verses may be clarified by noting their chiastic form. By explicit use of chiasmus, readers would have "consciously or unconsciously sensed" an author's intended unity, cohesion, and interrelation of thought.<sup>7</sup> Since Paul had a "predilection for chiasmus and old testament parallelism,"<sup>8</sup> they must be considered for accurate interpretation. If not, the resultant hermeneutic could be less than complete. Such is true for 1 Cor.11:2-34.

While the first part of Paul's permission contains three distinct chiastic forms (1 Cor.11:4-7, 8-12, and 13-16), these will not be commented upon except to illustrate the corresponding balance with the latter half of the chapter.

Careful study of the general chiastic outline of chapter 11 in Figure 1 (facing) reveals a very natural and orderly flow of its differing but related content. The correspondence of XB and XC to ZB' and ZC' respectively is clear, but the authoritative proclamation<sup>9</sup> of 11:26 requires some comment.

While the object is expressed, the indirect object is not. Who were the recipients of the authoritative proclamation of the Lord's death? The verb is active without any reflexive pronoun, so it was not to the



believers present. It was not to unbelievers because they were not present each time.<sup>10</sup> The correspondence of XC overtly (11:10) with ZC' covertly (11:26) indicates Paul meant 'angels' or the spirit world.

XD and ZD' are the only sections of the chapter having articular reference to 'the church(es) of God' (1 Cor.11:16,22). They have the only questions within the chapter. They also are essentially detailed conclusions within their respective systems.<sup>11</sup>

Objectively such corresponding agreements cannot be accidental. Since Paul had used chiasmatic structure in the first half of the chapter, it was reasonable for him to have used it for the second half as well, especially if Paul conceived that the different subject matter had an essential unity or relationship. While seemingly unrelated, head-coverings possess very close inner unity of proper decorum in praying, speaking, eating, and drinking together at the same meeting.<sup>12</sup>

In Y (11:17-19) the transitional 11:17 is essential, but 11:18-19 is parenthetical. The last Greek word of 11:17 and the first major Greek words of 11:18 and 20 are the same word 'coming together,' but with different inflections. Now when *like sentence endings and beginnings* occur, "the words so repeated are thus emphasised as being the most important words in the sentence, which we are to mark and consider in translation and exposition."<sup>13</sup> One could easily connect the end of transitional 11:17 with the beginning of 11:20 without any disruption of thought. Therefore, 11:18-19 is parenthetical to Paul's main thought, but 11:17 is essential as transition.<sup>14</sup>

Without grasping the chiasmatic unity of 1 Cor.11, many have a distinct dichotomy between the 'praise' of 11:2 and the 'no praise' of 11:17. However, Findlay has stated that 11:3f. "rectified an error," and 11:17f. "censure a glaring fault" because both verses "detract, in different degrees, from the 'praise' of verse 2."<sup>15</sup> A. T. Robertson tersely commented concerning 11:3: "I wish you to know, censure in contrast to the praise in verse 2."<sup>16</sup> Paul's censuring and correcting of 11:3-16 and 17-34 all detract from his praise of verse 2. Therefore determining that a dichotomy existed within 1 Cor.11 upon the basis of 'praise' for 11:2-16 and 'no praise' for 11:17-34 is an inaccurate oversimplification; the chapter is unified by its chiasmatic structure.

### Concord

The first three Greek words of 1 Cor.11:17 translated as 'Now commanding this' require some careful thought. While the near demonstrative pronoun 'this' is first and emphatic and closer to the participle 'commanding' than to the principal verb 'praise' in Greek,

Arndt and Gingrich from their translation of Bauer's fourth edition list 'this' as the direct object of 'praise' and translate the participle absolutely 'in giving my instructions.'<sup>17</sup> It seems more natural on the basis of Greek word order, however, to understand 'this' as the direct object of closer 'commanding' as have many critical commentaries and as have Thayer and Abbott-Smith.<sup>18</sup> It also seems more natural to take 'this' as the direct object of 'commanding' because the principal verb 'praise' has the expected 'that' (*hoti*) clause following it which further explains why Paul was not praising the Corinthians.<sup>19</sup>

But what is the reference or antecedent of 'this'? Normally pronouns refer back to what has already been mentioned; yet Greek grammar is flexible enough to sustain Arndt and Gingrich and others who prefer to interpret 'this' as referring to what follows. Where scholars differ, it is apparent that one's presuppositions about the context greatly determine the resulting interpretation. If one assumes basic incompatibility between the two halves of chapter 11 for whatever reason, then it logically follows that 'this' must refer to what follows, not to what preceded.

However, I believe the most natural and least forced reference of 'this' is that it refers to what preceded. The closest would be Paul's command to the Corinthian believers to judge among themselves whether or not it was proper for a woman to pray to God uncovered (11:13-16). Of course, all of 11:3-16 could also be included, since 11:13-16 is the conclusion of Paul's previous argument.

It is elementary to state that the action of the present participle 'commanding' takes place at the same time as the action of the leading verb 'praise' with its 'that' (*hoti*) clause. But once one identifies the antecedent of emphatic 'this' at the beginning of 11:17 with what preceded it and then identifies the 'coming together' at the end of 11:17 with 11:20 with like sentence endings and beginnings, then the antecedent of women's active praying and the Lord's supper are scripturally connected to the same time and occasion by the transitional 11:17, connecting both halves of chapter 11.

In other words, Paul grammatically and chiasmically balanced correction of the head-covering problem with correction of the improper eating and drinking problem at the Lord's supper. Solving the first did not automatically solve the second. The two problems were related because they occurred at the same church meeting, the Lord's supper. Not only was Paul's chiasmic grouping logical and practical, but also such grouping demonstrated that Paul himself saw no contradiction with women's active praying at the Lord's supper. If Paul and the early church then saw no contradiction, there ought not to be any contradiction today. Therefore, if the Lord's supper is

relevant for today (Cor.11:26), then women's active praying at that meeting is also relevant for today.

### Customs

Because the Lord's supper was a communal meal, an eating meeting, it may be important to remember that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish dining customs for the ordinary principal meal were very similar. Families, specifically the husband and wife, normally ate their principal meal together, not separately. There would be conversation during that meal. People normally reclined while eating or sat on or near the dining couch when crowded. At the conclusion of the meal hands had to be washed because the fingers were used extensively. The dishes were cleared, and the furniture could be rearranged for evening activities. The men had greater freedom after the principal meal to go to the gatherings at other homes. Those who had not been previously invited to the principal meal could be asked to join in the activities of the evening.<sup>20</sup>

The point is that men and women ate their principal meals together and they talked together during that meal. The Passover, as foundational to the Lord's supper, was a family gathering with special religious significance. Yet Paul's prohibition (1 Cor.14:34-35) is widely explained as being prompted by the eastern custom of seating the sexes separately during meetings. If men and women had been seated together, the women could have questioned their men beside them instead of asking 'at home' (14:35). Paul meant therefore that the women were not to disturb the meeting by calling across the room to ask questions. The continuation by the church of the synagogue practice of separate seating for men and women has substantial support, but the apostolic church celebrated the Lord's supper as a communal meal. Are we to suppose that men and women, husbands and wives sat separately at that meal when Greek, Roman, and Jewish families normally ate their ordinary meals together? I do not think so. Activities before or after the principal meal could provide for separate seating quite easily, especially afterwards.

On the basis of this inference of sitting together for the Lord's supper and of sitting separately for the teaching meeting, one may doubt that Paul had in mind different aspects of the same meeting. If the seating were changed, there would appear to have been a change in focus — a different meeting.

## Contrasts

The old testament recorded two divinely appointed orders of ministry: priests and prophets. The priest's work was essentially sacrifice and intercession in *representing man to God*, but the prophet's work was essentially revelation and instruction in *representing God to man*.<sup>21</sup> While the two orders complement each other, they also contrast with each other. It is the broad contrast between the two orders which may help in interpreting the overall thrust of Paul's Corinthian permission and prohibition.

While there were no divinely appointed female priests in the old testament, the new testament revealed a priesthood composed of all male and female believers. Each priest is equal before God and their fellow priests.

Now notice the order of subjects Paul concerns himself with in 1 Cor. 11:4-5. By synecdoche (by which one example is put for all other similar things)<sup>22</sup> the term *praying* includes all kinds of man's *speaking to God* while *prophesying* includes all kinds of God's *speaking to man*. Thereafter he emphasises prayer (11:13-16, 24-25), but in chapters 12-14 he concerns himself with spiritual gifts (although tongues has both a 'to God' and a 'to man' aspect).

My point is that chapter 11 emphasises prayer which is priestly and that chapters 12-14 generally emphasise spiritual gifts which are largely prophetic. If the Lord's supper is priestly and the teaching meeting is prophetic, two different foci are evident. Some prayer at the teaching meeting does not change it into a prayer meeting. Prayer at the Lord's supper with its focus upon the character and work of our Saviour (1 Cor. 11:24-25) does not change it into a general prayer meeting. If there is one focus at a church meeting, then two foci indicate either two church meetings or two totally separate foci at the same meeting.

## Confirmations

Is there any objective evidence from the church's early history which confirms any distinction between church meetings or comments upon women's participation? While it is understood that Acts, our only canonical church history, does not teach doctrine as the epistles do, any evidence of apostolic practice may be helpful in clarifying comments in the epistles. At the Jerusalem church all the activities of the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42, 46; cf. 5:12,42) were not done at the same meeting. A simple comparison of Acts 2:42 with verse 46 indicates two separate meeting

places for the Jerusalem church: the temple and the home. Quite clearly the Lord's supper was celebrated in homes, not at the temple.

Lest one think only the Jerusalem church had separate meetings at different physical locations because of their special local situation, there is strong contextual evidence that the Troas church, approximately twenty-two years after Pentecost and 750 miles northwest of Jerusalem, also differentiated between meetings at their one physical location (Acts 20:6-12).

Critical to the 'differentiating foci' view of meetings is the proper understanding and subsequent translation of the genitive absolute, 'the disciples came together' (Acts 20:7). If it is translated temporally as AV and most other versions ('when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them'), then any distinction between meetings appears negated. But an entirely different sense is obtained if the genitive absolute is translated as an attendant circumstance as the NIV and The Jerusalem Bible ('on the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul preached to the people'). The 'temporal' translation states Paul formally preached (*dialegomai*) at the Lord's supper; the 'attendant circumstance' translation states Paul formally preached, but not at or during the Lord's supper. Which view is correct?

Several contextual considerations favour the 'attendant circumstance' interpretation. First, Acts 20:6 indicated Paul waited seven days before breaking bread. Why? Instead of breaking bread daily as did the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:46), believers now gathered regularly once a week for the breaking of bread (Acts 20:7). This new historical fact in Acts is primarily one of addition — attendant circumstance.<sup>23</sup> When it is difficult "to discriminate between the temporal participle and that of attendant circumstance or manner,"<sup>24</sup> then the entire context must be studied for the correct determination.

Second, Luke used two different verbs for Paul's preaching (*dialegomai*, Acts 20:7,9) and talking (*homileō*, Acts 20:11). Luke's other contexts of *dialegomai* (Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8-9; 24:12,25) connoted a formal, official type of preaching, reasoning, or lecturing for decision, but *homileō* (Luke 24:14-15; Acts 24:26; and a compound form in Acts 10:27) connoted private, informal conversation. When both occur in close proximity as Acts 24:25-26 and our present passage, the distinctions are especially clear.<sup>25</sup> One would expect official teaching to be more formal than the informal conversation and worship at the communal meal. The different verbs strongly suggest two different types of meetings, each with its own focus.

Third, if the custom was to recline or sit upon or very close to the dining couch while eating, how could Eutychus fall out of a window

while participating in a communal meal? The text could not be clearer that Paul was not preaching at the Lord's supper because that meal was not observed until after Paul went down and embraced Eutychus (Acts 20:10-11).

Therefore, these contextual considerations are ample justification to support the 'attendant circumstance' interpretation of Acts 20:7. While the 'temporal' translation may fit church practice and understanding after the Eucharist was separated from the Agape in the second century, it does not fit the facts of the context in apostolic times. The two different foci of Acts 20:7-12 confirm two different meetings at the same physical location.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of studying Paul's Corinthian permission and prohibition concerning women's participation has been to demonstrate that Paul did not contradict himself because he and his audience had two different church meetings with two different foci in mind. Most traditional and egalitarian extremes make the error of believing Paul was speaking of only one church meeting. Paul's Corinthian permission and prohibition are the decisive passages because their distinctive chiasmic contexts make them the longest new testament scripture on the subject of women's church participation. Consequently, they cannot be set aside or ignored. The view that the two chiasmic unities of 1 Cor.11:2-34 and 12:1-14:40 are contrasted to each other by the *peri de* of 12:1 and the view that 11:2-34 is an appendix to 8:1-11:1 allow both Paul's permission and his prohibition to be interpreted with equal weight and authority.

While the distinct chiasmic unities of Paul's permission and prohibition contain many similar concepts such as church(es), congregating, contention, and command, they also demonstrate radical differences in each specific church meeting in relation to each other as in figure 2 below.

Once these differences have been pointed out, I am unable to believe that Paul or his apostolic readers thought that the Lord's supper and the teaching meeting were different aspects of the same church meeting. I do see equal participation of men and women believers at the Lord's supper as a very practical expression of new testament priesthood. This does not mean equal participation at the teaching meeting with Paul's very clear prohibitions on that particular focus (1 Cor.14:34-35; 1 Tim.2:11-15). Harmonising Paul's Corinthian permission with his prohibition should pave the way for a re-examination

Figure 2

## DIFFERENCES IN CHURCH MEETINGS

Aspect	1 Corinthians 11:2-34	1 Corinthians 12-14
A GENERAL:	HEADSHIP, 11:3-16	DIVERSE GIFTS, 12:1-30
B CENTRE SHIFT:	(DIVISIONS, 11:18-19)	(LOVE, 12:31-14:1a)
A' SPECIFIC:	LORD'S SUPPER, 11:20-34	TEACHING MEETING, 14:1b-40
A'1 FOCUS:	<i>Giving to God</i> (teaching is incidental)	<i>Receiving from God</i> (prayer is incidental)
A'2 PARTICIPATION:	No restriction for men or women believers	Restricted to some men only — no women, 14:27-35
A'3 LANGUAGE:	Informal conversation implied	Formal from judgement of audience, 14:29
A'4 SEATING:	No separation of the sexes implied	Separation implied from 14:35 and synagogue practice

and re-evaluation of these very delicate matters. Basic assumptions must be tested.

### Comment

My greatest concern as a unit chaplain has been to minister effectively to as many unit members as possible. A strictly denominational approach by formal preaching does not promote the needed sense of community and concern among unit believers. Many are turning away from artificial or stiff services; they do not appear relevant in today's world. Yet the very simple apostolic type of communion as a separate service from other services during the noon or supper meal has great possibilities for promoting fellowship and community, especially for those in the field, at isolated posts or on board ship.

I have had communion during the Sunday noon meal at my reserve unit. While we ate, the believers encouraged one another by sharing testimonies and general conversation. Those who could not come during our regular morning service could come during the noon meal. It was encouraging to all to have each participate as believer-priests in praise of our Saviour.

Three problems were encountered: (1) the need for the chaplain to teach and encourage the believers as to their believer-priest responsibilities; (2) one hour was not enough time for eating and communion with fellowship; (3) the constant turnover of unit personnel meant starting over again after a short period of time. The combination of the last two problems make an apostolic-type communion service difficult in a reserve component setting, but not in an active component setting.

May this study and practical implementation encourage and stimulate all to minister more effectively.

### NOTES

1. J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Limits of Cultural Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23/2 (June 1980) 115.
2. *Ibid.*, p.119.
3. Although favouring current hermeneutical trends, an excellent summary of supporting and contrary arguments for traditional and egalitarian positions is Robert K. Johnston, "The Role of Women in the Church and Home: An Evangelical Test case in Hermeneutics" *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation* (ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 234-259.

4. Chalmer E. Faw, "On the Writing of First Thessalonians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952) 221; cf. John C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury Press, 1965) 61-65, 90.
5. cf. Gordon D. Fee, "Eidolothuta Once Again: 1 Corinthians 8-10" *Biblica* 61 (1980) 172-197. This is an outstanding article.
6. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinted 1968) 364. This work is more objective than *The Companion Bible* published under his editorship; cf. the objective criticism of Nils Wilhelm Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), 40.
7. William A. Smalley, "Recursion Patterns and Sectioning of Amos," *Technical Papers for The Bible Translator* 30 (1979) 125.
8. Nigel Turner, *Style*, ed. James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (4 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976) IV, 3.
9. William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (London: SCM, 1964) 162.
10. Neither 1 Cor.11:28-31 nor Acts 2:42-43 indicate any known unbeliever participated in the Lord's supper, but unbelievers could attend the teaching meeting (1 Cor.14:23-25); the third condition of 14:23 suggests few outsiders attended. Generally outsiders could attend synagogues or pagan religious gatherings to see and learn, but not participate (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Harper & Row, 1968] 325). However, unbelievers within did not escape notice (2 Pet.2:13; Jude 12); perhaps the apostle John added his fuller account of Judas at the last supper to correct unbeliever participation (John 13:18-30). For a contrary view cf. Norman M. Pritchard, "Profession of Faith and Admission to Communion in the Light of 1 Corinthians 11 and Other Passages," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (1980) 55-70.
11. Lund, *Chiasmus*, pp.45-46 cites Isa.28:15-18 as having its conclusion in central rather than at the expected extreme position.
12. On a smaller scale, Estella B. Horning ("Chiasmus, Creedal Structure, and Christology in Hebrews 12:1-2" *Biblical Research* XXIII (1978) 37-48, especially 40-42) demonstrates contextually, syntactically, linguistically, and chiastically the combining of *dissimilar material* into a single unit of thought following the A B C D E D' C' B' A' pattern.
13. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, p.251.
14. Cf. 1 Cor.7:18-24; Lund, *Chiasmus*, pp.41-44 discusses the very frequent "law of the shift at the centre" to different subject matter in the middle of chiastic forms. The extremes are related, but the middle will have a completely different subject.
15. G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (5 vols; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1961) II, 876.
16. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (6 vols; Nashville: Broadman, 1931) IV, 159.
17. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) 281, 618.
18. Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (cor. ed; New York: American, 1889) 479, 227; G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (3rd ed; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1936) 338, 163.
19. Arndt and Gingrich, *Ibid.* 592-593; Thayer, *Ibid.* 459.
20. Cf. Leonard Whibley (ed.) *A Companion to Greek Studies* (3rd ed; Cambridge: University Press, 1916) 610, 615-16; A. Petrie, *An Introduction to Greek History, Antiquities and Literature* (2nd ed; London: Oxford University Press, 1962) 116;

- J. P. Mahaffy, *Classical Antiquities. I. Old Greek Life*, ed. J. R. Green, History Primers (New York: Appleton, 1881) 27; Ludwig Friedlander, *Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire*, trans. Leonard A. Magnus from 7th ed. *Sittengeschichte Roms* (4 vols; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968) I, 217, 248; J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969) 49; Ludwig Kohler, *Hebrew Man*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) 87-91; Max Radin, *The Life of the People in Biblical Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1929) 190-93.
21. W. H. Griffith Thomas, "Is the New Testament Minister a Priest?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (1979) 65-73. This helpful article was originally published in London as a booklet entitled *Priest or Prophet?*
  22. See examples in Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, pp.634-35.
  23. H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1962) 228-29.
  24. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 1126-27.
  25. Editor's note: F. F. Bruce comments, "If I wanted to use a Greek word for formal preaching I should use *kērussō* or *katangellō*. Both *dialogomai* and *homileō* imply conversation, a two-way process."

# **The Role of Women in the Church\***

OLIVE ROGERS

## **The cultural background to the epistles**

When in Old Delhi once, I visited the golden-domed temple of the Sikhs. Being a woman, I was taken round to the back entrance and then through several rooms, till I reached the upper gallery where the ladies gathered. I sat on the richly carpeted floor and surveyed the scene. Suddenly, as so often in the east, the scriptures became alive! We were high above the main body of the temple. The worship — intoning of the sacred book, and instructions for salvation — being carried on down below was pertinent only to the men. I tried in vain to hear what was going on, but the women were sitting around in groups gossiping, amused at the play of their children, careless of the fact that they were in a place of worship. For them a visit to the temple was merely an opportunity to escape from the monotony of an existence behind the four walls of their homes, where they reign supreme in their own quarters, but where their lives seldom encroach upon those of their men-folk, who do all the work involving contact with the outside world.

Not many months later I attended one of the christian conventions held annually in S. India. Day after day thousands of men and women sat under the large leaf shelter. The men's section of the 'pandal' was quiet and orderly as they listened to the word, taking notes with assiduous care. The women's half was another matter. All the children were there, restless, demanding and noisy, and many of the women were sitting in groups chattering.

The eastern woman has always been sheltered and kept apart from the main-stream of life in the world, and she has not been encouraged to break from the security which such an existence afforded. She would wear a veil at all times (1 Cor.11:2-16). It denoted her recognition of the lordship of her husband and also gave her dignity and protection. Even in these days no man would presume to intrude upon the privacy of a woman shrouded in her 'burqa' or 'pallu' — the

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end of her sari pulled over her head. In orthodox hindu or muslim homes the women are still not allowed to go out freely; they are veiled, and when the men-folk approach, they sidle away quietly into the women's quarters to remain out of sight until called by their master.

A journey in an Indian train can be instructive in these matters. The 'Ladies' Compartment' is completely shut off from the rest of the carriage. No matter how hot or airless, the door is closed and no man is permitted to enter other than a close relative of the ladies inside, who will bring all necessary food and drink to the compartment and even he will remain no longer than is absolutely essential.

In the South Indian language which I speak, in common with other eastern languages, there is no difference between the feminine and neuter gender. A woman is 'a thing'; 'the thing in the kitchen', a thing to be sold for a price called a dowry, valued in terms of animals, land or money. She has no inherent rights; she is the sole property of her husband or, if he dies, of her male relatives including her son.

I have seen a woman, on the death of her husband, being taken outside a village fully shrouded. There she was stripped of her jewellery and her glory, for her head was shaved. From then on she may never again allow her hair to grow or leave her head uncovered. It is to her shame (1 Cor.11:6) till she dies that she has become a widow. Re-marriage is unthinkable; has she not caused the death of her husband? Again, I knew a woman who lived an adulterous life and, refusing to heed reproof, was taken by the elders and had her hair cropped, thus bringing upon herself public dishonour (1 Cor.11:6).

It is still considered in the east either a disgrace or a misfortune for a girl to remain unmarried. An unmarried life is incomprehensible to the eastern mind which cannot conceive a single person living in sexual purity. The unmarried women of earlier days were almost invariably 'devotees' of the gods, temple prostitutes who were usually lavishly adorned with jewels and often immodestly dressed.

In new testament times the Jewish and Greek cultures both decreed that a woman was neither expected nor permitted to learn from the holy scriptures, and the concept of a woman teacher was inconceivable. This attitude held true in India until as recently as the last century, when Pandita Ramabai's father was made outcaste for daring to teach his daughter the sacred hindu vedas.

It was against a background such as this that the apostles wrote to the early churches; and it helps us to understand what the scripture teaches if we appreciate something of the customs which still prevail in the east where christianity has not yet shed its enlightening rays in sufficient degree to dispel the darkness and bondage of heathenism.

### The subject of women in the epistles

Basically the problems which confronted the early church were no different from those which confront the church today. How much does contemporary society influence the conduct of the church? To what extent should the liberty of the believer in Christ be tempered by local custom in order to maintain a good witness?

This matter is discussed in 1 Cor.11, where the role of women is considered as part of the whole topic of conduct in the church. Chapter 14, and also 1 Tim.2, touch upon the public ministry of women. Such portions of these chapters which deal with the women's role should not be wrested from their context, but need to be understood as an integral part of a wider subject.

To gain a balanced view of the scriptures they should be interpreted not only against the background of historic cultures, but also in the light of

1. what the bible as a whole says about this subject,
2. Christ's attitude to women,
3. the practice prevailing in the early church.

1. In old testament times women enjoyed the same privileges as men in worship. Many sang in the temple choirs (1 Chron.25:5f; Neh. 7:67). Women also served in the tabernacle and the same word *sābā* is used of their work as that of the Levites (Ex.38:8; 1 Sam.2:22). These may have been wives of Levites or, more probably, widows who had dedicated themselves to the service of the Lord.

- (a) Anna worshipped and gave thanks publicly in the temple (Lk.2:36-38).
- (b) Miriam, who led the women in public praise, is specifically identified as a prophetess (Ex.15:20; cf. Micah 6:4).
- (c) Deborah was not prevented from prophesying by the law and what a graphic song of triumph she composed (Judges 4 and 5)!
- (d) Hannah's inspired prayer is recorded for us in 1 Sam.2.
- (e) Huldah was acknowledged as the outstanding prophetic figure of her day. When King Josiah sent Hilkiah, the priest, and the elders to consult with her, the Lord revealed his will through her (2 Kings 22:8-20). Both Miriam and Huldah were contemporaries of great prophets, viz. Moses and Jeremiah (cf. 2 Kings 22:3 with Jer.1:2), which fact refutes the contention that women received the prophetic gift only in the absence of qualified men.

2. Christ's total attitude toward women showed his unreserved

appreciation of them. This was in contrast to the normal custom of those days dictated as it was by rabbinic standards.

- (a) He recognised women as persons and accepted their gifts, being supported materially by a group of women who accompanied him on his tours assisting in the ministry (Lk.8:1-3; Mk.15:41; Matt.27:55).
- (b) The Sanhedrin taught 'indulge not in conversation with womankind',<sup>1</sup> but Christ broke all such racial, traditional, and sexual barriers with impunity (Jn.4:27).
- (c) He defied Jewish custom also in permitting Mary to 'sit at his feet and learn' in rabbinic tradition — a privilege granted to men only. He commended her for this, and exhorted Martha to choose the better part (Lk.10:42).
- (d) According to the law, both of those caught in the act of adultery should be put to death (Lev.20:10). The Lord, being impartial, exposed the injustice and hypocrisy of man as he forgave the woman (Jn.8:1-11).
- (e) He entrusted women with the most crucial fact of redemptive history; they were to witness to the disciples of his resurrection. This is truly remarkable since women's testimony was not regarded as sufficient to establish a fact legally in those days. No wonder the disciples hesitated to believe (Lk.24:11)!
- (f) In the economy of the East, a sister could be an acute liability, but Christ declared that giving up a sister for his sake constituted a privation that he himself would recompense (Matt.19:29). This was a most unusual precept for a man of his time, but such was the value he put upon women.

3. In the early church it is evident that women took as active a part as the men.

- (a) The Spirit fell equally on men and women (Acts 2:1-4).
- (b) The women prayed with the men (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor11:4f).
- (c) There were women evangelists, co-workers with Paul (Phil.4:2f).
- (d) The Holy Spirit used women as well as men as his prophetic mouthpieces (Acts 21:9).
- (e) Women taught in certain circumstances (Acts 18:26-28; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14f; Titus 2:3-5).
- (f) There were deaconesses in the local churches (Rom.16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11).
- (g) Note the impressive list of women commended for their loyal service in Romans 16.

Thus it is clear that nowhere in scripture is it indicated that women

should be wholly silent. Prayer, praise, and prophesying were permitted by the law and were also customary in the early church.

There were however two opinions held concerning women in the church in ancient times, just as there are today. At one extreme, there was an overlapping of the pagan attitude that a woman was inferior, the property of her husband. This produced an unnatural and improper subjection of women on the part of the men in the church. Many women were content to fill such a role. They were believers, but as women it did not occur to them that they should take seriously the matter of learning all they could about their new-found faith. Religion had always been the prerogative of the men; their place was in the home. At the other extreme, there were those women who were influential in their own spheres, some even owning their own business or properties. They realised that in Christ 'there is neither male or female' (Gal.3:28b) and that as believers they were equal with men in the sight of God. They thus found the restrictions of the heathen society irksome, especially the hampering veil, and they wished to cast it off.

The apostle discusses this particular issue within a more wide-ranging discourse. 1 Cor.11 is a natural sequel to chapter 10. 'Why should my liberty be determined by another man's scruples?' (10:29). To this he replies, 'Give no offence to the Jews, or to the Greeks, or to the church of God' (v.32). 'Be ye imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (11:1). Here is the crux of the matter: in all things we should take Christ as our example. But what aspect of Christ's example does the apostle encourage us to follow here?

For the purpose of bringing redemption to mankind, he who was equal with God, voluntarily became subject to the Father (Phil.2:6). He did not act on his own initiative though he could well have done so, but willingly submitted to the authority of the Father (Jn.8:28,42, etc.). Such was the complete oneness and interdependence of the Son with the Father, that Christ declared, 'The Son can do nothing of his own accord' (Jn.5:19). This was the practical submission of an equal for a specific purpose, and it in no way rendered him inferior to, or unequal with, the Father.

This is the pattern for the woman. Equal as she is with the man, she will acknowledge his leadership within the church as being divinely ordained and inter-relate accordingly. This relationship in the days of the apostle was expressed by the wearing of the veil. Thus in keeping with contemporary custom, the apostle says that to wear the veil would avoid offence to both Jewish and Gentile communities. For believing women of those times to have discarded the veil would have created grave misapprehension as to the morals prevailing in the

church, and this had to be avoided at all cost, especially in the licentious city of Corinth.

At the same time, Paul describes the veil in verse 10 as 'authority' upon her head. The western mind finds this concept strange, that the wearing of the veil denotes *not the authority of the man over the woman but rather her own authority and power* within the divinely ordained hierarchy. Ramsay defines the Oriental view: "Without the veil the woman is a thing of naught, whom any one may insult. A woman's authority and dignity vanish with the discarded veil". He suggests that the nearest equivalent we know is the 'authority' which a magistrate wears upon his head vesting him with power.<sup>2</sup>

The apostle also implies that since the angels veil their faces in the presence of a thrice holy God, it would offend them to see the unbecoming familiarity and lack of reverence in an unveiled woman worshipper.<sup>3</sup> As H. L. Ellison comments, "Every time and clime have had their expression of womanly modesty."<sup>4</sup> It hardly needs to be said however that the modern hat as worn in western countries, almost only at church services, has little or no relation to the eastern veil worn compulsorily at all times, for it carries neither the same significance nor performs the same function.

The apostle next turns his attention to the men. Jewish men had been accustomed to wearing a head covering during worship. Now they are to discard it in recognition of the divine order, that under Christ the head, they are appointed to authority in the church (1 Cor.11:7).

The injunction in 1 Cor.14:34 that women should keep silence in the church must be interpreted in the light of other scriptures and should not be isolated from the other two references in the same chapter to keeping silence in the church (v.28,30). The subject under discussion here is order in the church service. It may be clearly seen from Acts 1:14 and 1 Cor.11:4,5 and 1 Tim.2:9 that women are expected to pray and prophesy in the church meetings; albeit they are to be suitably attired. The silence imposed upon women here may not be taken as cancellation of a permission previously granted. It would be idle for the apostle to prescribe dress when praying if, in fact, public prayer is denied to the ladies.

What then is the silence here? It should be remembered that there were no written new testament scriptures in the days of the apostles, and discussion of the old testament scriptures was an essential part of discovering the truths of their new faith (Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8f; 20:9 etc.). This was known as authoritative teaching, and much of it took the form of dialogue and debate. While it was conceded that women had the right, in fact the responsibility, to learn, the apostle

declared that they should not intrude into the debate of the teachers. The injunction to silence here is no contradiction of chapter 11. In point of fact, Paul is following the same principle. Once again he says that women, though spiritually equal with men, should cause no offence. They should follow the current practice. In those days girls did not attend public or synagogue schools. If they wished to do so, they learnt at home from their brothers or fathers. In the same way, Paul says, women should learn at home from their husbands. For those of us who live in the east it is easy to imagine the dismay which would be caused if women were to call across from the ladies' half of the congregation to their husbands sitting in the men's section. Such flagrant disregard of reverence in the presence of God would call forth a stern rebuke.

When Paul writes later to Timothy to give him instructions for the Ephesian church he touches upon this subject again (1 Tim.2:8-15). Having stated that the women should be suitably attired when praying, he gives his reason why a woman is not permitted to teach or to take authority in the church. It was when Eve stepped out of her position of dependence upon her husband and acted on her own initiative that she was deceived and sin entered. It was possibly to underline the danger of this in the church that Paul wrote 'yet woman will be saved through bearing children' (2:15). It seems that he was encouraging the christian woman to realise that despite her new status as a person — with an eternal soul to save, of equal value in the sight of God, as much responsible for the use of the life with which God had endowed her as her male counterpart — she should not despise the traditional function of the woman. Child-bearing and child-rearing remain her primary calling, and as an enlightened believer she has a great responsibility to teach and train her children. For the unmarried there is a similar responsibility in the spiritual realm.

### **God's divine order**

It would seem that, were the divine order which God instituted in creation rightly understood and accepted, many of our problems concerning the role of women in the church would cease to exist. Gen.1:27 says so simply, 'so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'. Similarly Gen.5:1 reads: 'when God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them . . . and named them Man when they were created'. In these simple uncomplicated statements we have the summation of our equality, the

complementary nature and harmony of our humanity. We project the image of God as male and female, since God is male-female in his totality. It is necessary therefore to encompass both the male and the female in order to have a balanced projection of who God is.

In creation, God fully harmonised the sexes; and neither male nor female is complete without the other (1 Cor.11:11f). Thus Adam and Eve reigned together over God's creation as king and queen (Ps.8:4-8). Together they fellowshiped with God, and they equally shared the blessings of God (Gen.1:28). They were equally heirs of the grace of life together (1 Pet.3:7). Within this equality lies the authority-structure given by God. Man was created first, then the woman from the man and for the man. Thus man is the head (1 Cor.11:3). Small wonder is it that when sin entered, this most beautiful of all relationships, meant to display so perfectly the image of the Godhead and reflect the love of Christ for his church (Eph.5:21-33), became the prime target of the enemy.

In Gen.3:16 we see the results of the fall. These are not the words of a harsh God pronouncing an unbearable penalty upon his disobedient children, but those of a God of infinite holy love announcing the inevitable and awful consequences of sin.<sup>5</sup> Man, God predicted, would take advantage of the weakness of woman, bringing a progressive domination over her until she would be reduced to a chattel, a mere 'thing', which is exactly what has pertained in non-christian religions down the ages.

### **Christ's work of restoration**

When Christ came, as we have been reminded, he restored the dignity of the woman and gave to her, her rightful place in society.

- (a) In Christ once again she is equal with the man (Gal.3:28b).
- (b) In Christ she obtains salvation by faith exactly as the man does.
- (c) In Christ her body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit even as his.
- (d) She is fed by the word as he is.
- (e) She may be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit as he also may be.
- (f) She has access to the one common Father in prayer as he has, for she with him is ordained to the priesthood with all the responsibilities and privileges attendant upon such a high calling (1 Pet.2:9).

To limit public prayer to the men alone is to proclaim a doctrine of the priesthood of male believers, and to restrict prayer and prophesying to

women's meetings alone is to presuppose an inequality which does not exist.

Scripture assures us that spiritual equality is God's intention, and this perspective never varies whether stated in the old testament or in the new. Paul in Eph.5:21f says 'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord'. For practical purposes, within the equality which God has created, there must be a head. Thus, man as head, with Christ for his example, will take the initiative, not sparing himself. Woman, taking Christ also as her example, submits and co-operates; and her obedience becomes a joy, as both of them are activated by the love of Christ. Just as Christ is the glory of God, that is, the full expression of God, so the woman is the glory of man; she is a prepared complement to his maleness, and without her he is incomplete (1 Cor.11:7). Each is dependent upon, and is necessary to, the other. Mutual submission as a wider principle within the church is a spiritual commitment for which we are answerable to the Lord, 'for none of us lives to himself'.

The tragedy is that for many generations there has been an imbalance in our churches. As a result women generally have been content to remain inarticulate. Many are incapable of prayer in public and, even more serious, they are not able to communicate the truths of their christian faith to others. And worse, they are not distressed that this is so. This means that a large section of each church has become atrophied, incapable of action, thus seriously hampering the effective witness of the church as a whole.

The steps which should be taken to rectify this position will inevitably vary from place to place and from time to time, but it seems incontrovertible that the women with their homes are the key to the evangelisation of today's unchurched peoples. They need to be given all the loving, gentle encouragement and stimulus that is possible to help them to overcome the inhibitions and fears of the years. The responsibility for this initiative lies with the elders of each local church who, with the deaconesses of their appointment, should make every effort to discover and develop latent gift among the women and thus bring about a total involvement of the church in realistic and effective outreach.

It is certain that if our eyes were open rightly to understand God's order for the church there would be less fear on the part of the men that their position of leadership and authority in the church was being challenged and less apprehension on the part of the women that their activities were being misconstrued. A family is complete and happy when both father and mother work in harmony, each filling his or her own God-appointed role efficiently. So the local church as a spiritual

family will be really effective only when both men and women work side by side at the assignment for which each has been called and endowed.

### Postscript (1982)

There is nothing in the paper written in 1974 which I now wish to delete or modify. I wish only to underline all I have written and stress that I am more convinced than ever that the time is now ripe for further consideration and action by elders of local churches.

I feel, however, that a further note is now required on 1 Tim.2:8-15 where it is stated that women are not permitted to teach in the church, but first I should like to note once again that in the new testament days there was no written statement of 'the faith', i.e. apostolic teaching of authoritative christian doctrine. Paul urged Timothy several times to guard the truth which had been entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit (1 Tim.4:13-16; 2 Tim.3:14-17) and instructed him to hand it down to faithful men who would do the same.

The teacher of that day (always a man) was not such as today. He was more like the 'guru' of hindu culture, who not only teaches but gathers around him a group of disciples over whom he asserts authority and who imbibe his teaching and follow his way of life. Such were the Jewish rabbis and teachers of Greek philosophies. In an age when women were not permitted even the privilege of education, a woman teacher certainly was not acceptable to society, for teaching carried with it authority. Paul moreover was considering cultural proprieties. He used the creation story also to point out that *generally* a woman is more easily deceived than a man and that, at a time when false teaching was being propagated as authentic, it was absolutely essential for the purity of 'the faith' to be maintained. Again we find the authority structure coming into view. The man must take the initiative and responsibility in this matter also.

If we realise that Paul's restrictive directions on the teaching role of women were based on the prevailing cultural situation and the fact that the scriptures were still incomplete, then we will readily understand that today's situation is very different. Unfortunately our thinking on this matter is confused because we consider 'teaching' to be merely the speech which comes from the pulpit. In the early christian era, we have noted, such was not the case and today there is no reason to assume that a woman is usurping authority if the elders of her church, realising that she is a competent teacher, agree that she should teach the whole church (men included) in the area of her competence.

The matter of leadership of women is also linked with this and needs to be looked into more carefully. Not only should elders seek out those women with appropriate spiritual gifts and encourage them to use them to the full, but they should also delegate to them authority to exercise the ministries God has given them within the church, supporting them actively. The appointment of lady elders — under the primary authority of male elders — seems to be the ideal.

David Watson says, "The complementary gifts and insights of men and women would enrich the vision of the whole eldership, strengthen their pastoral oversight, stimulate their thinking and give greater balance to their decision-making." However, where there are basic objections to the appointment of a lady elder, certainly a spiritually mature woman could be appointed as elder to the women and children of the church. (Tit.2:3,4) Such a person will surely have the gifts of teaching, wisdom for counselling and knowledge gained from experience, and would certainly have an understanding of the women of the church which elders would not generally possess. Should she not then at least be invited to attend the elders' meetings regularly? Even if not officially appointed to the status of an elder, her function would be the same. To suggest that elders' wives already perform this function is to evade this very important issue and is neither scriptural nor a wise assumption.

The gifts of the Spirit are granted to individuals, not to married couples. Happy indeed is the situation where both husband and wife are endowed with complementary gifts of leadership. How fruitful was the joint ministry of Priscilla and Aquila! But an elder's wife will not *ipso facto* be the possessor of the spiritual gifts which would equip her for spiritual leadership.

It would be wise for the church to know which ladies (married, single, or widows) are endowed with leadership gifts and which are considered by the elders to hold such office. An official appointment would not be out of place; where the ministry of elders is recognised by hands laid on them, these ladies should be similarly recognised.

It is always unwise to base christian practice on corrective passages in the new testament. We are on far safer ground when we base our practices on the positive statements. Thus in the classic statement of Gal.3:28, Paul states that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, *neither male or female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. No-one in our churches is debarred from leadership on the grounds of racial or social discrimination, thank God! As the prejudice of the centuries has been overcome in these matters, it will surely also be overcome in the matter of equality of the sexes in the area of leadership in the church. I would add to what I wrote some time ago

that after the intervening years I discern signs that we are much nearer to realising the original purpose of God which Christ came to restore, viz. the complementary partnership of male and female in all areas of life, including I trust in the leadership of the church. Thus we are brought nearer to the goal when 'we all grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ' (Eph.4:15).

#### NOTES

1. Louis M. Epstein, *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (1942), pp.107-19.
2. W. M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul* (1907), pp.203-5.
3. F. F. Bruce, *An Expanded Paraphrase of the Epistles of Paul* (1965) p.99 note.
4. H. L. Ellison, *The Household Church* (1963), p.86.
5. Cf. H. L. Ellison, *The Message of the Old Testament* (1969), p.20.
6. David Watson, *I believe in the church* (1978) p.282.

## Book Reviews

*La femme dans l'église* (Women in the church)

Les Cahiers de Lavigny 80

Editions: Je Sème, Nyon 85pp SFr 9

Interest and growing concern about the ministry of women in assembly life is by no means confined to the anglo-saxon world. An excellent symposium, coming from the believers in a country which has only recently given its womenfolk a full political franchise and, by temperament, a conservative people, this French-speaking Swiss contribution is both stimulating and challenging to our preconceptions about the place and ministry of Adam's rib!

*Jean-Marc Houriet* opens the commentary by reminding us of the sociobiological status of women and of the current feminist revolt with its bitterness, affecting even the life of a christian fellowship. His word to the Brethren, with their cultural conditioning and scripturally unsupported assumptions, calls for a truly biblical understanding of the liberty which comes when we are 'transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Rom.12:1-2).

The history of woman's social development as it affects her status and ministry in the church is well presented in two further papers: 'The liberating attitude of Jesus' (*J. Blandenier*) and 'God created them man and woman' (*M. Lüthi*). When Jesus proclaimed his liberating ministry (Jn.8:36 passim), the Jewish woman had few rights in either public and private life, confined largely to domestic tasks and child-bearing; her religious contribution in the Jewish synagogue was strictly limited to attendance only. Her religious place was in the celebration of the Sabbath at home. The Greco-roman woman fared even worse; her entry into religious celebration was one of profligacy rather than liberation. But there was a relative public liberty for the Roman 'matrona' which began to have influence on the social development of the early mixed christian communities.

In the gospels and in the early church with its mixture of cultures, the evidence of growing change of attitude and relationships towards believing women is carefully examined by the authors. If the canonical revelation of the holy scripture had continued into our own day, what

might it have contained on this liberation process? Brethren also have need of a liberation as the papers observe: “. . . are we (brethren) marked with a carnal attitude, afraid of losing certain prerogatives which flatter the comfortable feeling of being part of the ‘better half’ of humanity — the part which ponders and takes wise(?) decisions? If, according to scriptural teaching, the office of authority seems normally to be given to the man, the simple fact of being a man does not *ipso facto* confer a status of authority. Are we prepared to admit that, in the conduct of church affairs, we have our limitations? We lack certain insights and certain approaches to problems. To recognise the differences between men and women is to accept that we have not been given what womenfolk have received . . .” (p.35f).

Useful advice is proffered in summary (p.53) and in practical suggestions (pp.83-85) which are well worth our reflection:

“. . . (i) Whilst the brethren may hold the main responsibilities in the church affairs, they should be concerned with the development of the other half of the priesthood;

(ii) The sisters should consider their gifts and vocation, losing their diffidence and apathy, yet without yielding to a spirit of seizing possession or bitterness, but being guided by the desire to serve better;

(iii) Women may pray and prophesy in the church; we should be concerned to use this liberty to good effect;

(iv) Since it is possible to speak today without exercising direct authority, there are many new and varied ways for sisters to take part without seeking to take the rule over brethren;

(v) Seek to maintain a shared pastoral ministry which allows the exercise of different gifts; the male and female ministry can thus combine better, more easily and harmoniously;

(vi) Open the diaconate to sisters, having regard to their gifts and the needs of the church; see the most humble gifts through the eyes of God and not according to our scale of values;

(vii) Let us renounce the errors of individualism in the ministry, recognising its mutual nature involving reciprocal submission to one another; spiritual authority is a group process in discerning and practising the will of God.”

The scriptural texts are clearly expounded and the bibliography — largely European — is an invaluable contribution. The French is clear and precise, easy to read and well worth the trouble of doing so.

*John Boyes*

*Paul's Idea of Community*

Robert Banks. The Paternoster Press 208pp. £4.40

“Paul’s approach is really a quite revolutionary phenomenon in the ancient world. In view of subsequent developments — in which Catholicism increasingly followed the path of the cults and made a rite the centre of its activities, and in which Protestantism followed the path of the synagogue and placed a book at the centre of its services — it would be true to say that in most respects it remains no less revolutionary today.” Though this is one of the few references in the book to later periods than the first century AD, the lucid presentation does not allow the general reader with interests in religious or social studies to forget its relevance for today. For, as Banks claims in his preface, “while in many respects Paul was very much a man of his times, in others he was astonishingly ahead of them.”

From his family and citizenship in Tarsus, through his studies and his travels, Paul gained a knowledgeable familiarity with religious and social practices and beliefs of his day, sometimes showing a sympathetic understanding as at Mars Hill (Acts 17:28) and sometimes warning of inadequacies and dangers (Col.2:8,18,20-21). But Paul’s ideas on community, which developed as he nurtured and advised the new communities of believers arising as an outworking of the gospel, went far beyond what was taught and practised in the Jewish or the Gentile worlds of his day. In many respects the Stoic philosophers, particularly the radical Cynics who practised poverty, rejected conventions, and deliberately shocked their contemporaries, were nearer to Paul’s thinking than the Jews (i.e. the rabbis and leaders of Essene communities, Pharisaical fraternities, and synagogue congregations). Stoic philosophy was, however, more abstract and, being concerned either with individual living or world-views, had little to contribute practically or theoretically to relationships in small communities. Paul’s idea of community developed through the practical necessities of encouraging the new scattered groups of believers and dealing with their problems as they came to his attention. His own epistles provide most of the evidence, as indicated by the numerous references to them (not all, unfortunately, accurately printed).

The new communities were revolutionary in their composition in that they crossed the contemporary social boundaries of race, rank and sex. ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal.3:28). The closest social relationships of the ancient world were experienced within households, but here were face-to-face groups, not tied by blood or

economic interest, which used the language of the family and engaged in companionable acts, such as kissing and eating communally.

Then the new communities were revolutionary in their cohesion. They believed that the Spirit of God lived among them, not only linking them spiritually with believers in other places in a heavenly commonwealth but binding them together in local unity. Following Christ's teaching and example, they thus learned to serve one another in unselfish love.

Again, the new communities were revolutionary in their communion. As their bond was sustained by acts of prayer and kindness, their relationships were developed by gathering together for spiritual exercise. Though they might make use of rites or liturgy or codes of conduct, none of these were central, or even essential, to their meetings. Whatever his or her social background, each believer had some spiritual gift or gifts to share — some quite new and others renewed by the Spirit — so that all were encouraged to give and to receive. An effort should be made therefore, Paul asserted, to ensure that all vocal contributions were intelligible to others, especially when household meetings came together as perhaps happened in larger cities for, unlike the mystic experiences of many cults, no gift lay outside the control of the individual exercising it (1 Cor.14:32). He suggested guidelines to avoid simultaneous prophecies, uninterpreted strange languages, and interruptions by uneducated wives calling to their husbands for explanations during the proceedings, but he did not expect their gatherings to be so ordered as to rule out unprogrammed contributions (1 Cor.14:26-40).

Lastly, the new communities were revolutionary in their control. They believed that they were led by the Spirit and that Christ himself was present at their meetings. There was therefore no need for priests or rulers or remote ecclesiastics to direct them. Even Paul expected to be received by them as a member (Gal.4:12), to receive as well as to give (Rom.1:11,12), choosing to plead with them rather than command when he felt that they were in error (2 Cor.1:24). He suggested that they judge for themselves the soundness of visiting speakers (Gal.1:9) and not submit unquestioningly to any plausible claim to authority (2 Cor.11:4). The main part of his advice in the epistles is directed to all believers (especially if we can take it that 'brethren' is a term inclusive of both sexes). All were responsible then for organisation (e.g. 1 Cor.16:2,3), for welfare (e.g. Phil.2:4), for discipline (e.g. Rom.16:17), and for community development (e.g. Col.3:16), though some might through their particular gifts contribute more than others. This general responsibility was not reduced when some of their number were distinguished as 'servants' (*diakonos*) or 'overseers'

(*episkopos*). (These terms, like 'gifts' (*charismata*) and 'gatherings' (*ekklēsia*) were probably selected by Paul because they were ordinary words without religious or hierarchical significance.)

It was a major aim of Paul's work to foster such communities in the towns he visited. To help in this work he drew together, for long periods or short, many colleagues in a team remarkable in its mixture of nations, statuses, and sexes. Among the other itinerant teachers of his day only the Cynics travelled without slaves. (Onesimus was with Paul for a time but was sent back to Philemon.) It is notable too that many women are mentioned as fellow-workers. Though he was pre-eminent among the changing team, Paul did not force his will on any and rejoiced when they were received as servants of the Lord rather than merely as his representatives (1 Cor.16:10).

When Banks considers the evidence of the pastoral epistles in an appendix, he finds many of the same attitudes as in the earlier letters towards the communities, their gifts, and apostolic authority. Nevertheless he notes some changes which, he judges, lend support to the view that these later letters were written in Paul's name by someone else. He notes a moderation of the spontaneity in gathering, of the informality in structure, and of the ranking of contributions, with 'teaching' becoming more important than 'prophecy' and without mention of the more spectacular gifts. Above all, he notes a greater use of commands rather than persuasion. "It begins to look as if the first tentative steps away from Paul's idea of community were made, with the best of intentions, in the name of Paul himself."

Before reaching this speculative conclusion, he should perhaps have considered not only Paul's changed circumstances, but also differences of purpose, in that Paul was not here advising communities directly, but close colleagues who had to work out for themselves styles of leadership appropriate to their own situations and personalities to attain such objectives as he set before them.

Banks' view of the pastorals — though not essential to his general thesis — affects his interpretation of references to women in the church (with whom this issue of the *Christian Brethren Review* is primarily concerned). From the other Pauline letters and the Acts, he concludes that women had much more freedom in the church than elsewhere and much more responsibility too, especially in exercising the highly ranked gift of prophecy. Perhaps in the expanding and mobile Corinthian society there had been a tendency to demonstrate their freedom to excess — abandoning customary coverings or hairlengths and denying the wife's subordinate status to her husband (a status justified on two grounds — that man is the source of woman, thus reflecting God's glory directly, and that the woman was made for

the man.) Her authority to participate should be indicated by her appearance, perhaps by her long hair given for a covering. However, in 1 Tim.2, Banks finds women's role to be more restricted — in praying (2:8; cf.1 Cor.11:5), in teaching and exercising authority over husbands (2:12; cf.Col.3:16), with an additional argument indicating woman's responsibility for the fall (2:14; cf.2 Cor.11:3).

Pauline or non-Pauline, could this advice to young ministers of the evangelistic team indicate a falling away from Paul's early enthusiasm for the community revolution, a beginning of the institutionalisation which affects so many revolutionary movements as they become established? Or is it strong encouragement to face the social pressures of the day in order to avoid, on the one hand, conformity springing from weakness (e.g. 1 Tim.2:9) and, on the other, licence stemming from the new freedoms (e.g. 1 Tim.2:12)? Are there not principles here to help those who find that the abandonment of ecclesiastic strait-jackets of today brings problems of inter-relationships and order?

Certainly this conducted tour of first-century religious groups has been both illuminating and stimulating for me, hopefully enabling me to contribute more effectively to my local community and to encourage others, especially the females, to contribute effectively too.

*Arthur Henderson*

*Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*

James B. Hurley. IVP 288pp. £4.95 (paperback).

*Man and Woman in Christ*

Stephen B. Clark. Servant Books 753pp. \$15.95.

Two issues that trouble the church in the twentieth century are the role of women in the church and the role of women in the home. Evangelicals are deeply divided over the questions posed by the modern women's liberation movement. Even Christian Brethren assemblies are finding that it is not sufficient simply to appeal to traditional practice and inherited interpretations of Scripture: we need to restudy these issues with open and renewed minds and with a greater understanding of all the factors involved. These two recent books will be of considerable help to us in this vital exercise.

Dr. Hurley begins by considering the patriarchal structures of Assyrian, Babylonian and Israelite societies in which women were situationally subordinate even if not considered intrinsically inferior. Moving on to NT times he notices the male oriented societies of the Graeco-Roman world and especially of Judaism where conservative tendencies had resulted in women being largely excluded from religion

and considered as unfit to learn. The place of women in the ministry and teaching of Jesus is thus presented as sharply contrasting with the culture of the time and providing the foundation on which the early church built. Women were incorporated on equal terms into the body of believers. They were not only considered able to learn but many of them played a major role in the expansion of the church.

The bulk of the book examines in detail the NT teaching on women and marriage, relations between marriage partners, the role of women in worship, and the role of women in church offices. Of particular interest is Dr. Hurley's exegesis of *1 Cor. 11* in which he sees Paul as teaching that women did not need to wear veils providing they had long hair which they kept pinned up. He also provides an answer to the current view that headship in the NT does not refer to authority but to origin or source of life.

The main conclusion of this book can be briefly summarised: the NT teaches the 'appointive headship' of men both in marriage and in the church. The book closes with some examples of how the basic NT principles might be applied in the modern situation. The author takes the view that women should be free to play a full part in public worship and even to engage in preaching and teaching providing they do not adopt the authoritative role of the elders. This is a carefully and sympathetically written book which calls for thoughtful and prayerful reading before its thesis is either glibly accepted or impatiently rejected.

Mr. Clark, a Catholic who runs an interdenominational Christian community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has produced a massive and widely-acclaimed treatment of the roles of men and women in the light of Scripture and of the social sciences. After a careful survey of the scriptural teaching he concludes that, although the details of the NT teaching are not always clear, a broad role difference between men and women underlies the specific injunction of the NT (but he points out that the NT teaching about Christian character and Christian love is much more important!).

The next part of the book assesses the validity of the scriptural teaching for defining Christian life and demonstrates that it is unified, authoritative and clearly supported by Christian tradition. The third part of the book discusses the applicability of the scriptural teaching in contemporary society and, making extensive use of the findings of the social sciences, argues that it is not only possible but also desirable to adapt the NT teaching to the circumstances of the modern environment: the sexual differentiation of the human race has not changed with the passage of time. The concluding part develops a

sketch for how Christians should approach the roles of men and women in the midst of the contemporary situation. This is the most thorough Christian treatment of the whole issue of the roles of men and women that is available and those who dislike its conclusions will need to bring equal industry, erudition and spirituality to convince us that it is not on the right lines.

*John Baigent*

## Christian Brethren Research Fellowship

The work of the CHRISTIAN BROTHERS RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP began in 1963 when a number of interested brethren established a study group activity which concerned itself with the life and customs of the assemblies of Christian Brethren with which they were associated.

These activities immediately began to draw widespread support and interest both within and outside of the Brethren movement in the United Kingdom and overseas. Associate links with similar bodies in New Zealand and Australia and with correspondents in many parts of the world were made. By means of its *Journal* and *Occasional Papers* — some 35 in number and now published under a new title, the *Christian Brethren Review*, with an even wider perspective of interests — the CBRF has become recognised as a forward-looking association of brethren and sisters engaged in promoting, on a continuing basis, the growth and development of our churches' principles and practices. During recent years, it has become a reference point for many enquiries about the Christian Brethren movement from outside bodies, the media and research workers.

The CBRF has also organised many well-supported conferences, seminars and workshops in London and in other regions. Some of the more recent issues examined have included:

Marriage, Divorce and the Church	(1977)
Leadership in the Churches	(1978)
Women in the Church — the Silent Majority	(1979)
The Caring Church	(1979)
What is Truth? — The Application of the Scriptures for Today	(1980)
Mission in the 80's	(1980)
Agree to Differ?	(1981)
New Life in the Church?	(1981)

Most of these papers presented are subsequently published with further material in the *Christian Brethren Review*. Tape recordings of these seminars are available for purchase (see inside back cover).

In 1977, a Trust body was set up to develop the work of the Fellowship and adopted wide constitutional aims to 'advance the

christian faith' by study and publication of its findings especially as they affect those known as the Christian Brethren. In pursuit of these aims, the CBRF undertakes a number of study projects of contemporary interest to our churches. Examples are: training and development programmes for younger leaders, students and others, for future responsibilities; church management processes for elders; church growth developments (continuing work on '*The Brethren Today — a Factual Survey*' by Brown & Mills 1980: CBRF); mission and evangelism for today and others. The fellowship is developing an information and resource agency for churches regarding workers, para-church bodies, missionary candidates and other personnel questions. It can also provide counselling services and consultancy aid to churches and oversights.

### **Executive Committee**

(See inside front cover)

### **Subscriptions**

There is no formal membership of CBRF; it is an open association of friends and supporters of our seminars and publications. Its aims and objectives are clearly set out in the Trust deeds (copies of aims available on request) and are acceptable by all who have a sincere concern for the growth and development of our fellowships.

*Subscriptions* are paid to CBRF through The Paternoster Press Ltd, 3 Mount Radford Crescent, Exeter EX2 4JW, UK, who provide a distribution service for our publications. The Paternoster Magazine Order Form for 1983 gives the current rates, including combined reductions with other periodicals.

The annual subscription is £7.50 due in January. This amount is minimal and enables us to publish the Christian Brethren Review but does not cover seminar and many other administrative expenses.

*Donations* for the development work of CBRF will be gratefully acknowledged by the Treasurer: James M. Tumbridge, 23 Percy Road, Winchmore Hill, London N21 2JA.

We ask for readers' fellowship in prayer as we share together our concern for the well-being of our churches and we seek your continued support and that of your friends in subscribing to our growing work in serving you all.

Yours in Christ's service,  
on behalf of the Executive Committee

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