

THE 'PLACE' OF THE WOMAN IN THE CHURCH

No doubt some would prefer to sweep this topic under the rug, since the debates on this issue have led to some deep divisions in the ranks of evangelical Christians. A wiser approach, it seems to us, is to keep on searching for Biblical answers.

The sharp disagreements on this question among Evangelicals clearly indicate that in this question it is not simply a matter of affirming the authority of God's Word, but rather it is a question of hermeneutics--how one interprets and applies the Scriptures.

All of us want not only to know what the Scriptures teach on this subject, but also, I venture to say, to do what God's Word says. The question is: Can we agree on what it says?

Within the limitations of time and space allotted to me I want to suggest how I read the New Testament on the place of the Christian woman. In fact, the New Testament gives her several places (all of them worthy positions). She can be seen (a) first of all "in Christ", (b) then, as wife and mother in the home, and (c) also as a servant in the church. These three are all very important; however, I will comment only briefly on the first two and devote the major portion of the paper to the third.

I. THE WOMAN IN CHRIST

The text that most succinctly expresses the equality of male and female in Christ is Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In the context Paul is discussing the nature of justification or, to put it differently, the conditions for full inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant with its attendant blessings (v. 29). The one condition for justification is faith (expressed in baptism, v. 27).

This text does not deny the sexual differences between male and female, of course, any more than it denies ethnic distinctions (Jew and Greek) or the reality of socio-economic evils (slave and free). In Christ, however, these distinctions are transcended, and the church must give clear evidence of that in its corporate life. There is something strikingly new here, for in earlier times a woman was a member of the covenant by virtue of the male (who had the seal of the covenant), in the church she is a member by grace on the basis of faith, like the man.

Peter joins with Paul in giving the Christian woman a new place in Christ when he counsels husbands to give their wives honor "as a fellow-heir of the grace of life" (I Peter 3:7). Whereas the physical differences remain (she is the "weaker vessel" --perhaps because of her powerless position in a patriarchal society), spiritually she shares equally with her husband in the grace of God and in his gift of eternal life.

The crucial question that remains, however, is whether equality in Christ also means egalitarianism in all functions in the Body of Christ, the church. Before we deal with that, we must also raise the question of where a Christian wife stands vis-a-vis her husband in the home.

II. THE CHRISTIAN WOMAN IN THE HOME

Whereas both Jesus (Mt. 19) and Paul (I Cor. 7) teach that singleness is a noble state, they assume marriage to be the normal state of men and

women. Also, marriage is to be monogamous and for life. In marriage, husband and wife are equals in the area of conjugal relations: "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (I Cor. 7:4). Incidentally, in all the instructions on married life ✓ the emphasis consistently lies on the (duties) of husband and wife, never on their rights. When either man or wife insists on his or her rights, their relationship suffers. Indeed, as Alan Richardson points out (Genesis 1-11, p. 68f.), grasping for (equality) is the sin that brought about man's fall.

What offends some modern Bible readers is Paul's exhortations to the wives to be submissive to their husbands. "Wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). It is often overlooked, that in the preceding verse Paul exhorts all members of the church (male and female) to be subject one to another; ^{in a general sense} and presumably that does not offend our Christian-conscience. Moreover, the model for the wife's submission to her husband is the submission of the church to Christ, her Lord--and ✓ surely that is not a galling subjection. Besides, the command to be submissive is balanced by a weightier command to the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church (v. 25). It is hard to see, then, why this ✓ command should have become so irksome in our day. Where the relationship of husband and wife is based on self-giving love, the question of "equal rights" will hardly be an issue in the relationship of man and wife.

It should be added that the (role-relationship) of man and woman in marriage is based not on the effects of sin (Gen. 3:16), but is rooted in a ✓ pre-Fall relationship, in which "complementarity" rather "egalitarianism" is stressed (Gen. 2). Therefore, to view all the references to the husband's

"headship" and the wife's "submission" as reflections of first century culture with no abiding significance is, in my view, too simple a solution. And with all the emphasis in our day on the "self-realization" of the woman, it should not be forgotten that authentic self-realization for both men and women is found in their willing submission to the divinely-appointed structures grounded in creation and redeemed by Christ (J. J. Davis, "Some Reflections on Galatians 3:28," JETS, Summer, 1976, p. 208).

And while we are on the topic of the home, the high calling and dignity of motherhood (ennobled for all times by our Lord's incarnation) needs to be underscored today. Whereas in the past Christian women often felt a deep sense of fulfillment in being good wives and mothers, today the confession: "I am only a housewife," is often made with some chagrin. This should not be so.

This should, however, not be interpreted to mean that wives and mothers who pursue a profession are necessarily in violation of Scripture. Admittedly the New Testament does not mention the career woman, since the woman's place in the first century was in the home. It would be wrong, however, to infer from this silence that there is no place for women in the various professions open to them in our society. This should not, however, lead to a denigration of motherhood.

Evidently there were some women even in Paul's day who aspired to leadership in the congregation, and who felt that being a wife and mother was of secondary importance. Paul assures them that they "will be saved through childbearing" (I Tim. 2:15). Not that the bearing of children by itself will save any woman, but just as the married man experiences God's salvation in the circle of his calling, so the mother of the home need not

fear that she will have to forfeit the blessings of salvation by fulfilling her marital and maternal duties.

The more controversial question today, however, is the question of the woman's place in the ministries of the church.

III. THE CHRISTIAN WOMAN IN THE CHURCH

A. Opportunities for Ministry

Women were the first witnesses of the resurrection and among the 120 who experienced the coming of the Spirit and the birth of the church were women (Acts 1:14). There were a great many converts from among womenfolk in Jerusalem (Acts 5:14), in Samaria (Acts 8:12), and also in the Gentile world. The very fact that Luke would mention the conversion of both "men and women" is striking, for in the new order which Jesus brought, both men and women have the freedom to accept or reject the Gospel. That they were a force to be reckoned with can be seen from Paul's account that he had ✓ "dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3).

When Paul and his associates brought the Gospel to Europe it all began with the conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:13ff.), and her household became a base for further operations (another woman who put her house at the disposal of the church was Mary, ^{in Jerusalem} Acts 12:12). At Thessalonica again a great many "leading women" became charter members of the church (Acts 17:4). An Athenian woman, who heard Paul's Areopagus address, believed the Gospel. She must have been an outstanding woman for she is mentioned by name (Damaris, Acts 17:34).

In Corinth Paul encountered a Jewish couple (Acts 18:3), who became his co-workers in the Gospel. When Paul left for Syria, Priscilla and

Aquila went with him to Ephesus, where they became the spiritual mentors to Apollos (Acts 18:26). Later this couple moved back to Rome where a church met in their house and Paul greets "Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus," in his letter to the Romans (16:3, 4). They are greeted once again by the apostle in II Timothy 4:19. In the six references where this outstanding Christian couple is mentioned, Priscilla's name stands first four times. Later scribes caught the significance of this order. In the Western Text of the Acts the order was reversed, for it seemed improper to have Aquila's name stand after his wife's. Was Priscilla more gifted than her husband? Did she come from a higher social class? We do not know; but it would not be wrong to infer that she took the lead when Apollos was instructed in the faith.

Although it is not possible to define with precision what "prophecy" means in every instance in the New Testament, it is recorded that the evangelist, Philip, had four daughters who had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9). That some form of spiritual ministry is implied, is obvious, I should think. Bruce humorously suggests, "Had the writer of Acts been a romancer, he would certainly not have missed the opportunity of putting some specific prophecy into the young ladies' mouths" (Commentary on Acts, p. 424).

No one reading the Book of Acts could come to the conclusion that the early church was led by women. On the other hand, it would be unfair to overlook the vital role they played in the life of the church from its inception. This becomes quite obvious from the many woman associates mentioned by Paul in his letters. He begs his "yokefellow" to help two ladies, Euodia and Syntyche, to be of one mind. He recalls that they "labored with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers. . ."

(Phil. 4:2, 3). Precisely what the two Christian women had done for the advancement of the gospel is not stated, but he includes them with his male fellow-workers and it seems rather obvious that they had done more than domestic duties.

Perhaps nowhere is Paul's appreciation for the work of Christian women seen as clearly as in Romans 16. Altogether 26 persons and three households are mentioned, and of the 26, nine or ten are women. The list starts with Phoebe, who, it seems, was entrusted with the letter to the Romans. She is called diakonos, which probably means "deaconess." This is possibly also the meaning in I Timothy 3:11, i.e. "women-deacons" rather than "wives of deacons." Paul recommends her to the Roman church as a saint who had helped him and many others (Rom. 16:1, 2).

Of Prisca and Aquila he says that these fellow-workers had "risked their necks for my life" (Rom. 16:4). The church met in their house in Rome. Among his friends whom he greets is Mary (v. 6), "Who has worked so hard for you" (i.e. the Roman church). This is the only reference to this particular Mary in the New Testament, and we can only speculate on how she may have labored for the Christian cause in Rome.

One wishes we knew more about Junia (Julia) and Andronicus (v. 7), but it is impossible to decide whether the name Junia (Julia) is a feminine (AV) or a masculine (RSV, NEB, TEV). If Junia (Julia) is a feminine then we have a somewhat staggering encomium applied to her: "Of note among the apostles." Chrysostom in the fourth century wrote: "Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be counted worthy of the appellation of apostle." It may well be that Andronicus and Junia were a husband and wife team--perhaps witnesses of the resurrection.

Tryphaena and Tryphosa (v. 12) were possibly twin-sisters, and are also given honorable mention as "those who labored in the Lord." (Their names mean "dainty" and "delicate," respectively, and, as Barclay suggests, Paul may have had a twinkle in his eye when he dictated his letter and made this comment to the effect that they belied their names by working like trojans for Christ's cause).

In the same verse Paul addresses Persis: "Beloved Persis, who worked hard in the Lord." Does any other Biblical writer address a Christian lady as affectionately as that? (or does he mean "beloved" by the church?). We do not know about Rufus ("red-head"), but Paul makes an affectionate comment about his mother: "His mother and mine" (v. 13). Perhaps she made up to Paul the loss of his own mother's love when he was ostracized by his family (Phil. 3:8). Philologus and Julia were possibly a husband-wife team (v. 15). Also Nereus and a sister of his ^{are} ~~is~~ singled out for a Christian greeting.

A close study of this chapter shows how Paul's family cuts across all the barriers of sex, race, social and economic status. Romans 16 is a kind of commentary on Galatians 3:28, "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female."

There is no doubt that the mission of the church in the early period was greatly strengthened by the contribution made by Christian women. The question *what* their function in the Christian assemblies ^{was}, however, is not quite that clear.

In I Corinthians 11:5 it appears to be assumed that a woman prays and speaks in public (of course she is to observe the rules of propriety in the matter of dress-which in Paul's day meant to wear the customary head-covering and to distinguish herself from the man by the length of her hair).

While it is true that Paul is not dealing primarily with the function but with the deportment of Christian women in the worship service, it would seem like a serious faux pas on the part of the apostle if verse 5 was meant to be purely hypothetical. It may be that "pray and prophesy" is simply a way of saying that she participates fully in the worship experiences of the church, but convincing proof of this meaning is lacking.

In the light of all this evidence (and there is more) one can only be amazed at the courage of Paul to break with his rabbinic past in order to restore to Christian womanhood some of that glory which her Creator intended her to have. There are, however, two passages in which he seriously limits the Christian woman as far as her function in public worship is concerned.

How does one harmonize the freedom passages with the restriction passages? The temptation is to explain those we are uncomfortable with in our modern culture in the light of the passages which appeal to us (these would be for us the "plain" texts). So we have interpreters who explain the restrictive passages as reflections of first century culture and the freedom passages as the message of the Gospel, and in this way they create a "harmony". "Traditionalists" go the opposite way, and explain the freedom passages in the light of the 'plain' restrictive commands.

Stendahl alerts us to something in Paul that is worth noting: "When Paul fought those who defended the old--as in Galatia--his bold vision of the new expressed itself most strongly, as in Galatians 3:28. When he discerned the overstatement of the new he spoke for the old, as in Corinthians. Our problem is not to harmonize the two tendencies into a perfect system. It is . . . to discern where the accent should lie . . ." (The Bible and

the Role of Woman, p. 37). Before we make any attempt at harmonizing let us get the two restrictive passages before us.

B. Restrictions on Ministry

1. I Corinthians 14:34-36.

"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."

Before we make some observations on these verses let me mention some ways in which interpreters have tried to harmonize this passage with I Corinthinas 11 (and for that matter the rest of the New Testament), where women are seen as participating both in the mission of the church and in the church's worship exercises.

*pray and
prophecy*

a. Since this passage appears after verse 40 in some MSS, and since it appears to disrupt the flow of Paul's thought concerning the use of tongues and prophecy, some are of the opinion that this passage is an interpolation and is un-Pauline. While that is highly doubtful, since the passage is rather secure in this very place, it would still not relieve us of the problem. Even if this had come from the pen of another apostolic writer, we would still be faced with the meaning of what is here said.

b. Another view is that chapter 11 has the worship of the church, which ~~has~~^{was} open to outsiders, in mind, whereas chapter 14 describes a membership meeting. Another form of this view is that chapter 11 describes the worship experience of believers only, at which the Christian woman had the freedom to pray and prophecy, while I Corinthians 14 describes a meeting at

which unbelievers might also be present. In such meetings women should be silent, in order to avoid offending others.

Another way out of the dilemma is to argue that Paul mentions the praying and prophecying of the woman, but does not condone it. However, since he condemns inappropriate attire, one would have expected him to censure the women for praying and prophecying, if he had objected to that sort of activity.

c. "Pray and prophecy" in chapter 11 means to participate in worship and to receive all the blessings of worship but not actually that women who participated in worship prayed and prophecied themselves. That, however, seems to be contrary to Paul's assumption that they did pray and prophecy.

d. Michael Green is of the opinion that the "speaking" which is forbidden in chapter 14 is speaking in tongues, since the entire chapter has to do with that topic (Called to Serve, p. 56). Certainly if women spoke in tongues in public this would have added to the confusion that already existed in the public worhsip at Corinth and which Paul seeks to overcome in this chapter.

e. Krister Stendahl holds that "the context" (v. 35) makes it clear that the silence here stands in contrast to 'asking questions', not to preaching, teaching or prophesying. That being so, there is no tension between this passage and the clear reference in chapter 11 to the fact that women may prophesy "^(Ibid, p.30) Since women were generally segregated from men (they were in the synagogue), these Christian women were making a nuisance of themselves by interrupting the service with questions, perhaps shouting them across to their husbands. Paul forbids them this kind of questioning in

church and advises them to ask their husbands at home.

f. Another approach is to see in this passage a failure on the part of Paul, who knew better, to bring his practice into line with his theory. However, to accuse Paul of a lapse at this point would get us into serious trouble, for then we could get rid of Paul whenever he did not agree with us or vice versa. A more sensible approach (if one follows this line of thought) is to recognize that Paul could not in the first generation force the church to break cultural patterns which had become fixed over a long period of time in a patriarchal society. Just as he could not overcome slavery in his day (while holding to the freedom of the slave in Christ), so he could not allow woman to go farther than society would allow, if the church was not to come into complete disrepute.

Perhaps a few more comments on the passage under discussion are in place. First, it is obvious that Paul did not mean the command for the women in the church to be silent to be understood in the absolute sense, otherwise they could not have participated in song, prayer, and confessions of faith. Second, the reminder to the women to be submissive may suggest that some did not know how to handle their newly-found liberties and were assuming what was generally held to be a man's prerogative, namely, leadership. Third, Paul seems to have the creation account in mind when he counsels submission--"as the Law says"--suggesting that the new order of redemption has not done away with the order of creation. Some commentators take this reference to the Law to be an allusion to Genesis 3:16, where the husband's rule over the wife is mentioned, but Bruce thinks it is rather a reference to the creation account. Genesis 3:16 stands in the context of the curse, and it is somewhat hard to see why Paul would refer to the curse

be quiet does not mean that they said nothing, but rather it means they did not object. This would be in line with I Corinthians 14 where constant interruption with questions or even objections would cause confusion in worship.

In our passage "silence" probably means the opposite of lording it over the husbands. Indeed quietness here is linked with submission--the kind that is expected of all church members (Eph. 5:20) and even of the *male* prophets who speak (I Cor. 14:30). Certainly Paul does not mean that a woman is not to be heard in church, but rather there is not to be any wrangling and arguing.

Verse 12, however, states clearly that it is inappropriate for a woman to teach or to lord it over the man; she is to be "in quietness," i.e. in submission.

That he did not forbid the woman to teach altogether is clear: Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:1-3, 24-26); Euodia and Syntyche labored side by side with Paul in the Gospel, and we take that to mean that they did more than prepare food and wash clothes (Phil. 4:2ff). Paul, of course, wants women to teach their children (II Tim. 1:5; 3:15)--how otherwise would Timothy have known the Scriptures from childhood? Older women are urged to teach younger women (Tit. 2:3-5). If ^{they} participated in prayer and prophecy when the church gathered (I Cor. 11), they exercised some kind of teaching function.

Clearly, then, the prohibition forbidding a woman to teach is not to be absolutized for it was not absolutized even in New Testament times. Nor have we absolutized it in the 20th century, for we have never thought it inappropriate for lady missionaries to instruct the future pastors of our mission churches (did we violate a New Testament teaching in permitting this?)

Some see the way out of the dilemma by distinguishing between two different kinds of teaching in the early church: the instructive, discursive, kerygmatic, in which the woman might participate, and the authoritative, disciplinary, perhaps doctrinal teaching, the kind Timothy is asked to do in the face of heretics, in which she should not take part. Whereas such a distinction would help to harmonize the New Testament materials, it is a distinction that is hard to make on the basis of the New Testament.

Others see the restriction as limited to leadership functions. Perhaps the verb "to teach" and authenteo ("to act out of oneself" and then to act autocratically, or to interrupt) are used in parallel fashion here. By implication, the woman may well instruct the congregation, if it is done under the leadership of a man.

Again, others insist on universalizing and "freezing" this prohibition without taking into account the situation in which these instructions were given. On the one hand, the ascetic emphasis in Gnosticism may have led to a disparagement of family life, marriage, and child-birth on the part of some women who insisted on playing a leading role in the teaching ministry of the church (perhaps v. 15 suggests that, also).

On the other hand, we may have had a situation in Ephesus (where Timothy labored) such as is reflected in the letter to Thyatira (Rev. 2:18ff), "I have this against you that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols." This would be the libertine wing of Gnosticism.

Guthrie suggests that the prohibition may have been due to the greater facility with which contemporary women were falling under the

as a binding arrangement. Fourth, Paul wants the woman to be fully informed on matters of faith. "If they want to learn anything let them ask their husbands at home."

Whereas we, looking through the eyes of our culture, tend to be offended by this stricture on the woman, we overlook how revolutionary the passage actually is in the light of Paul's day. Whereas the rabbis thought that to teach the woman the Torah was like teaching her to sin, Paul wants the woman to learn. Where else in the first century does a male writer express the hope and desire that women should be instructed?

A. Berkley Mickelson comments on the stricture in this verse:

The context of this verse indicates that Paul was trying to help the Corinthians restore order in their church gatherings. A study of culture shows that most *Gentile* women of that day were illiterate and Jewish women believers had no instruction in the Old Testament because rabbinical tradition forbade their being taught.

In the synagogue and in the early Church, it was the custom for one person to read the Scriptures, perhaps speak, and for men of the congregation to interrupt with questions as they chose. The women of the Corinthian church were far behind the men in their religious understanding because of the culture of their area, so Paul told them to save their questions until they got home and then ask their husbands.

(Better Bible Study, p. 14f) ✓

Leon Morris (in a public lecture) pointed out that in both the restrictive passages (I Cor. 14 and I Tim. 2) Paul mentions the "learning" of the woman, and he suggested that the implication is, that once she will have learned she will also be permitted greater freedom and fuller participation in public worship. It would then be wrong to universalize and to "freeze" the command to silence for all times. In Paul's day it would have been disgraceful for a Christian woman, illiterate and unlearned, to assume a leadership role in a Christian assembly. However, she is to be

informed about the great truths of redemption and the Christian life as fully as the husband. By implication, we could say, that once she has learned, and once she finds herself in a situation where it is not considered improper for a woman to speak in public she may well be asked to do so. Submissiveness, of course, there must always be.

2. I Timothy 2:11, 12.

"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.^{teachable and to listen} For it was Adam who was first created and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman, being quite deceived, fell into transgression."

In a day when women did not teach elsewhere in public, it would have been out of character if Paul had thrown open the doors wide and encouraged women to become the leaders of the church. Moreover, the heretical teachings which Paul combats in this letter may have been furthered by untaught women who had, by virtue of their gifts, taken leadership in teaching. Some interpreters infer from this that once she will have learned she may teach, but for the moment Paul wants her to desist.

To learn in quietness probably means that she should not raise objections to what was taught. Speaking and "silence" are not mutually exclusive. For example, when Peter reported on his fellowship with Gentiles (Acts 11), the Jewish brothers became "quiet" and "praised God." Did they praise God in silence? Hardly! But they did not object to Peter's fellowship with the Gentiles. Or, take Acts 21:14, where the disciples at Caesarea tried to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem, but when they couldn't they were "quiet" and "said": "The will of the Lord be done." Here clearly to

influence of imposters. And that may be instructive when we look at Paul's rationale for the prohibition. "And Adam was not deceived but the women was thoroughly deceived and fell into transgression." This offends some modern readers, but let me give some lines of interpretation: (a) Behind this statement we may detect the Gnostic tendency to despise marriage and family in the interest of greater holiness and openness to God, and Paul may be warning such women that just as Eve, when she was alone, was approached by the Tempter and fell into sin, she better watch herself. That there were such deceivers who forbade marriage can be seen from 4:3. (b) Another way to go is to say that Paul counsels against giving to a woman a position of authority in the church because she is by her nature more perceptive and responsive and so in greater danger of being led astray. (c) A third line of interpretation is that since Eve tried to lead once and created chaos for mankind, her punishment for all times is that she may not lead. This is problematic, if for no other reason than that elsewhere in the New Testament Adam stands at the head of the sinful race. Moreover, it would mean, then, that Paul was determined in his instructions on the place of the woman in the church not by what has happened in Christ, but by what has happened in sin, and the very next verse reminds us that the woman, too, experiences Christ's salvation. (d) A fourth way to go is to say with Jewett that Paul's argument here reflects but a left-over of his rabbinic thinking. But it will hardly do to say that Paul is in error at those points where we cannot harmonize him with other passages or (which is worse) with current sentiments.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As one surveys the New Testament materials that bear on our topic, a host of questions come to mind: Should Christian women be restricted in their use of spiritual gifts? Does the equality of men and women in Christ refer to spiritual status only, or also to function? How are we to harmonize statements in Paul's writings that seem to be contradictory? Since Paul's teachings were given in particular historical and cultural situations, are they all equally and permanently binding for every conceivable historical or cultural situation? What happens when the gospel takes root in a matriarchal society? If Paul was concerned about the deportment of women in the congregation in order to insure the reputation of the church in the community, how does the church express this concern today in a society which might interpret the church's traditional stance as a form of repression? What about the single ladies in the church, to whom the texts which speak of the marriage relationship hardly apply directly? Or do they?

These and other questions beg for answers. But the answers are hard to come by. Quoting chapter and verse often means selecting a particular chapter and verse which expresses best our feelings on the matter and, either overlooking passages which point in the opposite direction or, subordinating such passages to our preferred texts.

The church must be on guard constantly lest it be swept along by some current tide of opinion, but the church must also have the courage to question its own accepted traditions and interpretations, (especially since there are conflicting traditions in the church). Both church and society stand under the Word of God.

We all agree, I am sure, that the Christian woman shares in all the

blessings of God's redeeming grace as does the Christian man. By now that is a truism, I think. Also, it would be hard to show from Scripture that ladies are less endowed with charismata than men are. That husband and wife have different roles assigned to them in the marriage relationship, I believe, is also understood. The crucial question then is: Is the church to restrict the sisters in their functions in the public life of the church?

It is my understanding that Paul's command for women to be silent in the church's assemblies must be understood (in part, at least) in the light of the status of womanhood in his society. Had the apostle not taken the feelings and prejudices of the contemporary-patriarchal world into account, there would have been utter chaos. This means, that where cultural patterns differ, Paul's strictures in this matter must also be modified. Our sisters do not wear Near Eastern kerchiefs to church, and yet presumably they confess to be in harmony with I Corinthians 11, since in our society women do not need to have a head-covering to be appropriately dressed.

Slavery was an evil institution of Paul's society, yet Paul did not crusade against it, for to do so would have meant defeat and utter chaos. But that did not mean that he condoned the status quo of his day (as Gal. 3:28 clearly indicates). Similarly, it would seem to me, some of the things Paul has to say about women in the church is an accommodation to people's feelings about their status at the time; but that does not mean that Paul condoned what Jewish and pagan culture had done to them. And just as Christianity planted seeds that would lead to the abolition of slavery, so it also restored womanhood to true dignity. (It is recognized, of course, that the analogy is not a perfect one.)

Moreover, we should be careful not to absolutize prohibitions which were designed to curb excesses in local situations about which we are not sufficiently informed--particularly in the light of the fact that there are passages which seem to point in the opposite direction.

The argument that where God has endowed a sister with certain gifts, the church should allow her the use of them in the congregation, must be qualified somewhat, I think. In the first place, only relatively few men in the congregation have opportunity to use their gifts in the meetings of the church. Moreover, when the church meets for worship and edification it is not to provide all the members an opportunity to exercise their gifts, but to be strengthened and equipped to perform their mission in the world--and our society provides ample opportunity for the use of all the gifts of grace which God gives us.

What shall we say to this in the light of the fact that the New Testament clearly shows the active involvement of Christian women in the life and mission of the church and in the light of the fact that God has endowed them with gifts as he has endowed men?

We all know that churches are coming to different conclusions on this whole matter. (a) There are those who take the restrictive passages to be a kind of "hangover" of Paul's patriarchal mentality and therefore not a word of God for all times. This is, I think, a wrongheaded approach to Scripture. (b) By contrast there are those who universalize, absolutize and 'freeze' the commands of Paul to silence in the congregational meetings. This approach is hard to harmonize with the New Testament materials as a whole. It overlooks the fact that Paul was seeking to curb excesses, and pays no attention to the cultural setting of the New Testament. (c) Others

hold firmly to these passages as a divinely inspired word of God but a word which came in a given cultural form. Once the form changes the word must be applied in new ways. The danger in this approach (and we take this approach whenever we ask what a New Testament passage means for us today) is that we not only apply the truth to a different situation, but that we do away with the truth altogether. (d) Others hold that the restrictive passages in Paul are in line with God's creation order, in which man's headship is established, and that this remains unaffected by redemption. Redemption affects only the tragic consequences of sin and not the relationship of man and woman prior to the Fall. In practice this might express itself in one of several ways: Either the woman should not teach at all when men are present; or she might teach as long as a man leads; ~~or she might teach as long as a man leads;~~ or she may not teach if she is married, but may if she is single; or she may teach, but not assume pastoral leadership--and other variants on this theme.

In the light of the creation order and the strong emphasis in the epistolary literature on man's headship (which I do not understand as "lordship") it would appear to me that complete egalitarianism of men and women either in the home or in the Christian community is not entirely in harmony with Scripture. On the other hand, we would hardly be true to the New Testament if we failed to recognize the untapped spiritual resources in the sisters of the church for ministries at home and abroad.

It would appear to me that we could only gain if our sisters were encouraged to participate actively at the various levels of church and conference activity. However, since the divine order of creation is not

reversed by redemption, and because of the New Testament emphasis on man's headship, it would seem to me that the pastoral leadership of the congregation should be in the hands of men. Our sisters should be encouraged to use their gifts at all other levels of church^{life}, but they should not aspire to ordination for the pastoral ministry.

David Ewert