

most extraordinary of all miracles and accepts that the Son of God went about among men doing good, he can understand the place of miracles in his life. As the believer considers the mighty deeds which Jesus performed in favour of the blind, the lame, the sick, in short, in favour of those who were in any kind of need, he can understand them as manifestations of God's saving and healing activity in the world. He can interpret them as signs of the inauguration of the new heaven and the new earth of which the prophet had spoken (cf Is. 6:17; 66:22). He can see them as heralds of that era which is an anticipation of the age when every tear will be wiped away and when there will be neither crying nor pain any more (cf Rev. 21:4).

Was Paul a Male Chauvinist?

Christine Butler

Poor St Paul : with, 'Wives be subject to your husbands', he has a pretty bad reputation as a misogynist. I will try to show, however, that examination of his writings proves that this reputation is undeserved and to indicate how it has grown. So that it has become what Dr Caird describes as: 'one of the most firmly held of the prejudices and half truths which together comprise the biblical semiliteracy of the man in the street'.

I cannot here go into a detailed exegesis of all the extracts from St Paul's letters in which women are mentioned, but one central point must be made clearly from the start. St Paul had one main concern. That was, to preach the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. His mission was not concerned with women as women, or with their place in society or even in the local churches. It was not as a sociologist that Paul wrote but as an apostle. He was concerned above all to preach what Christ had done for all mankind. He was concerned to show people how a new relationship with God could be found through being in Christ. The new relationship with God came through the new covenant established by Christ's death and resurrection. Through baptism into Christ, people were given the new seal; just as circumcision had

been the old seal of God's relationship with his old people, and the law had been their relationship with God. There would of course be repercussions in social relationships which would follow from the realisation of the new relationship with God through Christ. But if we look at Paul from a particular standpoint: what has he to say about women *only*?, we are asking a question which he did not ask. He was not concerned to work out the consequences for every section of society of the new life established by Christ. The consequences of the new life in Christ are for all creation and are already begun in Christ's resurrection by overcoming death, but they are not yet accomplished throughout creation.

That famous passage in Galatians: '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', is not so much therefore a piece of teaching *about* women, or slaves; it is the logical conclusion to be drawn from the implications of the new life in Christ as a relationship with God, initiated by Baptism; as opposed to the old relationship with God through the law. Membership of the covenant community in the old life was shown by the sign of circumcision. This was an exclusively male privilege. In Judaism women were definitely inferior to men, and they were not allowed to be taught the law. In Galatians Paul is saying that to inherit the promise one no longer *has to be* Jew, freeman and male, but it can be read as saying also that in Christ by faith these distinctions are literally wiped out. The old order of creation (the hierarchy, God, Man, Woman) is literally changed in the new order established through Christ.

Obviously distinctions of racial, social and sexual status still remained in the world. But they are no longer to inhibit our eligibility for 'putting on', or 'being in' Christ—that is—having a relationship with God. The fact that these distinctions are still a cause of suffering and strife is worth noting with some concern—the resurrection body, as witnessed by the Christian community is surely still developing. Our main point still is that Paul's object is not to teach *about* differences of racial, social and sexual status, but *about* Christ's work for all. Value judgements on inferior status are made by men not Christ. Indeed Christ has overturned the original order of creation because God has accepted humanity.

This being said we must remind ourselves constantly that Paul's letters were written to local churches in different areas of the Mediterranean, separated by hundreds of miles, and obviously very different in historical background and contemporary characteristics. Although we are aware that the letters are very important documents, for the study of the development of Christian ethical teaching, we think it is vital to remember that they were not written primarily as ethical treatises—they were written to preach Christ. In the case of 1 Corinthians the recipients had asked questions which were often moral problems. One of these questions, when answered by Paul raises one of the well-known issues that has clouded Paul's reputation; that of the relative

values of celibacy and marriage. Paul's argument admits that the fewer one's responsibilities the more time one is likely to have to devote to the affairs of the Lord, but if one is married when one is called one should not have scruples about the situation. It is my view that Paul in no way denigrates the position of women; within marriage she has the same freedom and the same responsibility as her husband. Paul's practical missionary experience and devotion to the true meaning of the new creation lead him to admit that there is no absolute way of deciding the relative merits of the two states of living and loving, they both have their advantages and their hazards. Dr Caird in his paper 'Paul and Women's Liberty' (*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Spring 1972) summarises the situation neatly: 'Thus the would-be Encratites of Corinth receive from Paul only limited support. He is prepared to make a case for celibacy either as a special vocation or as a prudential response to emergency conditions. But getting married is the normal course and they are not to allow high-minded people to bully them into thinking it might ever be wrong. The remarkable and important thing about this chapter is that from start to finish Paul treats husband and wife as equals. Whatever is said of the one is equally said of the other.'

This last apology is usually also offered for the so-called *haustafel* passages of Colossians and Ephesians. ('*Hauptafel*' is just commentators' jargon for those passages in which instructions are given on social behaviour.) We realise that there are still scholarly arguments as to the authenticity of both these letters. For simplicity's sake let us take the view that Colossians is definitely Paul's own and Ephesians is using Pauline material and *appears* in Ephesians Ch. V to be expanding on Col. 3. I think that this whole passage has to do with the new relationship of men and God through Christ, that is, people must review their relationships with each other in this light. The rules for harmonious living which immediately precede the thorny phrase 'wives be subject to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them' . . . these rules are the new way of living because of Christ's action. They are not an autonomous ethic, not a new set of commands parallel with the old law, but spring from putting on Christ, everyone is admonished to put on compassion and kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience. In Ephesians 5, the emphasis is on Christ rather than on the instructions to the married.

It is, then, my view that given a social and legal climate in which women had precious few rights, and given Paul's Jewish background wherein women had definitely *inferior* status, women have every reason to be grateful to Paul for not letting himself be dominated by the idea of a static order of creation. Genesis 2, rather than chapters 1 or 5 had always been the basis of Jewish ideas of the order of creation. In fairness it must be admitted that Paul does tend to swing from total rejection of the idea—as in Galatians—where Christ has completely altered the old order, to a most convoluted set of arguments to cope with accommodating the old order of creation in Corinthians 11, 2-16.

The haustafel passages ask no more of wives and husbands than they do of the whole community, everyone is told 'to be subject to one another'. If any value judgements on status are made they are made by the reader and not the writer.

In the end one must judge a man by what he does, by the way he behaves rather than what he says. On this score Paul definitely wins hands down. He did not have his tongue in his cheek when he admitted that some of his best friends were women. Evodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:3) were his helpers; Phoebe (Romans 16) the deacon from Cenchreae, is given a warm recommendation, because she has helped many including Paul himself. The couple Prisca and Aquila, had saved his life (Romans 16) and done a lot to help him in his work (1 Cor., 16, v. 19). Local churches met in the houses of women, who are mentioned by name, such as Nympha (Col. 3, v. 16). Lastly the long rigmarole, already referred to, in 1 Cor., 11, about women's head covering, would not have arisen if Paul had not expected women to participate in public prayer and prophecy in the churches.

No mention has, however, yet been made of the letters to Titus and Timothy—the 'Pastorals'. They form the bridge between the two sections of this exposé: why has the undeserved misogynistic reputation of Paul persisted? For two reasons: firstly, because these Pastoral letters have been taken as the real Paul, and secondly, because they have been very much used by early writers as a basis for teaching. The letters to Timothy and the one to Titus are considered nowadays to have been written by another later author. The attitude of this author appears to be very different from Paul's, in two major areas: firstly as regards the law which in 1 Timothy (1, v. 8-11) is extolled in a way that Paul would surely never countenance. (For Paul the law is good still but only because it shows us what is sinful.) And secondly in the references to the church and its body of teaching in, e.g. 1 Tim. 4.6 and 6.3. We have here evidence of a church organised under a monarchical episcopacy; apostolic tradition has given way to ecclesiastical tradition (2 Tim. 2.2, Tt. 1, 5-9 and 1 Tim. 6.20 and 2 Tim. 1, 12-14). We are in an area where the tone is much more legalistic, and where 'sound doctrine' recurs (1 Tim. 1, 10, 2 Tim. 4, 3, Tit. 1, 9 and 2, 1).

Where reference is made to women it is not in the realm of personal relationships, arising from the new relationship to God established through Christ. The tone is much more one of settling the general order of things in an established church. Instructions are given in an organising sense. Thus we have in 1 Tim. 2, 9-15 a whole paragraph about details of women's appearance, and her conduct in the community as a doer of good works that 'befit women who profess religion'. Chapter 5, 3-16 goes into great detail about widows and who is to look after whom and gives instructions about the enrolled order of widows which the Church supported. Similarly in the letter to Titus the writer tells the recipient to 'preach the behaviour which goes with healthy doctrine' (Tit. 1, 9 and 2, 1). Women are to behave as *though* they were religious. It is all a question of outward appearances. It is

always, of course, easier to organise external behaviour by command than to teach a relationship with God. Paul's dominant theme on the other hand is: this is what God has done in Christ, this is what you *are* because of what God has done in Christ: now go and be it in all your relationships. Whereas in the pastoral letters it is much more a case of: 'I put it to you as a duty to keep these rules impartially', e.g. 1 Tim., 5, 21.

It is important to understand the character of the Pastoral Epistles because they have been the main source of the simplistic rules which have dominated argument about women's active role in the community of the Church as the body of Christ. If there were no doubt about the authorship of the pastorals a case might be made for combining their teaching with the *haustafel* passages of the letters to Colossians and Ephesians, all based on Jewish views of the order of creation in Genesis 2, 21; rather than Genesis 1, 26-27 or Genesis 5, 2. But given the scholarly doubts as to the original authorship of Ephesians and even more of Timothy and Titus, one cannot any longer hold Paul personally responsible for the fact that quite a few passages in New Testament writings *are* negative in their attitude to women and imply value judgements about inferiority.

We must remember, however, that much of the commentary of the early Church fathers was based on the assumption that Timothy and Titus were in fact written by St Paul. It is not surprising that where there are clear negative rulings which fit in with readily acceptable social norms these will predominate over the more unusual counsel which might emanate from the letters of the genuine apostle. The rule-book aspect of the pastorals became a ready-made source of teaching, and from Origen onwards the first letter to Timothy was highly influential. St Thomas Aquinas thought highly of the pastoral epistles, and gave them their distinctive adjective. He said of them: 'This letter is, as it were, a pastoral directive, which the Apostle handed down to Timothy, giving instructions about all things which have to do with the rule of bishops. For in the first letter he instructs him about the administration of the Church but in the second he deals with pastoral concern of that degree which accepts martyrdom in the care of the flock'.

The early fathers relied heavily on a simplistic interpretation of St Paul's analogy of the union of Christ and the Church and that of man and wife in Ephesians ch. 5. Seeing not the closeness of the relationship between Christ and his people, but only the obvious disparity of Christ and sinful man. It was then but a short step to accepting the total inferiority of woman to man. The roots of the social, legal and educational framework stretch back to Judaism where women, and all that is connected with them, were at best inferior and at worst a source of scandal. The further symbolism of Adam and the new Adam, the connection between Eve and the sin of mankind led to a smooth transition to women being the source of sin and the transmitter of sin. (Paul himself when discussing the theme of the sinfulness of man in

Romans never makes such a simple deduction, but instead has 'the whole creation (has been) groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies'. As celibacy becomes more honoured so women became the source of dishonour. No one seems to have objected when woman was called the 'door of Hell' by Tertullian or, as Clement of Alexandria put it: 'every woman ought to be covered in shame at the thought that she is a woman'. One needn't go on. Here are the real male chauvinists, basing their accusations on an oversimplified interpretation of non-pauline material.

So then where are we now? Having cleared Paul's reputation is there anything more positive one can say? As I said earlier Paul's main task was that of preaching the good news of what Christ had done for mankind. Following directly from this is the theme of the new Christian community as the body of Christ. As John Robinson in his book *The Body* shows, the theology of the body of Christ is Paul's unique contribution to the life of the Church. Paul's guiding principle in his practical advice to the communities to which he wrote is: 'does this build up the body of Christ'. That which does not build up but which fragments or destroys its unity is therefore wrong, and a whole range of man's activities comes in for his condemnation. Our conclusions therefore would lead us to no special pleading for a woman's place in the Church, no carving up of areas of special responsibility. Everyone who is in Christ through Baptism is part of his resurrection body 'Christ is all and in all' (Col. 3, 11). 'All are baptised in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3, 28).