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THE QUESTION OF THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

IN THE LIGHT OF SOME N.T. TEXTS

by

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The question of the ordination of women, which is now being discussed in various churches of the world, makes it necessary for us to face up to our understanding of Holy Scripture. It is the fact that both "for" and "against" are based on the Bible, which makes urgent a critical examination of the basic conception of the binding nature of particular statements in the biblical books, and of the Bible as a whole. This urgency is all the more pressing, in that the particular N.T. texts, which are frequently quoted (as e.g. 1 Cor. 11, 3ff, 14, 33 ff; Gal. 3, 28, 1 Tim. 2, 11-15) are not uniform, and can only be harmonized with difficulty. The differences, which are seen today within the "Ecumene" of the churches, are already to be found in nuce in the N.T. Can criteria be found -- (or how can they be found) for the comparative evaluation of the two sides? What is prevailing in this varied evaluation of the texts, which is a part of the situation (the supporters, for example take their stand exclusively on Gal. 3, 28, and their opponents on 1 Tim. 2, 11-15)? A deliberated theological understanding of scripture as a whole, which is similarly applied to all other areas of church life? Or, in this particular field, which concerns man in his inmost being is it "non-theological factors?" In what follows, the attempt is made to bring to bear some hermeneutic considerations.

In the understanding of these texts, two extremes must, in any case, be avoided. They must not be taken out of their original contexts, and treated as absolute norms of everlasting validity (the very fact of their disagreement excludes this). But they must also not simply be rejected as conditioned by and applying to their own age alone (this is contradicted by respect for Holy Scripture as a whole). If these ways are both excluded, what possibilities remain?

According to the new trend in theological research, even biblical texts of both Old and New Testaments are to be read as historical texts, i.e. they can only be heard and understood as they are only binding, when they are seen in relation to a particular situation. In the Bible, God never speaks into a vacuum; He speaks through men to men. So He speaks through Paul to the men and women of the community in Corinth, a community, living in a particular historical situation. When we, as men of our day, read these texts, we will of course ask ourselves, if we have the same needs and queries. It is clear that we both meet amazing coincidences, and also have to realize that our questions and



presuppositions are basically different from those of the N.T. This last is especially true of churches with long traditions and for countries with a social order, which is essentially conditioned by the influence of the Gospel, or of the Christian church (Western Christendom, the so-called post-Christian world). Here the biblical witness is no longer - as at the time of the first communities - brand new, in a world which is untouched by the gospel; but is confronted by men and relationships, which already live under the sign of Jesus Christ, who have developed under the influence of the Gospel. It will be essential to bear this in mind during any discussion of the texts, particularly in the matter of the position of women, for it can be shown that the impetus towards the equality of women came from the Gospel, something which is repeated in all the missionary churches (founding of Girls' Schools by missions, and the beginnings of "emancipation"). The fact that arguments for a conservative and obstructive attitude on the part of the churches are being drawn today from the same Bible, must make us think anew - i.e. it faces us inexorably with the question of our understanding of these texts, and of the validity of their message for us, who live in a changed world, indeed in a world which has been changed by them! Is there one pure, timeless message to be drawn from this situation, some kind of standing doctrine on the service of women in the Church, or at least a basic minimum, valid for all time? Something like this seems presupposed in the following sentences by Charlotte von Kirschbaum (Der Dienst der Frau in der Wortverkündigung, Evang. Verlag Zollikon/Zürich 1951 p. 21), which in general comes very close to what is said here: "The Apostolic exhortations and injunctions are not legal prescriptions, but living finger-posts, pointing in a definite direction, marking out a particular area, within which we have to hear that instruction today. They have something precise to say to us today. We are not undermining the timelessly valid presupposition of the Pauline exhortation, that woman within the order which conditions the relationship of man and woman, is in a subordinate position

It seems doubtful to me whether we really can and should hear that instruction, and whether the texts really say "something precise" (i.e. with a particular content) to us to-day. Is it possible - how is it possible? - to subtract what is conditioned by its age, and find a timelessly valid message? Should we not start from quite a different place? Paul, in his exhortations and injunctions to the Corinthians, for example, appeals to the fact that both he and they are members of the Body of Christ (see the introduction to the Letter: both his apostolic office and their "office" as Christians mean membership of the body of Christ, even if the office of an Apostle has a particular and unique position). That he and they are rooted in Christ is the ground and background of all he has to say. So also is his extreme interest in the building-up of this body. Even where he speaks of husband and wife, or of marriage and celibacy, he is not primarily, but only secondarily, interested in these. The important thing is that they all, men and women, married and unmarried, are members of the body of Christ, children of God and heirs of the promise, and that they ought now to live in accordance with this calling. At this point we can certainly join in the conversation. Here we are contemporary with the Apostle, for this presupposition is also valid for us. We likewise speak of the ordination of women i.e. of her position in the Christian Church from this point of view. For us, as well as for the Apostle, the important thing is the building-up of this Body, so that it can properly fulfil its mission to the world. This mission is bound for all time to



the mission of Jesus Christ Himself, and that means that in the question we are discussing christological and ecclesiological criteria must be decisive, and not our understanding of the psychology and task of women, although this understanding, which comes from the historical situation, will always be in the conversation.

Here again is a point where the NT texts can give us standards and direction. We can learn from them, how temporary circumstances are presupposed in the world, are taken up, and then taken into the Christ-event, into the proclamation of the gospel and the teaching and admonition of the community. This goes so far that functions and "callings" of the then world - or at least their names - were taken over from the world into the community. This can be shown in the case of the words episkopos and diakonos (see Kittel ThWbNT), though of course this says nothing about the change in their content through the new relationship to Christ and the integration into His body. In any case this procedure presupposes considerable freedom and ease with regard to the so-called world - that freedom to which Christ frees those who belong to Him.

A further example of this procedure is given by the so-called "Haustafeln" (e.g. Eph. 5, 21 ff). Here it is quite clear that the contemporary situation of the large family is presupposed and taken over. It is based on a clear super-ordination of husband over wife, which is of course, like the whole social order of the day, patriarchal. Similarly, slavery as a social institution is not shaken or questioned. Neither Jesus nor His Apostles appeared as social reformers. Nevertheless, that does not mean that these conditions are not to be transformed from within precisely because they are consciously related to Christ. The most impressive and also most extreme example of this is probably 1 Peter 2, 18-25, where slaves are admonished to be subordinate, even to be subordinate to "froward" masters, i.e. to accept the given social order even in individually questionable circumstances which can be criticised. This attitude is given an interesting basis; in doing this they are following the example of the suffering Christ. As He took suffering upon Himself, so now they are to take upon themselves and bear their special suffering, which is caused by the injustice and cruelty of their masters. They are the more able to do this, since Christ was not only an example, but also suffered for them; they can now go this way together with Him as victor over suffering and death, with Him as risen and ascended Lord, and in the power of His death and resurrection. Through this relationship however the particular situational suffering of the slaves is put into quite new perspectives. The second part of the verses quoted shows how paramount these are. Here we are suddenly confronted with a piece of proclamation of Christ. What He suffered and achieved through this suffering is so great, that it breaks through the given situation and overflows. The human, historical vessel is too small, to contain this message. However - or, perhaps, therefore? - it took several centuries until there happened within history and under the influence of quite different spiritual currents what was basically already hidden in the proclamation of Christ: the emancipation of the slaves.

From this point of view, however it would now be foolish to pass on the situation itself as something normative. Neither unjust suffering under "froward" masters, nor slavery as such can be passed on as comparent facts of the proclamation of Christ. The proclamation itself however remains binding, and includes the obligation to set all the situations of our life, without



exception, in conscious relation with Christ and not in a purely individual relation, - for He is not only nor even primarily the personal saviour of each individual believer - but in a relationship which is part of the life within the body of Christ in a relationship to Him as Lord of history. The situations change and with them the possibilities of relationship with Christ. What remains binding is what He Himself has done and brought and thus the ordering of the life of His body.

What is extremely clear in this passage of Scripture which has nothing to do with our theme, is just as valid from the other "Haustafeln" and for what they have to say about husband and wife. Here too the existing patriarchal relationships are put into the new ordering of life in the body of Christ and thus changed from within. So in the famous passage Eph. 5, 21 ff the superordination of husband over wife, which was then a matter of course, is certainly presupposed and taken over. It is however, given a new meaning and changed by being related to the relationship between Jesus Christ and His community. Only from this point of view it is understandable that the whole section can be placed under the title: "Be ye subject one to another in the fear of Christ", whereby the whole social order, which then prevailed and which is entirely accepted in the following verses is radically called in question from within. (This is convincingly shown by Else Kähler in her book: Die Frau in den paulinischen Briefen", Gotthelf Verlag Zürich 1960, p. 88 ff). The husband, who must measure and practise love towards his wife according to the love of Jesus Christ to His church, is freed by this love from the desire for mastery, and the compulsion to regard his wife as an object. The wife, who must measure and practise her attitude to her super-ordinate husband according to the attitude of the church to Christ, is thus free from bondage, and liberated for a freely-given response to her husband, and at the same time to Him who stands behind him: Christ. A confrontation is sketched in the relationship between them both, which relativizes and disarms the patriarchal structure of society from within. What has to be proclaimed however is not this "Hierarchy" of man and woman, as though it were given for all time, but God's action in Jesus Christ, which touches upon various forms of marriage and the man-woman relationship at different times and establishes a relationship with them. So in the present age, when the tendency in many cultures both eastern and western is towards partnership of husband and wife, and perhaps even eventually towards complete levelling of the relationship, we must ask anew, where the relationship between Christ and His church shines out. Perhaps, in our "pluralist society" with its multiplicity of roles for man and woman we should begin with the presentation of the body of Christ as a community in which the many varied gifts of the individual member delimit and fulfil each other in manifold and ever changing super- and sub-ordination. It is from here that we must seek today forms for marriage and the family, and also for the building up of the church, the ecclesia.

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro



Some Pauline texts

We turn now from these premises to our proper theme - the confrontation with some texts which are always quoted in connection with the ordination of women. What has to be kept in view with all of them is that they are answering specific questions of the day (it will also be necessary to present these questions as clearly as possible). We can therefore not expect to get from them any doctrine of woman.

1 Cor. 11. 2 ff

In this passage Paul presupposes that women pray and prophecy in the church. It should especially be noted that in this text, where Paul emphasizes the inequality of man and woman, this fact is no way doubted, or questioned. He lets it stand, and, as in other contexts (cp. 1 Cor. 7) addresses man and woman together, and separately. They are both doing the same thing, - both praying and prophesying - but they ought to do it in different ways, because different customs are proper to man and woman. Clearly, the women in Corinth have broken this custom. Under the overwhelming influence of the Spirit, trusting in the complete renewal of their life through Christ, they have crossed a boundary and behaved as is proper for men. This is the occasion, perhaps rather trivial in our eyes, which brings the Apostle into action. In his arguments we feel how, wherever the question of man and woman is raised, we are touched in our inmost being (that this is so today, is proved by our present discussion). He is clearly looking for arguments, in order to show convincingly why the custom must be retained.

The arguments which were available to him in his day, come from quite different sources: from the apparent evidence of the natural order (by nature woman has long hair, therefore ... v. 14) which is raised to the level of a norm. From the social background of the custom (v. 10 for the sake of the angels woman should wear a head-dress), from the creation story (especially from the second account v. 8 and 9, but perhaps also from the first see v. 7b). Moreover, he expounds a basis of judgment - Beurteilungsgrundsatz (Wendland) the so-called "haddès" which has been used a great deal as an argument against the full participation of women in church-work. A closer look shows that it has nothing to do with a ladder. This can be seen best if the affirmations of the text are represented in the order in which they occur:--

- Christ the head of the man,
- the man the head of the woman,
- God the head of Christ.



Karl Barth (KD III 2 p. 374 f) and Ch. von Kirschbaum (Die wirkliche Frau p. 42) have shown conclusively that the statement on man and woman is taken in a christological "parenthesis". It is therefore no ladder; but the human man-woman relationship, by being set in the "heils-geschichtliche" God-Christ relationship is not set firm but opened up. An unchangeable order of being is not established, but an abiding, social fact (which undoubtedly is rooted in the differentiation of man and woman in creation) is put in a new light.

In Paul's day the superior position of the man was taken for granted. This however is now relativized by the parenthesis which is indicated above, for man too is subjected to a higher power; and apart from that the God-Christ relationship shows how differently this sub-ordination is to be understood within the Christian church, as compared with the patriarchal social order (cp. the op. cit. of Else Kähler, and especially her remarks on the idea of subordination - which is found implicitly though not explicitly in this passage - and which appears in 1 Cor. 15, for example in relation to Christ).

Verses 11 and 12 show the same attitude as this "parenthesis". They are found in the middle of Paul's argument for the establishing of a custom to ensure - in modern terms - the differentiation of men and women; and yet everything is changed as soon as what is said is set in the direct context of the new reality, which is given through Christ. The completely reciprocal nature of the man-woman relationship shines out "in the Lord". Because this reality embraces everything, Paul is not disturbed by the really strange fact that in Corinth women pray and prophesy just as men do. Even in this respect the man is not without the woman and the woman not without the man "in the Lord". The confusing argumentation of the text, which in detail is difficult or even completely impossible to understand, shows that Paul is not able to maintain this insight consistently.

If we now ask ourselves, with all caution, what this text yields for our question, we have to say: not very much directly, because there is as little reason to draw a direct line from the charismatic speech of the men to the present day ministry as to do this for the women. But one thing we can learn from Paul's argument: that in Christ men and women are associated with each other in a new way; and it can be said that in Him God's intentions for man are made plain, if we take seriously the idea that Christ is the true man, the real image of God (2 Cor. 4,4, Col. 1,15). This association and "equalization" (for in this text both men and women are doing the same thing!) breaks upon the custom of the day, which means that because it must take an external form, it has to take account of that custom and come to terms with it. This custom reflects something of the natural created differentiation of the sexes, but Paul's argument shows that everything here is fluid. He draws his weapons from various armouries, just as we today have recourse to psychology and sociology. Everything is changing. We would no longer seriously start with the same presuppositions as Paul. Covering of the head is no problem for us, but the forms and the cultures which confront us to day. What must be preserved? What given up? All these things are confronted with the new reality "in the Lord". This new reality is binding; however it does not exist in a vacuum, but always in confrontation with changing forms, which it does not simply overpower, but takes over and transforms from within.



1 Cor. 14, 34

This is the text which is most often quoted in the question which concerns us, and which apparently adopts the most negative attitude. It is interesting, we note in passing, that the text in question is usually quoted incorrectly. Even in Protestant books one is always coming across the translation of the Latin text: "Mulier taceat in ecclesia", "Let woman keep silence in church", while the Greek text unequivocally says "Let your women (i.e. your wives) keep silence in church", which must be understood in a much less apodictic way than the rendering of the Latin Bible. This correction is not invalidated by Paul's reference in verse 33 b to "all the churches". In the context of the whole passage (see v. 26 - 33) the real issue is the ordering of worship, which must be conceived as very flexible. It does not help the building up of the Church, if two people talk at once, anymore than if too many speak one after another. There must be order, in which each may hear the other "that all may learn and all may be exhorted". The question of "all" is always important in the Church. The body of Christ is neither whole nor capable of action if one member oppresses another (see ch. 12). The command that the women should keep silence must be seen in this context. It must have been a question of undisciplined speaking on their part, speaking which disturbed the balance of the service. Judging by verse 35, it was a question of interruptions. Women who did not understand what was being said, interrupted the service with cries and questions in no kind of order, and it may be that then already this kind of spontaneous reaction was regarded as an especial danger for women. There must be no such disturbance of worship. Wives must ask their husbands at home, because it is not right that all should have to put up with their spontaneity. So the women are told that they must keep order, indeed be subject to order (v. 34). This verse does not deal with the men at all, and the verb to be 'subject' (hypotassesthai) is used once in a similar sense in the same chapter: the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets i.e. to their conscious ordering in the fellowship. This suggests very strongly that with regard to women, hypotassesthai (to be subject) also refers here to their fitting into the community, and not to their place within marriage.

Paul again looks outwards for a basis for his attitude. He refers to "the law" (v. 34 c). It is difficult to tell what he means by this law. Paul generally means the whole Old Testament. But what does that mean in this context? Reference is usually made to Genesis 3, 16. But is that what is meant? And if so, what weight does it have? Can it be said, perhaps, that wherever it is a question of woman, reference is made to certain honourable, religious traditions, to custom? (cp. 1 Cor. 11). In this sense, Paul is referring more or less vaguely to "the law". It is something known to his readers, something immediately intelligible to them. In the human uncertainty vis-à-vis the new thing which has come into their lives in Christ and which is shaking the fixed ordering of the man-woman relationship, even Paul clutches at what can give certainty, and perhaps he must do this. (The history of missionary work in our day could provide many parallels!) Nevertheless the "law" remains on the edge; everything is still held in a living equilibrium and his main concern in this chapter is always the question of order in public worship (cp. 39 f). It is only from this starting point - only from the Christian Church - that he is thinking about men and women, which means that this relationship is never a primary question.



It is always included in the question about the Church.

If we also ask of this text, results for our question about the ordination of women, perhaps we may go a little further than we could with the previous text, and say: in any case there is no refusal. Anyone who wishes to deduce from these verses a permanent prohibition on women speaking and teaching during worship (or in public at all), must seriously ask himself, if he has got it from this text with a good conscience, and with the same criteria that he would use for other passages of scripture, or whether he has not unavowedly transposed what is said in 1 Tim. 2,15 into this verse. But if one is to take the methods of recent exegesis seriously, one must realize that it is necessary to listen primarily to what is said in each individual text by each individual author. We will come to the specific problem of the Pastoral Epistles later. But if we stay with 1 Cor. 14 and Paul, we can scarcely find a general prohibition on speaking, and even less a general rejection of the full cooperation of women in the Church. What we do find is the reminder, that the edification of the Church and the disciplined ordering of worship are of primary importance even in this field of concern. Men and women each have their contribution to make, and one thing that has to be taken seriously into account with any regulations, is that our services are generally essentially different from those in Corinth. Charlotte von Kirschbaum says very pertinently: "And today? Today the whole congregation, men and women, keep silence, and only a few hymns in "liturgical" churches and perhaps some versicles and responses before and after the sermon, interrupt the silence of the congregation. One man speaks, Sunday after Sunday, - and also on a week-day evening - and proclaims to the congregation the word of God. This man has studied theology and passed his exams, he has shown himself to be competent during his "Vikariat", and he is now called and installed by the Church for this service. He performs it during services of worship in great solitude vis-à-vis his congregation which remains, at least outwardly, in a state of almost complete passivity. The fullness of voices is silenced, the activity of the Holy Spirit is at best confined to this one voice Can silence still be a form of witness among the silent? Does the congregation need further quenching of its super-abundant enthusiasm, or is it much more necessary to remind it that all members are called to service in the Church? In this situation the question arises, whether the witness of woman in the worship of the congregation today should not be a worship of speech, as opposed to the witness of silence in the church at Corinth? Whether woman today could not be called to cooperate in the service of the proclamation of the word?" (Der Dienst der Frau in der Wortverkündigung, p. 26 f.).

Galatians 3, 28

As the last text from the epistles which are certainly Pauline, Gal. 3, 28 must at least be touched upon. In what context does Paul come to speak here of man and woman? The epistle to the Galatians is addressed to a church which is gripped by faith in Christ, the members of which are baptised, but in danger of being persuaded (by false teaching) to fall back into old ways. Paul, on the contrary, reminds them of what they are in Christ; and he uses the most varied expressions, to characterize this new reality: they are in the spirit, not in the flesh (3,3), they are the children of God, not slaves (3, 26 and 4, 3.7); adults who no longer need a disciplinarian, and who are no longer under guardians and stewards (4,2), redeemed slaves (4,5). The new



status, the new community is characterized by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of turning to the Father (4,6) and who also strengthens this new position by helping and encouraging man really to turn to God as Father.

One thing about this new life in the Christian Church is that old distinctions are no longer relevant. Three are named: -

- the different positions of Jew and Gentile in the history of salvation,
- the social distinction between slave and free,
- the distinction between the sexes.

All three occur in the man's thanksgiving (which has come down to us in varied forms from Persians, Greeks and Jews and which is still to be found in the Jewish prayer book), that he is neither unbeliever, slave nor woman (for the material see THWb NT I 776 f). Before we ask ourselves what it really means, that these distinctions are irrelevant in the Church of Christ, let us look at what it was from which Christ set them free and redeemed them and to which they had been subject. Paul makes it quite clear, that he understands the "law" as this enslaving power (3, 23, 4,5) but strangely enough he treats Jews and Gentiles in the same way: both have the same past, for both stand under the enslaving power of law, both were living in the same prison; the expressions "in bondage under the elements of the world" and "under the law" are juxtaposed and interchangeable in ch. 4, v. 3 and 5. "The elements of the world" include cosmic powers, especially the constellations (4,10), which are raised (4,8) by the faith of those who fall victim to them, to power which really and essentially they do not have. But before Christ they did have this power, and, however foolish it seems after Christ: they are a standing temptation for His Church - just like the O.T. law, e.g. the demand for circumcision - to fall back into a pre-Christian situation. Is it going too far to say, with regard to the pairs of opposites of 3,28 and the meaning of the thanksgiving quoted above: in this pre-Christian situation, in which the Jewish law and the pagan elements again come to power, the Jew is confirmed in his superiority as Jew, the freeman as freeman, and man as man? But under the rule of Christ they are bound together with those under them into one body, for Christ has overcome the law and the power of nature.

If we now ask what this in fact means, the N.T. gives very instructive examples for the first two groups. Jewish Christians and gentile Christians together form the body of Christ, the Church, but the differences between them are not simply evened out. In his missionary work Paul always goes first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, and in the image of the olive tree which he uses in Romans 11 to describe the Church, Israel is the root, and the Gentile Christians are the twigs that are grafted in. Nevertheless it is only one tree. So far as slave and free is concerned the epistle to Philemon is the most beautiful evidence. Here too the distinction is not merely evened out. - Paul sends Onesimus back to his master Philemon, no longer as a slave, but as one who is "more than a slave", as a "beloved brother" (v. 16). The end of this verse shows that this new attitude certainly has not only spiritual consequences but also real, earthly ones: it is to be so "in the flesh as well as in the Lord". This brotherhood must be visible not only when master and slave pray together in worship, but in their daily life together - in contrast to much that has been written and experienced on this subject in Christendom, and which according to Paul should certainly be described as falling back under the power of the elements of the world.



What does this mean with regard to the third pair, man and woman? Certainly the differences here too are not evened out (cp. what was said about 1 Cor. 11). But it can also certainly be said that here too the new category of "sister" comes into play (cp. Phil. 4, 2 and 3, where Paul speaks in the same way of men and women as those who "have contended with him for the Gospel", cp. also Romans 16, 1,3). The new reality of life in the Church takes woman seriously as sister, just as it does man as brother. (It is interesting that there is no reference to maternity or motherliness. We shall come back to this). The sister remains of course a sister and does not become a brother, or, to express this in a less banal way, sisterhood will always be something other than brotherhood, but brother and sister are on the same plane, and they come from the same parents! -- which in the case of the Christian Church means that they stand in the same relationship to God. But must this also not have consequences for their actual position in the Church, and also for their position in the world? Church history shows that wherever the Gospel is preached anew, woman is freed from hundred -- or thousand year -- old chains (see the beginning of this article), that for example -- because they were suddenly taken seriously as sisters, as fellow human beings, as persons of infinite worth to God, they were given schooling and thus came level with man in a new way. Galatians 3, 28 is the place in the N.T. where this new relationship of man and woman is most clearly formulated and it should be pointed out that this new relationship (whether it be called common humanity or partnership or common pardon or equal value) has been an essential element in the history of the west, as it has been and still is among the peoples that have been reached by Christian missions. It is all the more difficult to understand that today, especially within the Christian Churches the question of cooperation of man and woman on an equal level is so difficult, and that in the inner circle -- in the formation of the orders (or better ministries) which serve edification of the Church -- there is often little to be seen of true brother -- and sisterhood of man and woman. It should be clear that the ordination of women to the pastoral or priestly office, which is only available to men and which is often the only ministry to remain out of the fullness of N.T. gifts and services, is not the only solution. But where churches refuse to think consistently about the given relationship of men and women in the Christian Church, and in some way or the other to make it real, then they will have to be questioned from "outside", by the so-called world, about the basis of this attitude, and it might well be God Himself who is putting the question.

1 Timothy 2, 8-15

The passages which we have considered so far stood in the epistles which are considered by almost all scholars to be genuinely "Pauline". That is not necessarily a judgment on their worth and significance for us. Still, the part of greater proximity to the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is significant when one is considering NT texts as historical texts (see supra). "Since the revelation of God really is a revelation in history, the first witness of this revelation is always closer (at least in time) than what has been derived later (W. Marxsen, Der Frühkatholizismus im N.T., Neukirchener Verlag 1958, p. 19). With the pastoral epistles we are clearly, in a different age. The Church is no longer expecting the immediate breaking in of the Parousia, she is establishing herself in this world in evident controversy with those who threaten her; with the gnostic heretics. The multiplicity of gifts has not yet



been replaced, but it is delimited by the establishing of specific "orders", though these also are certainly not yet rigidly fixed and unequivocally to be recognized by us in the range of their work. For instance, it is not evident whether elders and bishops are the same or two different groups (see E. Schweizer loc. cit. note 334 thinks that v. 11 is more easily applied to female diakonoi (deacons) than to the wives of the deacons) and whether widows, who certainly form a clearly recognisable group, had other tasks than that of intercession (1 Tim. 5,3 ff). What is also not clear at all is the question of ordination - only with regard to Timothy and Titus themselves is there mention of the laying-on of hands, and that not in connection with the orders which they pass on (Schweizer, loc. cit. 6 h).

It is possible that in these churches all men had "freedom of the word for prayer in services and perhaps also for teaching" (Schweizer loc. cit. 6 i), which is also essentially different from a large part of our present day church life. One thing that is certain is that the Church is trying to make herself safe against the attacks of gnosticism by emphasizing the apostolic tradition and even the handing down of the law (1 Tim. 1).

"Do not these orders acquire in the course of this development an importance which they did not have originally? To begin with they were a self-evident datum, to which scarcely any thought was given; and now suddenly they have to serve as defensive walls against threatening dangers. Thus they change from being a possibility, supported by all sorts of practical considerations, to a necessity, without which the Church can no longer be the true Church. But does not this dislocate everything? If this happens, is the thing which makes the Church the Church, still visible in her order"....." Is salvation not seen onesidedly in the repetition of the old message, without the possibility of translation and thus of risk, but also of opportunity to experience the living spirit of God? This cannot be answered with a simple "Yes". The prophetic order which first led to the ordination of Timothy is too important, the really, if unconsciously achieved translation into the new situation is too evident. But we have reached an extreme point within the NT. Thus onesided emphasis was necessary in the struggle against gnosticism. But it is clear that there are other dangers, and that from the NT point of view, development is taking a wrong course, if the other side, the witness of the living Lord and of the freedom of the spirit, may not also take a clear form (E. Schweizer loc. cit. p. 78).

If we go back from here to the question of women, we must first establish the fact that nowhere in the N.T. does the family come into view so clearly as in the Pastoral Epistles. Marriage and the children of the bishops and deacons (1 Tim. 5, 6,10) interest the writer and the Church, and we get an insight into the "home" of the period, as nowhere in the pauline letters. Where the eschatological voice is weaker, the family is heard more clearly. Of course "eschatological" is not the same as "imminent expectation", it should also be understood as the urgency, which comes from the presence of the living Lord and the effectiveness of His body the Church, which is already living in the new aeon. Is it just chance, that the expressions "in Christ", "in the Lord" do not occur a single time, expressions which in Paul (as also in Eph. and Col.) describe the new reality of life, in which what God has done in the cross and resurrection of Christ, becomes valid for the Church? We cannot avoid the



suspicion that the family as the closest and most important order of this world is becoming more important at the cost of the order of life in the new aeon. It goes without saying that this must have consequences for the position of woman, because she is essentially bound to the family in all cultures by her role as mother.

It is therefore not surprising that something is said in 1 Tim. 2, 8 ff, which Paul, as we think, did not say: woman is strictly forbidden to speak in church meetings either to teach or to ask questions. She is referred unequivocally to her "proper" place, the home and motherhood, and that is based on a reference to the creation story (only Genesis 2!) and the fall. She who comes after in creation, is now first in sin. Else Kähler shows conclusively (Die Frau in den paulinischen Briefen, p. 156 ff) that this use does not do justice to the witness of the O.T. in Gen. 2 and 3. We can no longer read the O.T. in this way, and so these conclusions are not final for us. Unfortunately they have been accepted in a frightening way - cp. many sayings of Luther about women and marriage! She is saddled with this, and the result is that she remains confined to her "natural" place. The new order "in Christ", which shines out in all pauline texts (even if it is not realised; even if it is in controversy and intermixture with current and certainly in respecting the biological data cp. Paul's sober appreciation of marriage!) is replaced by what looks just like a bourgeois morality (cp. the "clothing laws" of verses 9 f) in which the places for men and women are fixed for ever. Behind the allusions of these texts arises for the present-day reader the whole history of "Christian" morality through the ages, for strangely enough it is precisely these allusions which have had so great an effect in the teaching and admonition of the Christian churches. It is in this context that the reference to motherhood follows, and in an alienating way. "She" (woman) shall be saved through child-bearing". It is clear that the writer himself was not too certain about what he was saying for he adds immediately "if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety". In the first part of the sentence a verb, which in all parallels in the pastoral epistles is only used in connection with God's redemptive work in Christ, is too harshly juxtaposed with the adverbial qualification "through childbearing". Even if we do not foist upon the writer an understanding and definition of childbearing as the means of redemption, setting it, as it were, in the place of faith (for that would contradict what is said elsewhere in the epistle), the juxtaposition is still striking, and we must agree with E. Kähler when she says, "Here we are faced with a powerful natural theology" (loc. cit. p. 158). It can be understood from the situation of the time, that such formulations could arise.

"If we go right back into the situation of the Pastorals (struggle with gnosticism and the anti-creational asceticism of the heretics - Jeremias), if we try to understand with the writer, that woman could be reduced (may be also in a sexual sense - so Dibelius), then according to the writer "salvation" must also occur on the same plane, that is to say through childbearing. That is the special situation of the pastoral epistles, and it must be understood as a polemical situation, with polemical, i.e., occasional words. Such expressions become difficult for later readers, such as ourselves today. Anyone who still regards v. 15 as the "way of salvation" for woman, burdens her with an "original guilt", which cannot be justified and therefore cannot be borne, and forgets the great company of the unmarried (for how can they be less guilty? The writer can scarcely have been thinking about unmarried women at all). How



should these achieve their "salvation?" We see that it is quite impossible to apply this regulative part of the pastoral epistles just as it is. In any case it requires "translation", "sensible application", and now not partially but wholly. The question arises at this point in the pastoral epistles, as to whether the words are to be read "evangelically" or "legally". To read them evangelically means that they are to be understood as neither unimportant, nor out-dated, but also as not intended to be taken word for word. We have to ask what the words meant in their situation, and also - in the light of the whole revelation of Christ - what their significance is today" (E. Kähler, loc. cit. p. 158 ff).

Before we try to ask in this way, what this text has to say in our situation today and to our special question, may we be allowed to say something which is transcending the purely exegetical findings? It seems important to us and worth further consideration and investigation, that this is the only place in all the N.T. epistles where physical motherhood is emphasised. (The only verbal parallel is 1 Tim. 5, 14, referring to young widows, who are to marry and have children. Cp. the Pauline (1 Cor. 7) evaluation of celibacy precisely for young men and women!) Of course, this is everywhere presupposed, but that is just it: presupposed but not demanded. That is a great difference. In contrast to Paul a part of the natural data - doubtless an important part - is raised in the pastoral epistles to a norm, possessing an unshaken, unrelativised validity even in the sphere of salvation. We see then how the "elements of the world" (cp. supra on Gal. 3, 28) creep into the sphere of the Church. Is it merely chance that this goes exactly parallel to the establishing of "order"? Or are both not closely related? Do not both come from the same need for security? Where the body of Christ is formed in the multiplicity of services and gifts which of course are always incomplete and broken through human sin and human failure (cp. the warnings in the NT epistles) - the need arises for rigid leadership, the establishment of command, the delimitation and clarification of power. So in most churches the multiplicity of gifts and services is de iure or de facto smelted down into a few orders or into only one. And, parallel to that: wherever the man-woman relationship in a fixed order of family and kinship (which of course is based always and everywhere on unchanging biological facts, and which in some sense gives order to these facts) is disturbed by their common membership of the body of Christ, uncertainty arises, as soon as the charismatic mutuality of this body falls apart or solidifies. At the moment when one begins to look for security, woman is referred back to the place where she always was and where she always will be - motherhood. Here she is secure and protected - protected from the encroachments of enthusiasm (which certainly occurred in the early days of Christianity and not only to women!) But she is also cut off from direct responsibility for the building up of the Church. Perhaps a further step in this direction is the elevation and over-evaluation of the maternal - either in certain forms of mariology, or in the massive joy in family life of many protestant churches. In any case it is worth considering seriously that the establishment of orders and the fixing of woman in the realms of home and maternity occur together in the N.T. Much, that should also be investigated psychologically, plays a part here. Perhaps the condition, which persists up to the present day, that women, if they are granted access to "order", must be unmarried, comes in this sphere, at least if it is a question of a fundamental condition. The fact that the full exercise of an office in the Church can no longer be combined practically with the task of a mother of several



children, is something quite different. A woman minister who marries and has children shares this complex of problems with all the other women of our day who before marriage had a differentiated profession in which they found fulfillment. That is basically different from forbidding a married woman as such (- and then certainly with regard to her biological function) to continue in the work which she has mastered. Perhaps the fundamental attitude which is found in 1 Tim. 2,15 is still active here.

If at this point we ask what 1 Tim. 2, 15 contributes to our problem, we have to say that here we find, in a text which stands within the canon, an explicit prohibition on teaching by women, which cannot be explained away. We can, and must, reject the writers' argument, as stated above, and will therefore come to different conclusions. But, if we do this, is his concern removed or dealt with? In spite of everything this seems to us to be highly questionable.

In order to reach a conclusion here we have to be clear about the position of the pastoral epistles in the canon. Everything we have said here about particular NT texts came under the explicit presupposition, that were all to be understood as historical texts. Looking back we can now say, that we are experiencing a piece of church history within the NT canon. If a certain "suspended equilibrium" is to be found in Paul - who was very close to the Christ-event - with regard to the Church and to men and women (cp. similarly E. Kähler loc. cit. p. 51 and p. 87), then this equilibrium is absent from the pastoral epistles. May we go so far as to say, that a different situation demanded this answer? Here the particular standpoint of the critic will play a very decisive part. Personally I would underline all the critical questions of E. Schweizer which are quoted above, and sharpen them up with regards to the question of women. But we still have to accept the part that these letters have found a place within the canon. At the extreme other end stand the Johannine churches, with their emphasis on the spiritual gifts of all members and the absence of titles of office. Unfortunately nothing is said here about the man-woman question. It would be interesting to have something, and to use it to test the validity of what is maintained above.

What remains then from this extreme position within the canon? The consequence that we cannot just take one stratum of sayings and use them as the basis of the exegesis of the other. Paul certainly seems to us to be of especial significance, but even in his writings not everything can be reduced to a common denominator and there are different strata of argumentation, from which we cannot take one as absolute at the expense of the others. We will have to remain in this tension, and in the present ecumenical situation it may be helpful to see that the same tension which today exists between separate churches, already exists in the different layers of argumentation and in the different situations. Can, then, nothing binding be deduced? Is all open? We think that we have however, produced something secure.

Consequences

1. A careful and differentiated questioning of the NT does not yield a biblical basis for the rejection of the ordination of women. If anyone tries to understand the Bible in a biblicistic and legal way, then the question becomes fraught with insoluble contradictions. That is also true of a biblicistic basis for the ordination of women. And just as true for the biblical basis for the ordination



of men, and of all present-day "orders", none of which are just simply found in the NT.

2. The regulative criteria for all the texts discussed here is the building up of the Body of Christ. This would have to be primary in all present-day discussions. The present-day question about the ordination of women should help to shake up all orders of ministry which have become too solidified. For example, it would be a pity if the concession to women of entry into the order traditionally filled by men were to hinder a new testing of the rightness of these orders against scripture and the contemporary situation. Or, to say the same thing in another way: the question of the ordination of women is primarily a question of ecclesiology, and only secondarily and tertiarily one of sociology and psychology.

3. In the NT the building up of the body of Christ is always done with a view to its mission to the world. So no ecclesiology can be formulated without reference to the contemporary situation (cp. our exegesis). To take the Church seriously as a body, which achieves a form in the world - will help us to take seriously the various historical expressions, bound to their own age, and also the various forms of the Church.

4. The fact that the relationship of man and women in the NT is everywhere grafted into the manifold relationships of the body of Christ, is also binding on us. It is from this point that we have to consider our own situation and God's call to us within it.

5. There is a rising demand for partnership between men and women (cooperation, or equal rights, or whatever it is called) as well as for the equality of women in education, work and public rights. This grew up in the western world - the culture formed by Christianity, whence it has spread to the rest of the world, not by chance, but as a historical consequence of the preaching of the gospel (cf. recent mission history). What comes to us from outside today - often in a distorted form - is what is laid down at the very core of the biblical message. We are asked if we want to legitimise this child, or let it run about the world illegitimate. Plainly expressed: should not the building-up of present day churches and congregations show in an exemplary way, what a true mutual relationship of men and women, received from God, can be both in marriage and in celibacy? Would we not receive guidance from this, in so many pressing contemporary questions, which threaten the relationship of men and women? (Sameness instead of partnership, transgression of bounds, misunderstanding and misuse of marriage and celibacy?)

6. These results would also have to be continually tested against the regulative criteria: does the admission of women to full service in the Church help in its edification and in the fulfilment of its mission to the world? and, does the repulsing of women into the realm of the family alone hinder the service of the Church? Only a church which is using to the full all the gifts and power at her disposal, without atrophying any of them, is an instrument which her Lord can use. This is where, in our problem, we have to keep on asking for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

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