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# TSF BULLETIN

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 1981

**TSF BULLETIN** VOL. 5 No. 1  
 (Formerly *TSF News & Reviews*)  
 Published by Theological Students  
 Fellowship, 233 Langdon, Madison WI  
 53703. ISSN No. 0272-3913

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1, or space travel, the flatlander would be left helpless. All of which is to say that, even though secularist wisdom ought not be condemned as all wrong, it cannot be accepted as all right, either.

Given this understanding of "eschatology," I submit three quick observations:

(1) Everything we know about the New Testament church — faith, its worship, its Scriptures, its practice, its life — would indicate that its perspective was thoroughly and consistently end-earth *eschatological*.

(2) However, it does not follow that all (or even any) consequent versions of Christianity have retained the orientation. Indeed, regarding the Believers Church interpretation of "the fall of Christendom" under Constantine, I would suggest that the key to that entire catastrophe was the church's trading its eschatological birthright for a mess of secular pottage. And my apprehension of the church today is that it, too, is very strongly secularized, displaying very little of eschatological understanding or commitment. And what eschatology it does know tends to be either that of liberal, realized demythology or else of ultra-conservative speculation and literalism.

(3) Notwithstanding this sad state of affairs, it is my conviction that, within church history of the modern era, as something of a subconscious influence from our commitment to the New Testament, the Believers Church tradition marks the closest approach to a recovery of the original eschatological vision. In saying that, I am talking about our sainted progenitors and not venturing any opinion about the present state of our churches. At least we do still have our Bibles and perhaps some vestigial memory of how to go about reading them. Round-earth eschatology ought not be an entirely impossible option for us.

*An aside:* To the best of my knowledge, among moderns, it was the Blumhardts, father and son, who first did a deliberate eschatology based on biblical eschatology and thus fed the emphasis into contemporary thought. You can test that thesis with my *Why Kingdom Come: A Blumhardt Reader* (Eerdmans, 1980).

*The conclusion of this article will appear in the November-December issue.*

#### AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

The 1981 Annual Meetings of the AAR/SBL will be held in San Francisco December 19-22, 1981. In addition to the usual array of papers, discussions, panels, and receptions, TSF members may be interested in the three sessions sponsored by the Group on Evangelical Theology. Chaired by Mark Lau Branson, topics of these sessions include Evangelicals and Karl Barth, Evangelicals and Politics, and Evangelicals and Process Theology. Participants include Donald Dayton, George Hunsinger, Ray Anderson, David Gill, Grant Osborne, Paul Feinberg, John Culp, and others.

The roundtable discussion on Process Theology will be limited to fifteen participants and requires that all attending read the four papers in advance. Reservations should be made through the AAR. All registration correspondence should be sent to Scholars Press, P.O. Box 2268, Chico, CA 95927.

The Institute of Biblical Research, a group of evangelical biblical scholars, will be having its annual meeting during the AAR/SBL events. Further information can be obtained from Carl Armerding, Regent College, 2330 Westbrook Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1W6, Canada.

## INQUIRY

*(Questions, proposals, discussions, and research reports on theological and biblical issues)*

### THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE GOSPEL? An Analysis of Stephen B. Clark's book, *Man and Woman in Christ*.

By Hal Miller, Ph.D. candidate, Boston College.

When a certain bibliographer can select *Man and Woman in Christ* (Servant Books, 1980, 753 pp., \$15.95) as one of the "most significant" books of the year for evangelicals, it is difficult not to be interested, especially since the relationship of the sexes has been such a pesky issue among us. The same critic even praised it as "of all the multitude of books on this subject . . . easily the best." Having made a fairly serious effort to read some of that multitude, and having found some books I consider quite good, Stephen Clark's book was bound to demand careful scrutiny.

Even if it is not the best of these books on women and men, it is easily the biggest. With 668 pages of text and nearly a hundred more of footnotes, it dwarfs all other works on the subject. The breadth of its project is proportional to its size. It not only examines the biblical texts concerning men and women, but goes to great lengths to contextualize their application in the modern age through a system of men's and women's roles. It is such an ambitious attempt that Clark's characterization of his work as "a book on social roles for men and women" (p. x) has far too modest an appearance. What Clark intends by "social roles" is an all-inclusive set of structures within which to live. His goal is nothing less than a comprehensive sociology for Christian life.

Emil Brunner called the problem of the sexes "the crucial point and fateful question" of Christian anthropology, and Clark's approach shows implicitly that he agrees. Although the center of *Man and Woman in Christ* is the relationship of the sexes, its scope is far broader. Clark's view of women and men spreads rather quickly to touch virtually the whole of social reality. Church structure, the family, the nature of Christian community, and the failures of modern culture are all, he insists, directly related to sexually defined roles.

This vast undertaking is organized into four main sections. The first, which Clark names "The Scriptural Teaching," seeks to explicate the content of the Bible as it touches men and women. Its unified teaching, Clark says, demands that we make a deliberate role differentiation between men and women, and that in these roles, women be subordinate to men. The second section speaks more fully about the "authority" of this teaching, arguing from the unanimity of patristic traditions about the roles of the sexes and discussing the issue of cultural relativity. According to Clark, obedience to biblical authority and attention to the Christian tradition necessitate the subordinate role of women.

Thus far, however, Clark has only shown the authority of the scriptural teaching, not its applicability (p. 366). In the third section, entitled "The Scriptural Teaching in Contemporary Society," he turns to this question. His approach here touches empirical studies in psychology and sociology, as well as philosophical issues. He marshals information from various research to show that sexual differentiation runs deep into the human psyche and throughout human societies. Then he critiques "technological society" and the modern ideologies which hold sway within it. Having decided on the basis of this

analysis that the scriptural teaching is indeed applicable to our situation (though not in as naive a way as most partisans of sexual roles seem to believe), he proceeds in the fourth main section to spell out his application by constructing a "modern Christian social structure."

The root concern which motivates Clark's massive effort seems to be a perception that the social order in which we find ourselves in the modern era is in many ways sub-Christian. One central place where this shows up is in our incomprehension of the basic sociality of Christianity. In an age in which unthinking individualism is rampant, Clark's emphasis on the centrality of loving relationships among Christians is valuable, for our solipsistic brands of Christianity have little in common with the essentially interpersonal life of the New Testament. Clark's concern that this sociality of Christianity be taken seriously is one of the most worthwhile aspects of *Man and Woman in Christ*.

In all this mass of material, there is much that could be profitably considered. If someone like Clark spends the time and energy to write nearly 200,000 words of prose, he deserves the courtesy of a lengthy discussion. Any reviewer could find innumerable points of detail on which to comment, but in my view, there are five fundamental problems in Clark's book which make his project abortive. The five are interrelated, and center on the question of whether Clark has rightly understood what might be called the "sociology of the gospel." My approach in identifying these difficulties will be to begin with the more formal questions of method and gradually move into the material issues of Clark's system.

For convenience, let me list the five problems here: 1) his approach is methodologically suspect; 2) he uses prejudgments and categories inappropriately; 3) he transvalues theology and sociology; 4) his system results in an isolationist social ethic; and 5) he advocates a curious personal ethic.

### 1) Methodologically Suspect

The feeling of comprehensiveness which a book the size of this one necessarily tends to give is enhanced as one begins to read Clark's exposition of the Bible's "teaching" on men and women. All the apparatus of scholarship is there — even two different kinds of footnotes. Yet the more one reads, the more the impression begins to be overpowering that this is a highly selective kind of scholarship. It is difficult to justify this impression at first; for Clark cites literature galore, and deals with the central texts in the debate at length. Yet, on closer examination, it becomes clear that at point after point he has dealt with his material in a selective and tendentious fashion.

Let me give just one example of this. A remarkable insight which has emerged from the debate over the sexes concerns the use of *'ezer* ("help") to describe the woman in Genesis 2. The Old Testament nowhere uses this word to refer to an inferior (unless this be the sole case); rather, *'ezer* is used to describe God and military allies. The cognate verb is used of armies coming to the rescue. Special pleading apart, it would seem that to refer to the woman as "a help fitting" would at least imply her lack of inferiority. Yet Clark dismisses this linguistic data and insists that "there is clearly some sort of subordination indicated" by it (p. 24). How one could come to this conclusion without having decided on it in advance is a mystery.

Examples like this one can be found throughout Clark's chapters on Scripture, patristics, and the social sciences. Perhaps an analogy will make it clear why his method is so inadequate. If one thinks of all the available insights into a question as cards placed on a table before the investigator, the proper method would be to try to comprehend them, asking how all these parts can possibly be a whole. Clark, by contrast, lays out all the cards (witness his plethora of citations), but rather than trying to comprehend them, he looks over them only to pick out the ones which serve his purpose, discarding the rest. Although such a tendentious method is difficult to pin down at first, it ultimately undercuts the credibility of his entire work.

This basic methodological problem turns up in various forms. In the name of constructing a clear and consistent teaching on the relationship of men and women from the patristic writings, for instance, Clark draws a distinction between places where the fathers were reflecting the "received" Christian tradition, and places where they were acting as theologians in their own right (p. 317). Unfortunately, he uses this distinction in an entirely arbitrary way (e.g., p. 319). In the end, the distinction itself breaks down, for Clark admits that the two categories of teaching are "inextricably mingled" in the patristic writings (p. 322). If they are inextricable, they are inextricable, and Clark's ostensible extrication of the "received" tradition is little more than a foil to reflect his own judgments.

Many of his judgments are based on remarkable inflations of the evidence at hand. Clark will make a hypothesis about a text, insulating it with all the necessary "perhaps's" and "possibly's." But a few pages later, when he comes to his conclusions, the same hypothesis has virtually attained the status of fact. Confidence has emerged from nowhere, and the "possible" hypothesis has become an "obvious" conclusion. His dismissal of the relevance of Gal. 3:28 hangs by just such a thread (pp. 145-158). Where he cannot even form such threads, he appeals to a nebulous "overall sense" of the text which is unsupported by detailed examination (pp. 24, 30).

The overall impression left by Clark's exposition of his various sources is that he is arbitrary in both analysis and application. Although he is offended by "Feminist Social Science" because of its "casual dismissal of contrary evidence" (p. 459), this criticism applies quite generally to his own work as well. Of course, there are many points of value in his analysis. Yet because he has truncated and misrepresented his sources, his conclusions are untrustworthy. In case after case, the truth of the parts has been sacrificed for an appearance of unanimity in the whole. The result is that this whole — "the scriptural teaching" — turns out not to be the scriptural teaching at all, but a series of assertions by Clark (some true and some false) which are molded into a semblance of coherence.

### 2) Inappropriate Use of Prejudgments and Categories

Clark bases this coherence on a certain set of prejudgments as to what the "scriptural teaching" about men and women might possibly be. This set of prejudgments he calls "the pattern" of social roles which "must be grasped in order to understand the concrete meaning of the explicit teaching" of Scripture (p. 137). This pattern is more or less presuppositional (p. 48), and Clark uses it as the key for unlocking the "teaching" of seemingly disparate Old and New Testament texts.

His interest in approaching Scripture from this standpoint of "social roles" (p. 224) is indeed valid, but his use of a presupposed pattern of those roles to help the Bible speak its message is problematic. Agreed that one necessarily comes to Scripture with some kind of preunderstanding, this does not mean that such a necessity may be treated as a virtue. Clark has used this necessity to justify fitting the Scriptures on the procrustean bed of an already-known meaning, dictated by his patriarchal preunderstanding.

Our prejudgments on the meanings of biblical texts can indeed be helpful, but only if we allow a kind of feedback loop to form between our preunderstanding and the texts themselves. Scripture must also be allowed to speak an unexpected word, one which undermines the validity of our initial ideas. Because Clark does not allow such feedback from the text, he cuts himself off from the profound critique which the Bible can and does level against such patriarchal systems.

Further, the major categories of Clark's preunderstanding ("role" and "subordination") are themselves inadequate. When Clark speaks of "role," for instance, he seems to have in mind something which is already out there for people to plug into (e.g., p. 95), like the job description of a twentieth-century bureaucrat. Women's role, he says, has to do with the home,

while men's role is to face the world. But Clark interprets this role distinction in an amazingly casuistic way:

The man provides the food; the woman prepares and serves it. The man sees that the family members go to the doctor and he pays for the medicine; the woman nurses the sick. The man receives the guest and sees that he is cared for. The woman gets the guest something to eat, prepares his room, washes his clothing. (p. 97)

Such a reified and static concept of "role" is just too firmly cast to measure up to the complex realities of Christian community and human culture. Into such pre-hardened forms, the dynamics of Christian life can never adequately be forced.

The other central category of "subordination" is no better. Clark claims that the kind of subordination of which he is speaking is "unity-subordination" (p. 41), which does not imply any inferiority or oppression. Yet in spite of his insistence that "equality" is not compromised in such submission, he never shows how it is that equality and subordination are related. It is not enough merely to assert (as Clark does) that "unity-subordination" does not threaten equality in Christ. Nor is it enough to polemicize (as Clark does) against the modern predilection to consider "rights" and "freedom" as central to the gospel (p. 335). One must show the interrelations of freedom and submission (which Clark does not do), and distinguish between submission by choice and subordination by sex (which Clark does not do).

### 3) Theology and Sociology are Transvalued

Although he denies that H. R. Niebuhr's famous typology is relevant to his work (pp. 702-703), Clark's stance is clearly one of the "Christ *against* culture" variety. Yet his approach is an interesting example of the fact that this type of understanding is fundamentally the same as its polar opposite, the "Christ *of* culture" variety. In *Man and Woman in Christ*, the gospel is so identified with a particular culture that the possibilities of living as a Christian in any other cultural form virtually vanish.

For Clark, the central opposition between Christianity and the world is "between God's people living in God's social order according to God's way, and the non-Christian peoples living according to their own customs" (p. 276). The culture of Christ (understood to be patriarchal and subordinationist) stands apart from all other cultures. Yet Clark does not equate this culture with that of New Testament times and so falls into the trap which K. Stendahl so tellingly described as "a nostalgic attempt to play 'First Century.'" God's own culture is not that of the New Testament *per se*; rather, it is the culture which Clark himself is engineering.

Here his distinction between "teaching" and "exegesis" becomes formative. Exegesis of the important texts of Scripture merely tells what happened at various times in the past; the "teaching" of Scripture, though, is an exposition of God's own culture in a way mere exegesis could never be. This "teaching" refers fundamentally not to doctrine but to "a way of life" (p. 176). By decisively separating the doctrinal and the practical (e.g., pp. 138-139), Clark brings about a dramatic shift of values. Scriptural "teaching" concerns "a way of life" in such a pre-eminent sense that, for Clark, the resulting sociology is of far greater value than theology. The decisive thing is not to understand our Creator and Redeemer truly (though he would never deny that this has a certain validity); the decisive thing is to enter into the form of culture of the scriptural "teaching." What is essential is the sociology of the gospel, not its content.

He states the matter quite bluntly: "The crucial issue is not whether the restoration of a Christian social structure is feasible. The issue is whether any Christianity is feasible without a restoration of a genuine Christian social structure" (p. 618). Never in the Christian tradition, so far as I know, has the very existence of the faith been so closely linked with sociology. It

has, of course, been so linked with theology. (Luther, for example, saw justification by faith as the *doctrine* by which the church would stand or fall.) In *Man and Woman in Christ*, though, this place is usurped by "Christian social structure." The benevolent patriarchy which Clark is articulating has become a kind of sociology of the gospel. And the transvaluation of this sociology over theology is basic to his entire approach to Christianity.

Because sociology takes decisive precedence over theology, the culture which Clark formulates can be completely held apart from substantive theological concerns. It is not even possible, because of the secondary nature of the theology, that a text like Gal. 3:28 might carry with it in the development of doctrine an increasing critique of patriarchy. Even if it did carry such a critique, that would be mere theology which does not affect the more important categories of social structure. There is no possible argument from the life of Christ, or from the priesthood of believers, or from baptismal freedom, or from any other part of Christian theology which can possibly dislodge Clark's social structure, for this structure itself has the divine mandate behind it (pp. 595-596).

### 4) Isolationist Social Ethics

As they live in this culture of Christ, Christians have two alternatives concerning the "technological society" around them: they can either deal constructively with the problems it creates, or they can withdraw (p. 539). Given that a radically "Christ against culture" formulation of Christian existence like Clark's has obvious affinities with an isolationist approach to the "other," non-Christian culture, it is not surprising that his recommendation is for withdrawal. He feels that in order to apply the scriptural teaching (that is, to embrace the sociology of the gospel), we need to change our circumstances (pp. 560-561). The goal of this withdrawal is to "create a space" in which God's people can live in his culture, functioning in their sexually defined roles, and relating to each other in an appropriate way.

Clark claims that such a withdrawal still leaves Christians "in the world" though not of it (p. 666). Yet it is difficult to imagine how he can justify such an assertion, given the importance he attaches to withdrawing to more godly islands of social reality. In general, the broader culture should be left to stew in its own juices while Christians live a life apart as much as possible. If evangelicals in the past have far too easily adopted a "prophetic" attitude to society, standing smugly over against it, Clark seems to have done us one better. Clark's social ethics does not even touch society enough to be prophetic; it is merely apocalyptic.

### 5) Curious Personal Ethics

Because he emphasizes the sexual dimension of the husband and wife relationship (this, by the way, is the sphere in which woman is a "help fitting" for the man), and because he makes children a central aspect of marriage, Clark reacts against the notion that a personal intimacy between husband and wife is necessarily to be desired. Though technological society may make it important (p. 648), intimate companionship *per se* is not a value in the marriages of God's culture. Such companionship is in fact to be avoided as much as possible because it tends to "feminize" men (p. 622). Clark would rather see men spend their time with other men and women with other women, so that they can be better formed into their distinct kinds of manly and womanly character.

Manly character is apparently a major goal of God's culture. It has to do, according to Clark, with two things: "social responsibility" (that is, taking leadership within the home and Christian community), and "aggressiveness" (p. 639). "Men are, and should be, naturally aggressive," says Clark. Such aggression should be channeled, of course, but there is no sense in which it might fundamentally have to be repented of. The manly character which God wants is quite different than that of the femi-

nized men who people the technological society. "Compared to men who have not been feminized," he says, a feminized man will "place much higher emphasis and attention on how he feels and how other people feel. He will be much more gentle (*sic*) and handle situations in a 'soft' way" (p. 636). One wonders how gentleness can be a fruit of the Spirit and yet not be pre-eminent in manly (as well as womanly) character. If God wanted aggression, he should have asked for it rather than for love, joy, peace, and so on.

Clark is certainly to be praised for emphasizing that there is a basic sociality of the gospel. Interpersonal relationships are constitutive in the life of God's people. But Clark does not stop there; he insists that a highly developed and intricately nuanced sociology of the gospel is also fundamental. Because Clark has confused the importance of Christian sociality with his particular sociology, and because he has elevated this sociology over virtually every aspect of the Christian's existence, even his concern for loving relationships becomes somewhat disfigured.

In his brief "Afterword" (a little more than one page out of this massive tome), Clark admits that "perhaps the pastoral recommendations made in this book do not express the best way" of living out the relationship and distinction between the sexes (p. 668). After hundreds of pages, such a self-critical reflection of his own position is welcome. If only it had come sooner! On occasion, he does admit to problems with his own view (though the reader is left in the dark as to what they might be). He even grants on one occasion that a diversity of opinion might be possible (p. 338). Yet he is easily entrapped by polemics into making some very serious charges against any who might disagree concerning men's and women's roles (e.g., pp. 297, 365). Because Clark so closely identifies God's will with his own social construction, the possibility of obedience to Jesus by someone who takes exception to his program seems remote.

If only the body of *Man and Woman in Christ* had been marked by the intellectual humility and the spiritual solidarity with the rest of the church which becomes visible briefly in this "Afterword," the book might have been a helpful contribution to our attempts to understand the sexes before God. As it is, unfortunately, Clark's work must ultimately take its place among the polemic and divisive literature which has polarized and stymied the discussion up to now. In the end, it is one more book which will briefly cause a stir in the debate and then be forgotten because it confused its own particular way with the ways of God.

#### URBANA '81

Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship's biennial student missions convention will be held December 27-31 at the University of Illinois—Urbana/Champaign. The 17,000 delegates will hear plenary speakers, attend elective seminars, participate in small group Bible studies, and confer with representatives from hundreds of mission agencies. Plenary speakers this year include, among others, Samuel Escobar, Billy Graham, Isabelo Magalit, George D. McKinney, Rebecca Pippert and Helen Roseveare. To request more information or registration forms, write Urbana '81, 233 Langdon, Madison, WI 53703.

This year Theological Students Fellowship will be sponsoring elective workshops on Theology of Missions each afternoon during the convention at 4:00 PM. These workshops will not be included in the regular Urbana seminar listings. Write TSF for more information on these; or, if you register for Urbana, watch for a notice from us in the mail.

## EVANGELICALS AND THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

By Stephen T. Davis, Professor of Philosophy, Claremont Men's College.

Recently I heard an impromptu speech from a seminary president who had just returned from a trip to China. In his opinion, he announced, American seminary students ought to spend a year in the Orient. My initial reaction was: Why just the Orient? Why not a year in Rome or Sao Paulo or Nairobi? Immediately I saw the answer — what the man had in mind, apparently, was the religions of the world. In Rome and Sao Paulo and Nairobi, one encounters, in the main, Christianity; in the Orient one encounters, in the main, religions other than Christianity.

My purpose is not to criticize the man, nor will I argue against his suggestion. But I do suspect that the idea of Christian seminarians being asked to spend a year studying other religions is symbolic of a deeper issue. It points to what I regard as a pandemic and alarming loss of nerve among many Christian theologians and clergy. To put the matter bluntly, it is now widely felt that in the light of our new awareness of a religiously pluralistic world, it is no longer polite or appropriate or warranted for Christians to claim that they are right and followers of other religions wrong.

The study of the religions of the world is not one which evangelical scholars have emphasized or even much participated in. The field has been left largely to religious skeptics or Christians of a theologically liberal persuasion. Now I am an analytic philosopher, not a historian of religion. But living as I do in an academic community with several notable historians of religion and a community which occasionally sponsors academic conferences in the field, I have been forced to think seriously about how evangelicals ought to view the religions of the world.

### Exclusivism in Religion

Let us define an exclusivist religion as one whose adherents regard it as the one and only true way. They essentially say, "We believe that we are right and that people of other religions who disagree with us on crucial points are wrong." By this definition, some of the religions of the world are clearly exclusivist. In my opinion, Christianity is one such religion. I will return to that point later.

A rather obvious preliminary point ought to be made here. I mention it only because some scholars apparently believe that the very fact of religious diversity creates logical difficulties for exclusivist claims. The point is this: One cannot refute a person who holds a given view merely by pointing out that some people disagree. Specifically, one cannot refute an exclusivist religion merely by pointing out that other exclusivist religions make equally strong claims. Nor can one refute an exclusivist religion merely by pointing out that there are people — religious scholars, some of them — who in the interest of religious harmony in the world would much prefer that no exclusivist claims be made in religion.

There is a danger, I believe, for students of religion who are ideologically committed to the existence of a cooperative world religious community and who believe that such a community can exist only on the basis of agreement. The danger, naturally, is that such people will misconstrue the data of world religions — that is, distort the exclusivist religions. We see this danger illustrated in two of the seminal figures in the field today, Wilfred Cantwell Smith of Harvard University and John Hick of the University of Birmingham and Claremont Graduate School. These scholars, it seems to me, share the belief and the commitment mentioned above. Smith's strategy to solve the problem of religious diversity is to search for an essence or common factor in all religious experience, something crucial to all the religions of the world. In several of his books he has suggested that such