

Demythologising the Liberal Illusion

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THE TITLE of this essay may sound rather provocative. It is not our aim, however, to try to prove that Liberalism as a political, economic or philosophical doctrine is an illusion, nor are we going to demythologise Liberal ideas about women as such. Here we are only concerned with the contention that these Liberal ideas are to be found in the Bible, the New Testament or the teaching of Jesus. Is that contention correct or is it an illusion? That is the thrust of this investigation.

Generally speaking, Liberal ideas about the position of the woman in the family and in the community have been accepted by modern civilisation. The Convention of the United Nations on the political rights of women gives a very clear expression to these ideas. The Convention states that 'women shall be entitled to hold public offices and to exercise all public functions established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination'.¹ The keyword of the modern view on the relation between men and women is *equality*, one of the three watchwords of the French Revolution in 1789. The aim of the movement for the emancipation of women was to establish equality between men and women as far as possible. This movement towards equality has above all been an assimilation of women towards men, not *vice versa*. Women have taken positions, which could earlier have been held only by men. But, as a result of this development, men, to some extent, have been obliged to do things which they never used to do, such as washing up, caring for young children, etc. Physiological facts are the only limit to this process of assimilation. This frontier has not yet been crossed even in the *kibbutzim* of modern Israel, where equality between men and women is worked out more uncompromisingly than in most other modern communities. But in all fields of community life, where physiological facts do not play the most important part, Liberalism and much modern opinion affirm a total equality and likeness between men and women. From this point of view, the ordination of women to the priesthood is a matter of course. But may one change a two thousand year old tradition in the Church just by referring to modern views? The accommodation of the practice and teaching of Christianity to one's own time cannot be a matter of course. It has to be proved that such accommodation

does not change anything essential in Christianity. Is the ordination of women to the priesthood, a matter of inevitability to Liberalism and much modern opinion, in accordance with the teaching of the Bible, the New Testament or Jesus of Nazareth concerning the nature of woman and the nature of priesthood? Here we concentrate on the first part of this question. Those who answer it in the affirmative state that the teaching of the Bible and the New Testament on woman, is essentially the same as the corresponding Liberal and modern understanding, or at least similar to it.

This question is only part of the greater question about the relation between modern thinking, influenced by Liberal ideas, and the Bible, the New Testament and the teaching of Jesus. It is well known that about fifty years ago this question was answered by leading Protestant theologians roughly in this way:

The Liberal religion of Humanism was the teaching of the historic Jesus; it forms the climax of a religious-ethical evolution from the primitive naturalistic religion of old Israel to the high ethical ideals and severe monotheism of the prophets, which were choked by the Law-theology of post-exilic Judaism; Jesus brings religion back to its fresh well-springs; the core of this teaching is trust in the heavenly Father and the unselfish love of the neighbour; after Jesus, his disciples relapse partly into Judaism, and partly into Hellenistic religious thought; thus, for the Gospel of Jesus about the Father and his Kingdom, Paul substitutes his own Gospel about Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, a Saviour who died and rose again; so the disciples of Jesus re-edit his message according to their misunderstanding of it and put words in his mouth, which are clearly not genuine, since they do not agree with the picture of Jesus that the Liberals thought they were able to reconstruct, that picture which so very well corresponded to the religious and ethical ideals of the time.

People at that time had such a reverence for Jesus that they could not believe that he was anything other than they wanted the greatest of the sons of mankind to be. There is a moving apologetic zeal in this more or less unconscious accommodation of Jesus to the highest ideals of the time. Yet it is now almost an axiom of theology that this way of getting at the historic Jesus is untenable from a scholarly point of view. That does not alter the fact that the way in which 'Liberal theology' looks at Jesus and the Bible still plays an influential part, not only in popular discussions, where it is still predominant, but also among many professional theologians, although these often seek to deny it. The leading feature of Liberal theology's reading of the biblical texts was its selectively critical principle, the presupposition of which was nothing else than the Liberal ideals themselves. That which agreed with them, or could be interpreted in accordance with them, was genuinely prophetic or a genuine word of Jesus. Everything else was primitive religion, post-exilic Jewish legalism or *Gemeindetheo-*

logie. It was the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, as is well known, which started undermining this manner of interpreting the Bible. The apologetic tendency yielded to more objectively descriptive science. Instead of a 'simple teaching of Jesus', there were now found in the words of Jesus according to the Gospels very primitive, though to modern people strange, Jewish thoughts about the speedy destruction of the world and about what was to happen in this connection. Jesus, who had earlier been so close to modern Western man, was thus moved far away in an Oriental mythical twilight. The resultant conceptions of Jesus proved to have very few things in common with enlightened modern thinking. During the last decades exegesis has gone further in this direction. The Liberal illusion about the simple teaching of Jesus is now generally discredited.³ After the first period of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (Reitzenstein, Wetter and others), when enthusiasm for parallels between the New Testament and Hellenistic mystery-religions flourished almost without limit, a more sober approach to New Testament exegesis has set in. Now scholars attempt to analyse the thinking of the New Testament objectively, without removing that which does not agree with their own world-picture. (It is another question, of course, whether they always succeed). These are well known facts of the history of theology.³ Our intention is to try to find an answer to our question about the relation between Liberal and biblical views on woman, according to these principles of 'realistic Bible research' (the slogan of Anton Fridrichsen), and of an 'immanent study of the New Testament' (the watchword of Hugo Odeberg). Are those people right, who want to find the Liberal view of woman in the Bible? Or have they worked according to a selective principle, previously determined (but seldom exactly defined), so that they have been able to unearth ideas which agree with their views on woman, and which are found in certain strata of the biblical material, and on the basis of which they can commend the ordination of women to the priesthood as possible or even desirable?

We need to investigate the texts which are quoted by those who want to find support for Liberal views about woman within the Bible.

1. *The Old Testament*

WE start with the Creation story, Gen. 1: 27: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them'. This passage plays a decisive part in Miss Thrall's *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood* (1958).⁴ She asserts that the difference with regard to the view on woman between Gen. 1 and Gen. 2 is 'absolutely fundamental'.⁵ In the Creation story of Gen. 2 the woman's equality of being the image of God is only secondary, mediated through the man, as it is also seen by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 11: 3ff.

Consequently, according to Gen. 2, the woman has to be subordinate to the man. In Gen. 1, on the other hand, nothing is said about the subordination of the woman to the man. On the contrary, according to Gen. 1, both man and woman are created in the image of God, so that 'according to Genesis 1, men and women, created alike in the Image of God, owe an equal and independent obedience to their Creator, and are possessed of an equal authority over the rest of creation. Nothing is said about the subjection of one sex to the other, so that we cannot assume it to be a general principle that either should be subordinate'.⁶ This interpretation of Gen. 1: 27 finds an apparent fulfilment in the New Testament: (a) 'The work of Christ is the complete realisation of man's existence in the Image of God. Therefore he fulfils the conception of the ideal man as it is presented to us in Genesis 1. (b) Through the work of Christ, the woman no less than the man, is able to grow into the kind of existence postulated for her in the Genesis 1 story. (c) Therefore the woman achieves an independent relationship with God in which Christ is the only intermediary.'⁷ Miss Thrall is not content just to establish a contrast between Gen. 1: 27 and 2: 21f, 3: 16 and passages in the New Testament dependent on these. She wants also to give a harmonising explanation of this contrast.⁸ The subordination according to Gen. 2: 21f, 3: 16, 1 Cor. 11: 3f, 14: 34f, Eph. 5: 22f, Col. 3: 18f, and other passages is only to be regarded as a temporary stage for the woman, necessary before she can reach the full equality with the man as expressed in Gen. 1: 27, and according to 'the wider implications of New Testament theology in respect of the theological status of the woman'.⁹

Miss Thrall makes considerable efforts to do justice to everything the biblical texts tell us about the relation between men and women. But the whole of her interesting description of the biblical view on woman stands or falls by her interpretation of the relation between the first and the second Creation story with regard to the creation of man. One has to point out that this interpretation is essentially an argument from silence. 'In Genesis 1 there is no mention whatsoever of the subordination of the woman to the man,' it is said on the decisive point¹⁰ (which is of course correct, if you do not emphasise the fact that 'male' is mentioned before 'female'). The statement that the description in Gen. 2 of the relation between man and woman is only a 'stage in the growth of human personality into the complete Image of the Creator'¹¹ lacks every foundation in the texts. Miss Thrall constructs a disjunction between Gen. 1: 27 and 2: 21f, on the basis of (to say the least) a debatable interpretation of the texts, but it would be most natural to regard the latter description of the relation between man and woman as a complement of the former. Gen. 1: 27 does not say anything at all more exactly about the relation between 'male' and 'female', at least absolutely nothing about the woman as enjoying 'an independent existence in the Image, an existence which she possesses,

as it were, in her own right, and which does not depend upon her connection with the man'.¹³ On the contrary, in Gen. 1: 27, it is, as a matter of fact, only about the man that it is said expressly that he was created in the image of God: 'So God created man (*aeth-haadam*)¹³ in his own image, in the image of God created he him (*otho*)'. One cannot avoid suspecting that Miss Thrall has pressed the texts in a certain direction, and in this way she succeeds in reading into them a view of woman easily reconcilable with the equality ideals of the twentieth century.

Miss Thrall, who belongs to the post-Liberal era which has rediscovered the importance of the Old Testament to theology, tries to find further support for the ordination of women to the priesthood in the prophetesses of the Old Testament, who must have had 'the same direct and unmediated contact with God as their male counterparts, and the same direct apprehension of his Word'.¹⁴ So they form an exception to the normal position of women in Israel and Judaism, where 'women, in fact, were theologically of the same status as Gentiles'.¹⁵ According to Miss Thrall and the authorities she refers to, the prophets of the Old Testament are types of the apostles of the New Testament.¹⁶ And the conclusion is thus self-evident. Now Miss Thrall herself admits that 'we may explain the existence of women prophets by regarding them as types of the women members of the Church'.¹⁷ So her proof on this point is far from conclusive. Everything depends on how 'the existence and status of women within the redeemed community'¹⁸ is interpreted. The analogy between the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New is not to be pressed. Prophecy could never be fixed to a certain ministry. And there is certainly more in the apostolic ministry than the prophetic feature. So this instance of a view on woman, similar to the modern one, to be found in Holy Scripture, has to be rejected as untenable.

2. *The New Testament*

THE strongest apparent instance in the New Testament of a view of the relation between man and woman based on the ideal of equality, is Gal. 3: 28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male and female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'. The passage invites comparison with the daily thanksgiving of the pious Jew that he has not been made a Gentile, a bondman or a woman.¹⁹ These three classes are all excluded from full religious membership of Israel, even in Orthodox Judaism today. Women are of course not able to enter the covenant of circumcision. On the other hand a Gentile woman may take the baptism of proselytes, which women who are to be received into Judaism still have to undergo. When circumcision in the Christian Church was displaced by the sacrament of baptism, the woman became, with regard to the rite of

initiation, quite equal to the man. Gal. 3: 28 is in a context concerning the precise relation between baptism and circumcision. The meaning of the passage is apparently that the woman in the New Covenant, which is based upon baptism instead of circumcision, like the Gentile and the bondman, has full membership in the people of God, with all the promises and all the obligations that this membership brings.

Now the question is: What conclusions are to be drawn from the revolution in the religious place of the woman that the New Testament undoubtedly brings, compared to her position in the Old Testament and in Judaism? Krister Stendahl²⁰ regards this passage as an instance of a fundamental theological view of the religious equality between man and woman, a view which has to admit consistently the equality of the woman with the man, entitling her to ordination to the priesthood, no less than to a new position in family and community. This consequence was not immediately drawn by the Church, but nor did the words 'there is neither bond nor free' at once bring the abolition of slavery, Stendahl says. He does not deny that the New Testament contains texts which militate against drawing the consequences from the full incorporation of the woman into God's people which Stendahl wants to draw. He even admits that the basic view of the relation between man and woman in the New Testament is 'plainly Jewish',²¹ i.e., it regards the woman as subordinated to the man as 'the weaker vessel' (1 Pet. 3: 7). The New Testament bases this view of the woman on the Creation (Gen. 2: 18f) and the Fall (Gen. 3: 16) stories.²² But this view, which characterises the 'Haustafel' of the New Testament (Eph. 5: 22f, Col. 3: 18f, Tit. 2: 5f, 1 Pet. 2: 18f) 1 Cor. 11: 3f, 14: 34f, at once 1 Tim. 2: 11-15, is broken through, according to Stendahl, by Gal. 3: 28, by the admonitions to Christian men to respect their wives as 'heirs together of the grace of life'²³ and by 1 Cor. 11: 11f: 'Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things are of God.' In the last passage, the understanding based upon the Creation story of Gen. 2 predominates: 'The woman is *of* the man' (ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός, cf. Gen. 2: 22f), while 'the man is *by* the woman' (διὰ τῆς γυναικός). What is expressed here is a mutual dependence and completing, not equality, side by side. Nor is it possible to maintain that the fundamental view, based upon the Creation story in Gen. 2, is broken by Col. 3: 19 and Eph. 5: 25, 28. The women are admonished to be subordinate (ὑποτασσέσθαι) to their husbands, the husbands to love (ἀγαπᾶν) their wives. If, like Stendahl, one interpreted the admonition to men to love their wives as expressing a tendency towards equality between man and woman, one would also have to interpret Christ's love for his Church as implying the abrogation of the subordination of the Church to Christ. For the subordination of women to their husbands is parallel

to the subordination of the Church to her Lord, as the love of the men for their wives is compared to the love of Christ for his Church (Eph. 5: 24f). From a modern point of view one would of course expect admonitions to mutual love between husband and wife. But as a matter of fact there are none in these texts. One would have to overpress the exhortation in 1 Thess. 4: 4f, 'that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God', if one were to find anything there that 'breaks through the Creation-conditioned fundamental view', as Stendahl says. 1 Pet. 3: 7 must be placed along with Gal. 3: 28 as expressing the New Testament conception of the woman as a full member of the people of God, and so co-heir of its promises. However, the verse also speaks of the woman as 'the weaker vessel' and apparently presupposes the subordination of the woman to the man, which is enforced in the preceding verses. It is clear that the apostle himself has not felt any contrast between a 'Creation-conditioned fundamental view' and the conception of the woman as *συνκληρονομος χαριτος ζωης*. Is it possible that there is such a contrast, although the author was not conscious of it? Is there a contrast between Gal. 3: 28 and 1 Cor. 14: 34f, although St. Paul did not feel it? That is what Stendahl wants to maintain. He declares in a rather high-flown passage: 'We must ask, whether the general biblical view . . . is not disfigured and deep-frozen, if the fundamental view and the tendencies that prove to be on their way to burst this fundamental view are allowed to make a harmonious peace within the frame of the Canon'.²⁴ But are there really any indications at all in the New Testament texts that the authors themselves were conscious of expressing any 'tendencies'²⁵ towards bursting that relation between man and woman which was founded by God, when he created male and female? If not, is it then proper to say that those who do not find any such tendencies are trying to harmonise the texts? Rather one might say that they try to take the texts as they find them, while Stendahl, according to *a priori* hermeneutical principles, attempts to undo that 'harmonious peace', which undoubtedly is there to the *authors*, between the first and the second half of 1 Pet. 3: 7, and between Gal. 3: 28 and 1 Cor. 14. 34f. If Stendahl has not managed to understand how the New Testament writers have been able to avoid feeling that contrast which he himself feels, that is his problem. But the task of the interpreter cannot be to read contrasts into the text, which are alien to the author, but to try to understand exactly what the author meant, when he wrote the text. As a working hypothesis at least, one ought to presume that the author himself best understands what he has written. Stendahl has hardly been able to show that the view of Gal. 3: 28 of the relation between man and woman, that the woman has full membership in the new Israel, must bring consequences for the place of the woman in the family, in the community, as well as in regard to

ordination to the priesthood, which the New Testament itself does not draw.

Finally one must ask why Stendahl wants to find the deepest 'Christian' view on man and woman precisely in Gal. 3: 28, which might be interpreted according to a modern conception of the relation between man and woman. If there were a contrast between Gal. 3: 28 and the Pauline passages expressing the subordination of women, why could not Stendahl equally maintain that Gal. 3: 28 expresses 'dangerous' tendencies towards the dissolution of the general biblical view on the relation between man and woman? In other words: What is Stendahl's selective principle, the selective principle that compels him to make the view he finds in Gal. 3: 28 the authoritative view, compared to the view he finds in passages like 1 Cor. 14: 34f? One cannot avoid the suspicion that in the end the fact that Gal. 3: 28 might be interpreted as expressing something like modern opinions about the equality between men and women is this selective principle. So Stendahl has himself fallen a victim to that method of 'Liberal theology' which he describes in a way which is very much to the point:

Thus one can rightly maintain that the exegesis of Liberal theology often proved incapable of descriptive and objective historical research, and it is evident that the reason for this was that its hermeneutic, its principles of interpretation, were allowed to adjust the material so that the texts were not given any opportunity to speak their original language. The application for our own time was built into the exegesis. Everything becomes arranged to suit apologetics. The distance between the centuries is overcome too easily and too swiftly. Whether one accepts these hermeneutic principles or not, it is evident that they colour the description and lead to an anachronistic sifting of the material.

Again, on St. Paul's mention of women as fellow-workers (Rom. 16: 2, 3, Phil. 4: 3)²⁸ the question is applicable: Why are *these* texts supposed to express the real view of St. Paul on woman? It cannot be a correct method of interpreting texts to range one group of texts in the material against another, if you are going to interpret the whole material. The right procedure must be to try to understand how St. Paul was able to count women among his fellow-workers, although he did not allow them to teach (διδασκειν) or to speak in the Church (λαλειν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ) according to 1 Tim. 2: 12 and 1 Cor. 14: 34. If the term 'fellow-worker', even 'in the Gospel', could imply any sort of priestly position, then all lay Christians would be excluded from being fellow-workers in the Gospel with the ordained ministers. Such a clericalism would be alien both to the New Testament and to the primitive Church. The whole people of God has the mission 'to proclaim the triumphs of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Pet. 2: 9). But everybody is not, for that reason, an apostle, prophet or teacher (1 Cor. 12: 29). The fact that

'women . . . are called to share in the apostolic task of the New Israel'" does not imply their vocation to the apostolic ministry *within* the Church, the mission to be a pastor to God's flock (Jn. 21: 15f, Acts 20: 28, 1 Pet. 5: 2f). Only when the apostolate of all Christians to the world, 'the priesthood of all believers', has been forgotten, do people get the impression that, in order to participate in the Church's preaching of the Gospel to the world, the woman has to participate in what, according to Lutheran terminology, is called 'the special priesthood', the ministry of ἐπισκοπος and ποιμην in the Church, the special tasks of which do not primarily concern the proclamation of the Gospel to the world (the task of all baptised Christians) but the feeding of the flock (Jn. 21: 15f), the steward's administration of the household (Lk. 12: 41f). When the tasks which should belong to all Christians have been reserved for priests and bishops, those special tasks which should belong to the pastoral ministry are liable to disappear, as in some places to a great extent they have done.

So, having confused 'special' and 'universal' priesthood, people think that (1) when the New Testament speaks of women who, had positions in the Church, this must imply their having been 'clergy' in one way or another and (2) women lack opportunities in the present-day Church, if they do not become priests. Characteristic of Liberal conceptions is the principle of equality between the sexes and the demand, based on this principle of equality, for equal rights in regard to all posts in the community. Characteristic of New Testament conceptions is the doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ with members of different kinds.²⁸ 'For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free'—and one might add: 'whether we be male or female'—says St. Paul in 1 Cor. 12: 13; but a few verses later he asks: 'Are we all apostles? are we all prophets? are we all teachers?'

The relation between 1 Cor. 11: 5, which suggests that the woman can pray and prophesy in public, and 1 Cor. 14: 34, with its absolute prohibition of any speaking by a woman in the Church, is a problem. The hypothesis that the later passage is an interpolation has been proposed. Miss Thrall convincingly refutes this theory in her book.²⁹ However this may be, the prohibition against speaking is found in at least one other passage in the New Testament, 1 Tim. 2: 11f.³⁰ Nor is 1 Cor. 11: 5 itself any support to the principle of equality. Here St. Paul demands that the woman, as distinct from the man, cover her head because she 'is the glory of the man', while 'he is the image and glory of God' (v.7). Although uncertainty as to the extent of the prohibition may exist, the constant principle of the woman's subordination to the man is clear and evident.³¹

One is tempted to speak about a desperate need for arguments, when some authors³² refer to the uncertainty among the older exegetes whether Rom. 16: 7 mentions a man called Junias or a woman called

Junia, who, according to an interpretation which is possible although not very probable, was counted among the apostles. Although, philologically, there is a possibility that these exegetes were right, it seems rather improbable, in view of what St. Paul in other places has said about women, that Rom. 16: 7 mentions any apostle Junia. This obscure passage has to be interpreted in the light of the clear ones; that seems to be a sound principle for the interpretation of texts.

A theory original to Miss Thrall, as far as I know, is that the Blessed Virgin in the moment of the Annunciation fulfils a priestly function, being then the representative of the people of Israel before God. For this is 'the traditional function of the male priesthood of Israel. . . . So that, if we say that the function of Mary is of significance in determining the function of women in the Church, the conclusion we must draw is that it is possible for a woman to assume the priestly function of representing the people before God'.³³ So the syllogism is:

- (a) Only priests can represent Israel before God.
- (b) Mary represents Israel before God.
- (c) Consequently Mary is a priest.

Now one has to question whether the priests and Mary represented Israel before God in the same way. The priests represented the people before God in the cult, above all at the sacrifices. The direction of this representation goes upward: from the people through the priests to God. The Blessed Virgin represents the people before God as receiving the Word of God in faith. The direction points downward: from God through Mary to the people. To receive the Word of God is a typically *lay* function, which every member of the people of Israel, both in the old and in the new Covenant, may and ought to fulfil.

3. *Jesus of Nazareth*

CHARACTERISTIC of the Protestant theology of the turn of the century was the contrast found between 'the historic Jesus' and 'the second founder of Christianity', Paul. It is well known that this is a permanent source for polemics in modern theology. However, when people look for support in Jesus of Nazareth against Paul's prohibition of women speaking and his teaching on subordination, it is nowadays mainly in popular circles which have not kept up with the development of theology since the turn of the century. Although one must feel sceptical from the beginning of all attempts to set 'the historic Jesus' against Paul, we must ask: Is there any reason to suppose that Jesus of Nazareth had a view of woman like the Liberal one?

The first difficulty in answering this question is how to reach the view of Jesus himself, independent of Paul, John and *Gemeindetheologie*.³⁴ Our sources for the teaching of Jesus consist almost solely in the four canonical Gospels, and these are written by people who represent *Gemeindetheologie*. Is there any criterion by which it would

be possible to separate that which originates from Jesus of Nazareth himself, from that which is *Gemeindetheologie*, Paul and John? Such a criterion ought to be sought from a reliable source outside those circles which are determined by *Gemeindetheologie*, Paul and John. But such a source does not exist. We are restricted to purely internal evidence, if we want to separate the genuinely dominical material in the Gospels, from that which is Pauline, Johannine, etc. Such internal evidence we might have had, if we thought we knew the theology of Paul, John, Peter etc. so well that we were able to state when a saying by Jesus, handed on by the evangelists, could not be reconciled with their theology. Then there might be reasons to suppose that this saying was so undoubtedly authentic dominical material that the evangelists dared not suppress it, or re-edit it, according to their own purposes. Is there such a saying or action by Jesus which might justify the supposition that his view of woman was more like the modern one than St. Paul's was? I have not found any saying of Jesus to support such a notion. The behaviour of Jesus towards women shows a more free view than was usual in his day. Most important is the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4. It has been employed, e.g., by Dr. Margit Sahlin in her book quoted above.³⁵ In John 4: 27 it is said that his disciples ' marvelled that he talked with a woman'.³⁶ Dr. Sahlin comments thus on the passage: 'As so often they met in Jesus the "otherwise", the secret that was still hidden—"What I am doing now, ye do not now understand, but in the future. . . ."'. This action, like the Lord's commission to Mary (John 20: 17) or the other women (Mt. 28: 10, Mk. 16: 7) to proclaim his resurrection to the disciples, the fact that Martha and Mary may be counted among the closest friends of Jesus (Lk. 10: 38ff, John 11: 12), that women remained standing to the last at the cross of Jesus (Mk. 15: 40f, John 19: 25), that Jesus points to women as examples of faith (Mt. 15: 28, 26: 13, Mk. 12: 41f, Lk. 10- 42 etc.), and in his parables describes female figures as willingly as male ones,³⁷ are 'signs', 'parable actions', which demonstrate the new way of life in God's Kingdom. 'The new age' is breaking in: 'it is there already, but visible only in glimpses and hints, which faith alone recognises. Also the closest disciples of Jesus were too much dependent on the inherited views of their own generation to be able quite to grasp this revolutionising new view, which Jesus gives, not in theoretical expositions, or reform programmes, but in actions which point forward.'³⁸ Faced with this sort of argument, it is necessary to ask what new factor has been added to enable Dr. Sahlin to understand these 'parable actions' better than the disciples of Jesus who told us about them, better than most interpreters of the texts up to modern times? It is hard to deny that the new factor is the Liberal view of woman. If one knows of the conception of woman's social equality with man beforehand, one may of course say that certain actions of Jesus are closer to the Liberal view than is the Jewish view, which has

been predominant up until our own day. So these actions of Jesus might be interpreted as 'signs' for 'the new age'. But one must ask: Which 'new age'? The 'new age' of the New Testament, an eschatological idea, or the 'new age' of Liberalism, our own age? If one interprets the texts in a purely historical and philological manner, the only thing which can be stated is that Jesus behaved more freely towards women than traditional Judaism did and does.³⁹ However, even Professor Stendahl turns away from the idea that this had any theological importance: 'It will be difficult to find any elements in the Gospels which break through this fundamental view of Palestinian Judaism. Those sayings of Jesus which touch the relation between man and woman all fall within this view. The contrast between Talmudic school sayings and the more non-professional and popular character of the activity of Jesus explains more than sufficiently the prominent role women play in his activity and the place of domestic duties in his parable sayings. The schoolroom or the judgment-seat of the rabbi is the milieu of Talmudic wisdom, but the wandering preaching of Jesus brought him closer to the life of the people.'⁴⁰ Incidentally, if the actions of Jesus towards women are to be regarded as 'signs' for the attitude a much later Church should adopt to the ordination of women to the priesthood, why could not his choice of men only to be apostles be equally regarded as a 'sign'? If Jesus in other cases suggested by 'signs' the 'revolutionising new view' of the relation between the sexes, why did he not above all do so at such a central point as at the institution of the Eucharist? The theory of accommodation may be an excellent way of explaining why Jesus acted in a manner in which one might wish that he had not acted, but it will always give a strong impression of wishful thinking.⁴¹ As when the Rationalism of the eighteenth century launched the theory, the feeling cannot be avoided that it is rather a question of accommodating Jesus to the opinions of our own age, than of Jesus having accommodated himself to those of his.

The result of this investigation is evident. Those who have wanted to find the Liberal view of woman as in all respects equal to man, in the Bible, in the New Testament, or in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, have worked according to methods elsewhere abandoned by scientific exegesis. Only by these methods, and according to a selective principle, settled in advance but seldom plainly expressed, have they been able to unearth some ideas, in certain strata of the material, which agree with the modern view of woman. Only on this basis have they recommended the ordination of women to the priesthood as possible, or even desirable, from a biblical point of view. In other words, it is an illusion that the Bible, the New Testament or Jesus of Nazareth teaches a view of woman which is in harmony with the principle of the equal rights of the sexes in all fields, in the family, in the community and in the Church. This does not, of course, necessarily

mean that Liberal thinking about woman is untenable in itself. Liberal ideas about the total equality between man and woman in all fields are wrong only if one sets out from the belief that the biblical view must be the right view. But it is impossible to establish any harmony between that view of woman which is the view of the Bible, and that which is the view of Liberalism, without changing one of them on essential points. Those who hold a Liberal view of woman are not asked to abjure that opinion. But, in the name of intellectual honesty, they are asked to acknowledge that their view of woman is the one of Liberalism, not the one of the Bible, the New Testament, or the historic Jesus.

NOTES

- ¹ Art. 3. Cf. also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the tenth day of December 1948, art. 1, 16, 23.
- ² Except perhaps in Bultmann's school of *Entmythologisierung*, which however regards Jesus himself as bound to mythical conceptions.
- ³ eg as they are described by Professor Krister Stendahl in the most outstanding Swedish book supporting the ordination of women to the priesthood, *Kvinnan Samhället Kyrkan* (1958), p. 140f.
- ⁴ pp. 28f, 73.
- ⁵ p. 28.
- ⁶ p. 36.
- ⁷ p. 73.
- ⁸ p. 36, 74.
- ⁹ p. 73.
- ¹⁰ p. 29.
- ¹¹ p. 36.
- ¹² p. 32.
- ¹³ Miss Thrall, for some reason which she does not tell the reader, states that both Adam and Eve 'really are the *adam* of Genesis 1' (p. 35). But why then the change from *otho* to *otham* in the latter half of the verse?
- ¹⁴ p. 50.
- ¹⁵ p. 45. But this is not quite correct. A Jew is only allowed to marry Jewish women. Cf. Ezra 9: 10.
- ¹⁶ p. 50, 64, 93f, 98.
- ¹⁷ p. 51.
- ¹⁸ Cf. H. Riesenfeld, *The Ministry in the New Testament (The Root of the Vine*, ed. A. Fridrichsen, 1953).
- ¹⁹ In *Shacharith: barukh atha adonai aeloheinu maelaekh ha'olam shaelo 'asanni goj . . . shaelo 'assanni 'aebhedh . . . shaelo 'asanni ijsha*. The striking parallel has been pointed out to me by Dr. Hans Kosmala, Director of the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem.
- ²⁰ Op.cit. p. 159f.
- ²¹ p. 152.
- ²² p. 156.
- ²³ 1 Pet. 3: 7. Cf. Col. 3: 19. Eph. 5: 25, 28.
- ²⁴ p. 161f.
- ²⁵ Stendahl is rather cautious in his mode of expression.
- ²⁶ In the Swedish debate, among others, Margit Sahlén, *Ordets tjänst i en förändrad värld*.
- ²⁷ Thrall, op.cit. p. 90.
- ²⁸ In the Swedish debate this contrast was emphasised especially by Bishop A. Nygren at the Church Assembly in 1957.
- ²⁹ Op.cit. p. 77ff.
- ³⁰ Maybe, too, in Rev. 2: 20—it is thus interpreted eg by B. Gärtner in *Kvinnan och ämbetet enligt Skriften och beknänelsen* (1958), s. 86f.

- ²¹ Attempts to solve this problem have been made, in Sweden (among others) by Hugo Odeberg in his Commentary on the Letters to the Corinthians (1944), p. 263, where he maintains that 1 Cor. 11 speaks about an inner meeting by the Christians in more free forms than the public service with which 1 Cor. 14 is concerned; and by B. Reicke in *Kvinnan och ämbetet enligt Skriften och bekännelsen* (1958), p. 29, who thinks that 'the prophecy' of 1 Cor. 11: 5 is a 'free witness', while 'the speaking' of 1 Cor. 14: 34 is 'a sermon', built upon the Word of God delivered through the apostles.
- ²² Margit Sahlin (1959), p. 38, Harald Sahlin in *Svensk Kyrkotidning*, 1959, pp. 655, 739. Cf. answer to H. Sahlin by L. Hartman, *Svensk Kyrkotidning*, 1959, pp. 692, 754.
- ²³ p. 87.
- ²⁴ I refrain from discussing the relation between these. I only want to use the terms which were generally employed by the Protestant theologians from the turn of the century.
- ²⁵ p. 16f.
- ²⁶ Γυναίκα stands in the indefinite form. The translation 'the woman' (AV) is hardly correct.
- ²⁷ p. 15, 17.
- ²⁸ p. 16.
- ²⁹ On the other hand it is hardly possible to maintain that these actions by Jesus go any farther than Gal. 3: 28. If they are 'signs' of anything at all, they are rather 'signs' of the full membership of women in the people of God, which Gal. 3: 28 speaks about.
- ³⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 153.
- ³¹ This is conspicuous in Dr. Sahlin's book, p. 34f, eg when it is said, 'that the watch-nights of the disciples in desert places or in Gethsemane were hardly suited to respectable women' and 'to take women about with one on the roads out to the life of the wilderness would hardly have been becoming for the one who had an urgent message to bring' etc.