

# Feminism and the Church

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IT IS FREQUENTLY ARGUED today that women have at last achieved, or almost achieved, their rightful place of equality with men. They have come a long way in the twentieth century. In British politics neither Tories nor Socialists appoint a cabinet without at least one woman. Israel has a woman prime minister, so have India and Ceylon. In most western countries women are now found as company directors, doctors, professors (even professors of theology), lawyers, judges, and so on. Why then have the churches, specifically the Roman, Orthodox, almost all Anglican and some Reformed churches, together with most evangelical independent churches, lagged so far behind? Newspapers and secular sources press the question. (Kenneth Hudson in *Men & Women*, p. 21, actually says, 'The Church Assembly is a strong candidate for the title of the most anti-feminist body in Britain.') Why are not women ordained on an equality with men? So runs the common argument in church circles, and it illustrates the nature of the pressure to have women ordained; it need hardly be added that ecumenical pronouncements (especially those from the Ecumenical Press Service in Geneva) constantly hint in this direction. Our intention here is to look at these pressures, together with their background, and then analyse out the right questions for Christians to ask in the current debate. There is a growing tendency to say that there are 'no conclusive theological' arguments against ordaining women, but for various 'other reasons' (until recently) the time has not been thought ripe for such an act in most churches. Now the word *conclusive* is being quietly dropped and the *other reasons*, always a bit vague, are melting away. Is it simply a matter of time before the churches catch up with the dominant mood of the western world? And is this the right way for Christians to approach the problem?

*Christianity and women in history*

OUR Lord himself undoubtedly raised the status of women in the ancient world. He broke the bondage of current convention (e.g. the woman at the well in Jn. 4: 27); over marriage he went behind current Rabbinic disputes, and even past the Mosaic divorce exception for hardness of heart, though he did not condemn that, to the pristine purity of Genesis (Mt. 19); and both Luke and Acts show women prominent among his followers. Currently it is widely and erroneously thought that Paul reversed this attitude, substituting for it male domination and a view of marriage as second best to celibacy.<sup>1</sup> But in considering modern needs the Christian should be aware of the honourable record of women in church history, from the many martyrs, saints and nuns in the early days (too numerous to relate), through the ladies of the Reformation (Renée Duchess of Ferrara greatly helped Calvin, Jeanne d'Albret played no small part in aiding the Huguenots, Marguerite of Navarre wrote high class mystical poetry, Julia Gonzaga was prominent in the Valdesian circle in Italy which included Reformers and reforming Romans like Contarini and Sadoletto, Queen Elizabeth translated theology as did Lady Ann Bacon, translator of Jewel's *Apology*), up to the nineteenth century, which saw a host of Christian women pioneering social reform, the Quaker Elizabeth Fry in prisons, and the Anglicans Hannah More and Josephine Butler in education and reform of the prostitution laws.

*Feminism*

THE starting point of British feminism\* is normally taken to be Mary Wollstonecraft's book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* first published in 1792. Mary became something of a feminist hero later, but in her own day and for a good while afterwards, she was (if widely commented upon) universally disparaged, castigated and mocked. Following Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* and Mary's own chaotic life, living with several men, suicide attempts, etc., it is hardly surprising that she had little positive influence, and her ideas were treated much as other ideas culled from the French Revolution had been (Mary went over to France, observing and studying events there).

The real development came in the nineteenth century. The rapid change begun by the industrial revolution brought the population more and more from agricultural work in the countryside to industrial work in the towns. Family responsibilities still remained of course, but

\*The word is used here without overtones and in a broad sense to cover the whole range of concern for feminine equality. In modern contexts it comes to mean a more aggressive egalitarianism in some cases, since votes and higher education for women are now history, and the militancy of Women's Lib. is upon us.

women ceased to help on the land and instead worked long hours in the new factories and down the mines. They then went home to do their domestic duties far into the night and even through the night. That was intolerable, as leaders like Shaftesbury soon appreciated, but the new factory work did have the byproduct of giving women a new standing in the family as part wage earner. Upper class ladies were still escaping from Georgian life that was in the words of Katharine Moore 'very idle and empty-headed'<sup>a</sup> and was satirised in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. But feminist leadership, and indeed support, was middle class. John Stuart Mill was to become, after his conversion to feminism through his wife, one of the leaders of the feminist nineteenth century thrust. It was from about the middle of the century that the breakthrough came. In 1857 women were allowed to divorce for cruelty or desertion. In 1869 Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women*, the feminist's Bible. In 1888 the first woman was elected to the London City Council. Meanwhile in 1865 Elizabeth Garrett Anderson had become the first woman doctor. In 1907 Hyde Park witnessed the first open air women's suffrage rally, and in 1918 women were given the vote. Between the wars the feminist causes waned, partly because most objectives were achieved, partly through sheer exhaustion, and partly through disillusionment that goals achieved had not brought the feminist utopia some had expected.

In America feminism was a nineteenth century development, but it had started earlier than in Britain. American women had always had a great passion for organising themselves into feminine groups, and this situation extended back to the early part of the century, providing a ready platform from which women could voice their opinions. The organisations were innumerable and covered every conceivable charitable and moral purpose, from education and suffrage to temperance and anti-slavery.

Many American women were drawn into the suffrage cause through their concern to get the female vote for some other cause close to their hearts. Early on feminism was linked with the crusade against slavery. Among the pioneers were the Grimké sisters. In 1838 Sarah wrote a book, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women*, answering the Congregationalist clergy of Massachusetts. She attacked slavery and asserted women's rights in church and society, basing a lot of her argument on biblical phrases. The first feminist gathering was the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. It was a small and local affair yet significant for the future. Its declaration on women's rights was again based on the Bible, or at any rate couched in biblical phraseology, and Lucretia Mott put this resolution to the gathering:

That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions and commerce.<sup>3</sup>

The feminist cause on both sides of the Atlantic followed a roughly similar pattern and even timetable. Feminists concentrated on getting higher education for girls. Oberlin College was the first higher educational institute in the USA to admit girls and produced the first female graduate in 1841. Queen's and Bedford Colleges were founded in 1848 and 1849. Girton College, Cambridge, was founded in 1869. Then feminists tended to concentrate on the vote, legal status of women in marriage, their property, and also a few specific issues like prostitution where double morality standards operated (infuriating Josephine Butler). There were many hints that marriage should be changed or even abolished, but no one quite had the temerity then to work out an alternative. This was to come later with Women's Lib. The one major difference between the sides of the Atlantic was that Prohibition was a feminist cause in the USA, but scarcely in Britain. In the 1890s there was an increase in feminist flirtations with free love, and sympathisers like Havelock Ellis were struggling to revise sexual *mores*, believing that thereby they would liberate women.

But in America as in Britain feminism died down between the wars. Its most recent US revival came in the 1960s when Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, an attempt to get a better deal for American women in business and in social life.

Before we turn to look at Women's Liberation, it is worth trying to disentangle the two strands in feminism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century variety, though the distinction is never absolute. First, a relatively small group see feminism as a part of a total social revolution, almost invariably left-wing, against current morality, and established political, economic and social values. Such people tended to write revolutionary books but remained very small in numbers. Second, the overwhelming majority of feminists accepted conventional morality (note for instance how late contraception was accepted by feminists as a whole), but shared a solidarity with others of their sex in fighting for the vote and certain legal standards.

### *Victories won and opportunities lost*

NINETEENTH century feminism won some victories the value of which few would dispute today. They achieved, for instance, the safeguarding of certain property rights for women, they contributed to the advance of higher education for women, they ultimately won the vote for women, they destroyed much of the double morality standards involved in prostitution legislation, and they demonstrated that in many professions women can in their own way do the job quite as well as men.

In education, in Britain as in America, girls do not seem to have taken full advantage of their new opportunities. Professor O'Neill shows

that percentage-wise the number of women in higher education has actually gone down between the 1920s and the 1950s in USA, while Dr. Constance Rover notes, on the British scene, 'the disincentive to an effort which may well seem unproductive in view of the short period of work-anticipation before marriage'.<sup>4</sup> These educational trends, and V. A. Demant's section 5 in *Women & Holy Orders* (pp. 102 ff.), should make for caution before anyone assumes a total evolution of women's role in society. It is much more complex than that, and certainly no smooth evolutionary curve on the graph.

### *Women's Lib.*

BETTY Friedan's *National Organisation of Women* belongs to the second stream of feminism, and according to Juliet Mitchell is not now regarded as part of Women's Lib.<sup>5</sup> Women's Lib. (WL) appeared in the late 1960s and without doubt belongs to the militant left-wing revolutionary strand in feminism, very much the minority strand in earlier feminism. WL reckons to start where the earlier feminists left off. They had achieved the vote and changed much of the law; educational opportunity has been greatly expanded (and no less important, contraception, RCs apart, is now almost universally accepted, thus reducing family responsibilities). None of that satisfies WL who call for total revolution. Mitchell claims the movement is international, with branches in all the western liberal democracies except three: Iceland which she describes as remote, and Austria and Switzerland which she dismisses as socially the most traditional countries. She repudiates the charge that WL is predominantly American. She does not rule out the use of violence in future; she resents the laughter with which WL is often treated, but with the unhistorical romanticism not uncommon in the revolutionary she insists WL is something essentially new and 'the most revolutionary movement ever to have existed'.<sup>6</sup>

She traces WL's emergence with other revolutionary groups of the late '60s, the students, Black Power, Hippies. According to her, women gave up Black Power when Stokely Carmichael made plain that Black Power meant black men with black women at home, and she views racism as merely an offshoot of the far greater problem, sexism,<sup>7</sup> the WL term for male domination of women. She concedes WL's middle class origin and domination; most of its leaders are graduates, all women—men are not trusted within it, the Stokely Carmichael pontification apparently being a bitter disillusionment to these revolutionary women. She is convinced that WL must be totally revolutionary and that all revolutionaries must work together in a total attack on capitalism and its system. She asserts that arts students are in the van of WL; she does not identify them further but it is not hard to guess

that they are the social science, politics and art students, and she recognises that the vast expansion in higher education in recent years has made such a movement possible. Whether this is the underprivileged seizing their opportunity, as she would like us to think, or a large number of people not being quite ready or up to the new educational openings, as others have said<sup>8</sup> and industry's increasing hesitation with these new graduates might suggest, is another matter. WL is seen as an urban phenomenon, and capitalism is blamed as the cause of the present 'general denigration of women' (p. 40). Her grievances are largely economic and legal, and occasionally biological. Abortion and contraception are demanded free for all. It is worth noting how attacks on capitalism, plus the demand for abortion and contraception, are now essential to the WL platform. Mitchell is anxious to show that WL is not still another form of feminine socialism, and she goes out of her way to demonstrate just how hidebound traditional European socialism has been towards women.<sup>9</sup> Women in short are exploited at work and relegated to the home by modern democracies, but modern technology will give them the chance: 'Industrial labour and automated technology both promise the preconditions for women's liberation alongside men's'. Contraception is vital to WL because childbearing must be totally voluntary, and then for every woman it 'becomes one option among others'.<sup>10</sup> WL is not just carrying on the old feminist struggles, says Miss Mitchell; it is waging all out war against capitalist society and attacking the whole concept of family life, as traditionally understood by a Christian at any rate.

Miss Mitchell certainly writes with youthful enthusiasm, and we wonder just what would actually happen if she ever got control of anything important, but we also wondered if she is just an extremist in WL. We have looked extensively elsewhere. The same basic notions appear in Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (all but anarchist), in Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (historical survey with a left-wing framework), and in Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, among others. The last book is very recent, and works out the fullest WL alternative we have yet seen. Like Kate Miller, Miss Firestone is a young American and at 26 a leader of transatlantic WL. She concludes her book by making four demands prerequisite to any alternative system, and we quote her verbatim:<sup>11</sup>

'1. *The freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available, and the diffusion of the childbearing and childrearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women.*' She goes on to dismiss things like day-care centres as 'timid, if not entirely worthless as a transition. We're talking about radical change'. She then talks about 'distant solutions based on the potentials of modern embryology', presumably a dark hint at test-tube babies.

'2. *The full self-determination, including economic independence, of both women and children.*' This means social and economic change, and

we are back with the radical attack on capitalism. Women are the foundation of our economic superstructure, but this is concealed from them by means of praise about self-sacrificing motherhood, though without any basis in reality. 'We have now attacked the family on a double front, challenging that around which it is organised: reproduction of the species by females and its outgrowth, the physical dependence of women and children. To eliminate these would be enough to destroy the family, which breeds the power psychology.'

'3. *The total integration of women and children into all aspects of the larger society.* All institutions that segregate the sexes, or bar children from adult society, e.g., the modern school, must be destroyed.'

'4. *The freedom of all women and children to do whatever they wish to do sexually.* There will no longer be any reason *not* to.'

Even if the reader thinks this hopelessly 'utopian' and out of touch with social as well as feminine realities, he can at least admire the young lady for her consistency and courage to spell out exactly what is involved. It is not difficult to add it all up. Capitalism must go. The family is part of it, so that must go. Our schools break up society, so they go. Moral standards impinge on freedom, so they must go. One is tempted to ask what sort of strange anarchy would be left, but our task here is to expound WL and its implications, rather than criticise this 'utopia'.

### *Social developments and technical changes*

WE have concentrated on post-1850 developments in feminism, because increasingly, and especially with WL, they have presented an ideological challenge to the Christian view of the family and the general male-female relationship in society, but in our enthusiasm we should not slip into the false assumption that there is one continuous evolutionary process of feminism. Feminism declined during the inter-war period, and the post-J. S. Mill age has witnessed some stridently anti-feminine voices like Kierkegaard and Strindberg. It is not a straight evolutionary process, as some assume, but as Dr. V. A. Demant writes, 'recognition of women's powers, abilities and influence is not the result of a historical progressive movement but comes and goes with certain cultures and attitudes'. Note should now be taken of modern sociological discussions. *Family Issues of Employed Women in Europe and America*<sup>12</sup> is a convenient book to take, not because it advances any startlingly new lines, but because it is very recent, challenges a number of common assumptions and especially because it spans such a wide geographical and political range, Communist and Liberal-democratic countries, Europe and America. It is primarily about married women, but is nonetheless relevant to the possibility of

ordaining women, for no one suggests that any future ordained women should be confined to celibacy.

First, E. Grønseth asks if the husband as family provider is as basic to the family ideas as people commonly imagine. He rather doubts it, but what are the consequences if he is right? If the husband is not to be regarded as the breadwinner, is it right that legislation should make him largely responsible for any children in a divorce or a separation? If breadwinning is to be equally shared, what happens if the wife is so tied up with looking after young children that she cannot earn an income? That takes us on to the further issue as to how far a state ought to consider itself the essential provider of things like day-care centres where children can be left while a wife works. As with almost every Government matter, it is a question of budget priorities, but behind them must lie a state's belief, even if subconscious, as to whether it wants to encourage a society in which children are more and more the care of the community and in which it is agreed as a desirable goal that women should always be freed from such domestic responsibilities so that they can take ordinary jobs. Logically, if a state decides to encourage all women to go out to work, there will soon have to be not merely community refuse collecting services but also community house cleaning, rather like the present office cleaning firms; not just meals on wheels for the elderly, but for all dependents. But how far are these domestic roles to be taken over by the state and the community? That is an ideological issue.

Modern technology is commonly assumed to be fast freeing women from housework, and also shortening a man's working hours. This is certainly a common WL assumption, but a survey in France and another in America doubts the assumption except where a job is done outside the home, e.g. saving on sewing time once clothes are bought ready-made. But contrary to popular belief, washing machines etc. do not appear to have reduced a wife's time spent on household duties. It is, according to these findings, doubtful if domestic spare time is increasing due to technological advances. But when women do go out to work, does it decrease their domestic family life satisfaction? Negatively H. Feldman seeks to establish that, far from the arrival of baby bringing deep bliss, conjugal satisfaction begins to decrease when children arrive and is at its height when children have grown up and retirement comes. Kharchev and Golod argue that roughly half the Polish and Russian women who went out to work gave other than finance as their main motive, while an American survey suggests that only a small minority of working mothers are career orientated, and stress on self-assertion and self-realisation only tends to produce divorce. But young Czech professional women were found by J. Prokopec to have more social and intellectual ambition in jobs, quite apart from marriage aspirations. The overall sociological picture is far from coherent or complete, and a good deal of subjective assessment comes into socio-



logical writing however subconsciously (it is not all subconscious, as the use of the words *myth* and *prejudice* in this book reveals). But even when the sociological facts are perfectly obtained, the ideological issue remains. In places the book does recognise that, especially when comparing the East European reactions with those in America.

With working mothers, whether full-time or part-time, there will always be a tension between job and family claims. (The problem exists for others too, e.g. the dedicated Christian who holds back from the missionfield to look after some relative, or the businessman who refrains from moving to a new job to be near an aged parent.) The Communist countries, who have much more large scale working married-woman-power than in the West, have never solved the basic tension as J. Piotrowski's account of the very mixed attitudes of Polish women makes clear. Where is the woman's prime loyalty? For the Christian we are back to the primary question of God's purpose in creation, *how*, and so far as we can ascertain *why*, he made the two sexes as he did. Modern technology has made some difference, and certainly contraception (and the more controversial abortion) has freed many women from unwanted pregnancies and unwanted children, but the ideological conflict remains. As Poloma and Garland conclude concerning American working mothers, 'Contrary to feminist writings, marriage and motherhood appears to be a great area of satisfaction for many professionally trained women. All but one of our respondents would not want to discontinue their professional activities, feeling that it added much to meet their own needs and thus contributed toward making their marriage a happier one' (p. 142). Perhaps there is some answer here to the churches' search for ways of using their professional womanpower—part-time outside the home jobs with professional training and professional status, though that does not have to be ordination to the presbyterate. Part-time formally recognised church jobs might be at least part of a solution, but what would be quite deplorable would be any attempt to use women in church work as cheap labour. No one ever argues that, but it would be a bold man or woman who denied that it ever happened.

### *The right approach*

IT is no part of our argument to suggest that those who want to ordain women subscribe to the philosophy of WL, but it is our conviction that very few Christians are fully aware of the background influence of the whole array of feminist thinking, nor are they aware of the real thrust of the most recent and militant form of feminism in WL, with its implications for drastic attacks on family life. Added to this is a vague feeling of unease that in church life somehow women have not of late quite had a fair chance. There is some danger therefore that such Christians

may feel that to ordain women would be a suitable remedy, and that they will agree to this without asking the basic theological questions.

In chapter one of *Women & Holy Orders*, an official Church of England report, the first reason given under the chapter heading 'Why has the Question been reopened now?' was this:

*The 'emancipation' of women*

Women have now been accepted into almost every profession and taken their place competently alongside men. It is therefore understandable that the question should be raised whether women should be admitted also to Holy Orders.

We believe that this was a correct explanation of current church moods. It is true that the next paragraph says that those who are most ardently in favour of ordaining women regard this as only a minor argument, but then they are a small body of academics and 'advanced' churchmen with liberal theologies, and are certainly not representative of the average man in the pew, who is much more likely to think in terms of the quotation above.

Whether they are aware of it or not, feminist thinking is widespread today and has influenced churchmen. The next section in *Women & Holy Orders* is entitled 'The New Insights awakened by the spirit of the times!' We are not arguing here for or against particular feminist views (Hans Cavallin has done that), but we do want Christians to be aware of them in thinking out their answer to the question of whether to ordain women. The crucial question is how we react to secular feminist pressure. One line of approach, and one which at times inevitably gets a lot of press coverage today, is to watch current trends in thought, and when they have become sufficiently powerful and influential, seek to accommodate Christianity to them and to attach something specifically Christian to the particular cause. There are plenty of examples of this today, as well as in church history: in theology, the accommodation of men like Rudolf Bultmann to the philosophy of secularists like Heidegger (see the dread consequences in a book like Joachim Kahl's atheistic *The Misery of Christianity*, 1971), or the succession of ecumenical crazes, such as theologies of revolution and ecclesiastical justification for draft dodging. Or go back to the interwar years: the idealistic pacifism which now seems to have receded, or the attempt of the German Christians to christianise Nazism. Or go back further: the social gospel movement in America, or the radical evolutionist criticism of the Bible which prided itself on its objectivity and which is now seen to have been totally subjective. The characteristic of this approach is to spot current trends in thought, come to terms with them, and attempt to claim them as Christian. In stark contrast to this method stands the approach of Karl Barth who confronted every new idea and new situation with the Word of God, and judged it by that alone. Professor Otto Piper in his *Christian*

*Ethics* has an important section on the theological approach culminating in this:

Bringing the Bible up to date is an important and necessary task. But that goal will not be reached by ignoring the exegetical tradition of the past and reading modern problems into the text. Rather we shall be best served by relating our contemporary problems to the process of holy history as described and at work in the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

Barth and Piper are right. The Christian must sit under the Word of God in the Bible, be judged and directed by that rather than by current and passing fashions of thought and opinion, even if given a vaguely Christian veneer of respectability. There are constant dangers of slipping into the latter course as church history shows, but for those who take the Word as their foundation-stone there can be only one permissible approach. Sound theology must determine our thinking and our action as Christians.

Let us apply this to the ordination of women question. Take *Women & Holy Orders*, where the biblical evidence gets less than three of 134 pages (that in itself is significant for the report's approach, and indeed for current Anglican methodology). Gal. 3: 28 is rightly identified with baptism. 1 Cor. 11: 3-16: the argument is said only to concern covering the head. Doubts are raised about the authenticity of 1 Cor. 14: 34-35, and even if those verses are authentic, the discussion is said to be only about what is edifying. 1 Tim. 2: 12: the background is said to be uncertain, with the probability that the text is an antidote to some Gnostic error. The subordination texts in Paul are recognised, but it is asked if these texts apply outside marriage and if they are valid for all time. Paul is exonerated from antipathy to women in 1 Cor. 7, a view which is rightly exposed as a fallacy. The apostle is said to have taken contemporary views of women for granted, as anything else might have caused radical disruption at the time. The section ends thus: 'The theological question cannot be simply settled by a mechanical quoting of texts from scripture, the evidence of which has to be seen in its context and in relation to its total background.'

We regret that the Commission did not take its own advice. There is, alas, no attempt whatever to investigate the idea that Paul might be expounding part of God's revelation given to man at creation, though the Commission recognised the Genesis text at the back of all the Pauline texts (see their footnote). There is no attempt to find a biblical understanding of the male-female relationship which is basic to this question. Notice instead the constant hints at explaining away all awkward texts *ad hoc* as part of contemporary world views (the onus is on those who adopt such an approach to prove their case to the hilt, not assume their own hypotheses. All too often, consciously or unconsciously, that avenue becomes a convenient way of ditching what is out of harmony with current fashions, and here we are back to our basic approach question). Is Paul just a man of his time in accepting

the Old Testament or is he an authoritative apostle submitting himself to the creation ordinances as revealed in Genesis, exactly as Jesus did over marriage? Was Jesus just accepting the limitations of his time, and if so, what are the christological implications of that?

Or take an acknowledged expert who shares this same deficient approach, Dr. D. Sherwin Bailey. It should be said that he is primarily an historian not a biblical scholar, but on p. 15 of *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought* he writes:

It is evident that the writers of the New Testament accepted without question the androcentric assumptions underlying the law and the social attitudes of Judaism and of the Graeco-Roman civilisation; and St. Paul even gave these assumptions a semblance of theological sanction by fitting the sexual relation into a universal hierarchial scale, according to which God, Christ, male, and female were set in a descending order of subordination. Woman, so the Scriptures declared, was created for the benefit of man, and must submit to him as her divinely appointed 'head': she was forbidden to teach in the church and was enjoined to keep silence, cultivating a meek and tranquil spirit, and learning 'in quietness with all subjection'; she was reminded, moreover, that Eve and not Adam was first beguiled into transgression—a stigma which long clung to her sex, branding every member of it as a 'weaker vessel', irresponsible, and a potential temptress.

Consider the implications and underlying assumptions in that quote. Paul just accepted current ideas, and even gave them theological sanctions (an exact description of the method we are contesting!). The implication is that Paul is rather unfortunate by modern standards in what he said. But where is the writer's doctrine of revelation? By what criterion does he sort out what are ancient views and what eternal truth, and was Christ limited in just the same way as Paul? It does not seem to have occurred to Bailey here that God might have planned his universe and the whole male-female relationship in that hierarchical way. Contrast this with Professor Otto Piper's exposition of a total biblical view of male-female relationships.<sup>14</sup> Piper shows how biblical ideas contrast strongly with mere biological or humanistic views of male-female relationships:

The second account of the creation of man in Gen. 2: 7 is in its present context meant to serve as a commentary on the first one (Gen. 1: 23-30) by stressing the difference of the sexes. Accordingly, woman's legal status among the Hebrews was quite different from that of the man. The Bible attaches such importance to the differentiation of the sexes that the full destination of man cannot be obtained except by means of it.

Piper's excellent discussion is too long to cite in full, but a few short extracts must suffice:

Rejecting all attempts to ascribe the husband's superiority to any natural male qualities, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the man holds this position by divine appointment, and the man's inability to reproduce himself is a clear indication that by God's will a definite limitation has been imposed on the natural state of masculinity (1 Cor. 11: 11-12).

Unless we realise that the relationship of the sexes is determined by God's plan for mankind it must seem objectionable to modern people that the woman is told to 'fear' her husband (Eph. 5:33) and to be subject and obedient to him (1 Pet. 3:1; 1 Cor. 14:34). These demands are not the remnants of an obsolete social order of antiquity but rather derive from the fact that God contrived to redeem mankind by a man rather than by a woman.

Man's superiority\* is derived from the fact that the woman was created out of man and for him, but not vice versa (1 Cor. 11:8 cf. 1 Tim 2:13). Besides, in Christ's being the Head of the Church, Paul finds a revelation of the true meaning of the sexual relationship (1 Cor. 11:3). In other words, the superiority of the man, and thus the subjection of the woman, is a fundamental phenomenon of human life. That this mutual relation should often cause pain and displeasure in married life is not due to man's position of lordship but rather to the fact that sinful men and women are not willing to accord loving consideration to their partner's interest.

C. S. Lewis sees the point in his usual perceptive way. Writing of the male imagery of God, and answering the question of whether, if God is without sex, we cannot turn all masculine descriptions of God into the feminine, he says:<sup>15</sup>

But Christians think that God himself has taught us how to speak of him. To say that it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable: or, if tolerable, it is an argument not in favour of Christian priestesses, but against Christianity.

Lewis saw the importance of taking God's revelation at its face value.

We cannot underline too strongly the importance of asking the basic question and in the right form. What does the Bible say about the

\*Whatever phraseology is used to expound this biblical idea, it is important to realise that such writers are trying to explain the notion of a hierarchical order which God placed in society, as stated in Genesis and expounded later by Paul. Piper writes of 'superiority', but he is careful to point out that this is not some essential male superiority, but a difference of created order. Bishop K. E. Kirk writing primarily of married relationships insists, 'The subordination of woman to man in the full sex-relation is a subordination of *function*, not of *essential nature*' (*Beauty and Bands*, p. 183). Bishops Hensley Henson argues, 'The only equality of the sexes which the Church can rightly make the basis of its practical system recognises difference of natural function and accepts the principle of subordination in common service. Sex is a factor of such importance that any attempt to ignore it in the sphere of ecclesiastical order must defeat itself. Only by frankly admitting difference can genuine equality be secured. Subordination is the very principle of ordered society, and it has its first expression and ultimate sanction in the Home' (*Bishoprick Papers*, p. 10). It is interesting to note that here we have three theologians writing out of very different traditions (an Evangelical Lutheran, a very Broad Liberal Anglican and an Anglican Catholic), and yet they all come to the same conclusion. Cf. also V. A. Demant's survey of the differences between the sexes in *Women & Holy Orders*, pp. 105-8. The biblical principle of hierarchy and subordination is not to be thought of in terms of preserving outmoded male superiority as feminists are apt to assume. It is certainly no cringing servility, but rather an attempt to explain what the Bible means by dependence, and ultimately true femininity.

whole range of male-female relationships, and what bearing does that have on the possibility of ordaining women? It is not the task of the church to accept current fashions uncritically, and vaguely christianise them, but to confront them with and test them by the Word of God. If the case for ordaining women can be made out from the Bible, or even if it can be clearly demonstrated that there is nothing in the Bible against it, then it is at least an open question; but those are the tests, and it is not enough to explain away all biblical texts *ad hoc* and then imagine that there are no theological objections.<sup>16</sup> There is no virtue in defending tradition for tradition's sake, though if a Christian tradition has persisted for centuries, it ought to make a responsible Christian pause and ask what lies behind it. But equally there is no virtue, rather the reverse, in Christians giving in to dominant feminist thinking if it is in conflict with biblical theology.

### *Male and female in the Creator's plan*

ONCE the determination to take the *whole* biblical teaching seriously, as Piper and Lewis insist, is accepted, the question of ordination of women to the ministry of the church is seen to be part of the wider issue of the way God has made men and women, and how together they fit into his divine plan for mankind. There is an urgent need here for a detailed study by a theologian who is capable of seeing biblical theology as a whole. Those who write off Old Testament ideas as if they were merely the conventions of antiquity will never arrive at a balanced answer. The whole role of man and woman, and indeed of the basic family unit within society, needs to be re-examined in the light of WL and other current challenges. Such a study would need to cover the role of the family in God's plan, the role of single men and women outside marriage, and God's very purpose for community life in creation.

Despite avant garde notions of communes and the kibbutz, there is no evidence that any sizeable group in western society wants to abandon the family unit as the basis of civilised society (the Communists tried it in Russia after the Revolution but soon went back on that idea). Yet the family concept is under increasing attack both directly and indirectly, *directly* from revolutionaries like the WL, and *indirectly* through permissive sexual morality and situation ethics, through the image of sex presented by advertising and the media, and through pornography and obscenity.

What does feminism say about biblical ideas? Recent WL writers usually ignore them. Juliet Mitchell dismisses Paul with contempt;<sup>17</sup> Kate Millett only discusses them incidentally in her historical and literary survey. Eva Figes has a chapter entitled 'A Man's God', but it can hardly be taken seriously as theology.<sup>18</sup> It starts with Genesis,

goes off into obscurity about ancient Near Eastern legends and primitive savages, barely glances at Paul, and then jumps to Augustine. That is Miss Figes' professional journalism, not theology. The more restrained academic approach of Dr. Rover provides the answer. At the end of a chapter entitled 'Introduction to *The Enemy*' she says:<sup>19</sup>

The battle goes on; the support given by religion to the conventional roles of the sexes has diminished along with the decline in religious belief, but to some extent its place has been taken by Freudian ideas supporting (or thought to be supporting) the thesis that women find fulfilment only as wives and mothers.

It seems the WL revolutionaries do not think the churches worth bothering about any more. Instead they have turned on Freud and others. Juliet Mitchell's chapter 'The Ideology of the Family' is not interested in religion (or Freud) but discusses the whole thing in terms of left-wing economic and social theory. Kate Millett rounds on such 'progressive' writers as Lawrence for his 'cunning sabotage of the feminist argument' and Miller for his 'flamboyant contempt for it'.<sup>20</sup>

In early American feminism there was an attempt to give feminism a Christian veneer, as the early documents in O'Neill's book show, but when analysed it is not a coherent theological argument, only a veneer of Christian phraseology. Not surprisingly it soon disappeared, being replaced by secularist egalitarianism such as occurs in Wollstonecraft and Mill. Is the basic appeal of motherhood and family life for the vast majority of women, even in modern urbanised society, dying? It is interesting to note that when in the '30s the Nazis wanted to break up German feminism, which was at the time well led by Gertrud Bäumer, well organised and well established, they could not do it through Nazi women, as the party hardly contained any. They succeeded by an appeal to family life in the home and by contrasting this with the intellectual ideals of feminism, pacifism, humanitarianism, etc. in the older leaders. They would not have succeeded if the appeal of the home had not been so strong.<sup>21</sup>

Christians should appreciate that attacks, whatever their origin, on the family concept are onslaughts on the very foundations of Christian society. It is important for Christians to ask if the hierarchical structure of family life is part of the divinely revealed plan, part of the way God made men and women, the way we observe them make up in everyday life, and if so, whether this concept is compatible with feminist egalitarianism. To speak of the 'equality' of women with men sounds superficially very moral and Christian, but interpreted so as to conflict with the divine plan for male-female relationships, it may prove unchristian, indeed antichristian. The concept of 'equality' of the sexes is in danger of destroying women's femininity and reducing them to mere substitute males. Such a concept wants very close examination before Christians accept it.

*Lay ministry in the churches*

THE third argument for reopening the question of ordaining women in *Women & Holy Orders* was 'The failure of the Church to provide an adequate ministry for women'. The paragraph following rightly sees this question as part of the whole problem of the ministry of the laity, but that important point is often overlooked. The details obviously vary from church to church, but there is a general bewilderment in practice about lay ministry, much talk, we suspect, but little real action. For instance Methodists, who had a great tradition of lay preachers, in the past a real source of strength, now report, in Britain at any rate, a sad decline. Presbyterians who for years have had a tradition of lay elders seem, according to a comment from a Presbyterian theologian friend, to have very few laity in positions of real responsibility, and he writes from the heart of Presbyterianism in Scotland. The Church of England has for some years possessed lay readers, with their theological dichotomy between word and sacrament, but *Ecclesia Anglicana* still retains the centuries old tradition of clerical domination in its local church leadership. Reading the odd lesson, taking a collection, or even being a churchwarden are no solutions to an adequate lay ministry, and the recent tendency to make women lay readers exactly as male lay readers merely confuses things further. What is needed, certainly in the Church of England, is an overall re-examination of the whole structure of ministry, into which male and female, lay and ordained, all can fit in the light of a sound theology. Ministry of women in the widest sense, not just ordination to the presbyterate, has to be seen in this larger context of ministry as a whole, for even if women were to be ordained to the presbyterate, that would affect only very few persons, and it would still do hardly anything to alleviate the current unease about the whole place in the church of lay women with obvious gifts.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> D. S. Bailey, *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought*, 1959, p. 14. Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, 1971, p. 112. K. Hudson, *Men & Women*, 1968, p. 21. E. Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes*, 1970, ch. 2. C. Rover, *Love, Morals & Feminists*, 1970, p. 4, though more guardedly.
- <sup>2</sup> *Women*, 1970, p. 31.
- <sup>3</sup> W. L. O'Neill, *The Woman Movement*, 1969, p. 111.
- <sup>4</sup> p. 93, and Rover, p. 154.
- <sup>5</sup> Mitchell, p. 11.
- <sup>6</sup> p. 13.
- <sup>7</sup> p. 19.
- <sup>8</sup> Bryan Wilson, *Youth Culture & the Universities*.
- <sup>9</sup> pp. 76ff.
- <sup>10</sup> pp. 99, 105, 108.
- <sup>11</sup> S. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 1971, pp. 233-237.
- <sup>12</sup> Edited by A. Michel, Brill, Leiden, 1971. The discussion in the rest of this section centres round this symposium. The reader should examine the detailed evidence in the book.



<sup>13</sup> *Christian Ethics*, 1970, pp. 123ff.

<sup>14</sup> O. A. Piper, *The Biblical View of Sex & Marriage*, 1960, ch. 11, pp. 90ff.

<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Undeceptions*, 1971, p. 194.

<sup>16</sup> O. Jessie Luce in *The Ordination of Women to the Historic Ministry of the Church* does exactly this: 'In the twentieth century we can only regard Gen. 2 as an interesting example of this kind [patriarchal society] of story and profitable for purposes of comparison only' (p. 3), and 1 Tim. 2: 15 'is wholly incompatible with the understanding of salvation in the rest of the New Testament' (p. 5). Such arbitrary dismissal of difficult passages simply will not do. Marga Bührig hints, though more guardedly, in the same direction 'The NT, like the OT, was of course written in a society based on a patriarchal structure, and this structure is presupposed in its text. But it is no more binding on us than is the conception of the world we encounter in the creation accounts' (*Technology & Social Justice*, ed. R. H. Preston, p. 316).

<sup>17</sup> p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Figs, ch. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Rover, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Millett, p. 362.

<sup>21</sup> C. Kirkpatrick, *Woman in Nazi Germany*, 1939, ch. 2.

### *Books on Feminism*

WE believe it unlikely that many Christians will be acquainted with the detailed history and arguments of feminism, and with the advent of WL it is all but impossible to keep abreast of the publications, and any list is liable to be out of date before it is printed. Nevertheless the following guide (to the end of 1971) may be useful: Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate* contains a popular account of the history and programme of WL. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* comes from America, is marked on the jacket 'World bestseller' and aims to show anti-feminist bias in culture between 1830 and 1920; it is a serious academic book. Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* is the fullest case yet for the feminist revolution, marked by youthful passion rather than detailed documentation. Kenneth Hudson's *Men & Women* and Eva Figs' *Patriarchal Attitudes* are both lightweight and journalistic impressions. *Woman in Nazi Germany* by C. Kirkpatrick is a detailed specialist study; it is important when assessing feminist manifestoes to know exactly what left and right wing regimes have done in the recent past. Katharine Moore's *Women* is a popular but very readable account of women through the ages. Easily the best historical books, both by qualified academics, are Constance Rover's *Love, Morals & the Feminists* (plus her earlier works on Women's Suffrage and J. S. Mill and Harriet Taylor) for the English side, and Professor W. L. O'Neill's *The Woman Movement* for the US side and a comparison with England. His book contains selected documents. *Woman on Woman* by M. Laing contains a vigorous selection of feminist polemic, full of sex and baby problems; but with one significantly milder chapter—by a nun.