

Heresy, Equality and the Rights of Women

MICHAEL BRUCE

The heretical aspect of feminism

THOSE who regard the ordination of women as in practice contrary to the will of God for his Church, though not strictly theologically impossible, could profitably re-read each, or any, essay they may have available which argues positively for the ordination of women, concentrating their attention on the incidental theological opinions expressed, and then judge for themselves whether there is not a pervasive pattern of distortion over a wide field of theology commonly associated with these arguments.

One example must suffice to illustrate the point here: 'The arguments against the ordination of women are indeed based upon Scripture and tradition. But Scripture requires interpretation and tradition is the reflection in the social pattern of those interpreters' views which have gained acceptance at a given moment in history. Until this century, scriptural interpretation and the formation of the consequent tradition has for the most part been in masculine hands, and those almost exclusively, of ordained clergy. It is therefore hardly surprising that (since it was also men who set down the word of the Lord as it came to them) the interpretation and the tradition should have been in favour of male government in society generally and religion in particular.'¹ But why, if this line of argument is to be pursued, stop here? Since our Lord was a man, should he not be suspect also? If, in the interests of feminism, his promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church into all truth is to be rejected, not only in relation to tradition, but in relation also to Scripture itself, is not the real demand not just for the ordination of women, but for a new religion?

The assumption in the quotation is that there is a special knowledge independent of the tradition of the Church, and independent even of the Evangelists, by which Scripture and tradition can be judged. This is something quite different from the examining of local and partial

traditions in the light of others, in order to grow into the fulness of the living tradition of the Church under the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is a parallel between such special 'knowledge', which enables its possessors to set themselves up in judgment on Holy Scripture itself, and the 'gnosis' of the Gnostic heresies.

Though to describe the rejection of the Divinity of Christ as Arianism, or to describe the denial of His humanity as Docetism, is historically far too great a simplification, as each was more complicated, yet it is true that many, probably most, heresies are like these two—basically concerned with the denial of a single Christian truth.

Many, even of those who are strongly opposed to 'priestesses', have fallen into the error of thinking that there is no heresy involved in the form of feminism which seeks ordination to the priesthood for women, and no theological objection to this extreme demonstration of it, because they have been unable to find any essential Christian belief, which this kind of feminism denies. It is important to remember, however, that not all heresies are of the single-error type, like Docetism and Arianism. It is not easy, for example, to delimit with precision what is the one essential Christian truth which is denied by Gnosticism: yet Gnosticism is a heresy which distorts the Christian Faith.

Feminism,³ if it is a heresy, must be regarded as a heresy of the second type. To search for a single point of Christian doctrine which feminism denies, in the same way that Arianism denies the divinity of our Lord, is to search for a 'will o' the wisp'; and, indeed, were some such single point to be concentrated upon, neither the danger of feminism, nor the positive truth which it distorts, would be given due importance.

There are those, possibly especially in the Anglican Communion, who regard feminism as a social and political movement, concerned with the franchise and similar questions, but would deny that it is a heresy. They regard 'the priesthood of women as irrelevant . . . very few really believe in it or want it.'⁴

This does not do justice even to the seriousness with which the question of women and the priesthood has been raised within the Anglican Communion;⁴ still less does it take account of the extent to which the ministry has been opened to women in the Protestant denominations. Both Roman⁵ and Anglican theologians have accepted the validity of the Orders of the Church of Sweden, and, since the action of the Archbishop of Uppsala and others in 'ordaining priestesses' on Palm Sunday 1960, the question can no longer be regarded as academic or irrelevant.

For Roman Catholics, whether they accept the above-mentioned judgment on Swedish Orders or not, the question is whether, if a bishop in the Apostolic Succession, using a valid rite, ordains a woman, she is in fact ordained or not? Is a woman capable of receiving the priesthood?

For Anglicans the question is still more acute, for the Lambeth Conference of 1920, and several Anglican Committees,⁶ have accepted

the validity of Swedish orders. It is indeed possible for Anglicans to say that these pronouncements were made before the question of priestesses was actual, and cannot therefore be held to express any judgment on the validity of the orders of 'priestesses'; and that, similarly, the Convocation regulations governing permission for 'Swedish ecclesiastics' to preach in Anglican pulpits cannot be held to apply to priestesses. Administratively, then, it may have been wise of the Church of England that it has avoided being rushed into a hasty judgment.⁷

When all has been said as to the propriety of the action of the Swedish Bishops concerned, the theological question as to whether what they did was objectively effective remains. Anglicans indeed have a further obligation to tackle this question, for it was first raised when the Bishop of Hong Kong 'ordained' a woman during the war of 1937-45. The province of the Anglican Communion concerned, the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui, did not approve this action, and the woman concerned 'retired';⁸ but the theological issue was not faced. It is not enough to brush it aside as irrelevant.

[If this was true when the author wrote, it is doubly true today, for history has now repeated itself. On Advent Sunday 1971, the successor to the Bishop of Hong Kong who laid hands on a deaconess in 1944, and claimed to have ordained her priest, laid hands on two deaconesses, and claimed the same thing. Had the theological issue been faced on the first occasion, there might not have been a second occasion—Ed.]

If there is no theological objection to priestesses, and objection to them is only on the ground of expediency, then it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain that the objection must hold always and everywhere. If, on the other hand, there is a theological objection, then the contrary belief is a heresy.

What we are concerned with in this book is that form of feminism which in its ultimate manifestation lays claim to the priesthood. Some few Christian doctrines will be examined in relation to the manner in which this sort of feminism involves their distortion. Basically, however, we are concerned with the truth which feminism seeks to assert and, in fact, distorts: the dignity of woman. Historically, feminism arose as a reaction against masculinism:⁹ the false idea that the only full members of the human race are male, and that women are second-class members of the human family. Feminism tends to combat this with the claim that women can do all that men can do; that every calling open to men ought to be open to women also. This claim to equality of function has, as its apex, the claim to the priesthood. In this reaction the true dignity of woman, as woman, is obscured, by lowering her to the status of a mere substitute man. The answer to feminism is not a return to the errors of the masculinism which provoked it, but an advance to a new 'women's movement', a real '*women's* movement', which will restore the true dignity of woman and the balance of mankind.

A practical word of warning is perhaps called for in writing on this

subject. This century has already seen a violent reaction against feminism, much uglier than anything that feminism itself has so far produced. It is often forgotten today how much of the early drive of Nazism was anti-feminist, and how enthusiastically this aspect of Nazism was espoused by German girls, as well as boys, in the early days of the movement. It is one of the horrors of feminism that it fails to satisfy either sex, and that therefore unless it is corrected by a true grasp of the dignity of woman in her own right, it will almost inevitably be replaced before long by a reversion to masculinism, which, in the case of Nazism, was more blatant and crude than the original masculinism from which feminism itself was a reaction.

It is not enough to condemn feminism, or even to show where it is wrong. The positive dignity of woman, which feminism misguidedly tries to assert by pretending that men and women are the same, needs to be firmly re-established.

The positive gains—things such as the franchise and educational opportunity, which were suppressed by the Nazis—need to be consolidated, on a sure foundation, on a doctrine of the dignity of woman which has a clear place in the corpus of orthodox Christian teaching.

The positive value of the challenge of feminism is that it is a goad, to stir theologians into dealing more adequately with that aspect of the doctrine of man which is concerned with the fact that mankind was created male and female.

Supporters of the idea of the ordination of women sometimes argue that God might equally well be addressed as 'Mother' as be addressed as 'Father'.¹⁰ They brush aside the argument that this is unbiblical by saying that, in the patriarchal society of biblical days, it was inevitable that God should be thought of as Father, but that, in these enlightened days of real Christian understanding, we know better. But is there any real link between a patriarchal society and the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God; and, if so, why did so many patriarchal societies indulge in the worship of goddesses, and especially of a Great Mother goddess? While, in the Pauline teaching, man as distinct from woman is, in a special sense, made in the image of God.¹¹

It is typical of the type of heresy with which we are dealing that this creation of mankind in the image of God should be represented in reverse as God being made in the image of man, *either* male or female, or more subtly in the image of the two sexes held together—a Father-Mother God.

Perhaps even more typical is the fact that those who are infected, or even attracted, by the heresy, are commonly unable to see this distinction. Their basic assumption is that man created God in the image of his fatherhood, and is gradually adding to this conception of God a fuller image of man which includes woman, so that he is slowly learning to think of God as a Father-Mother. The idea that the likeness between God and man springs from an anthropomorphic

conception of God is assumed, and there is little awareness that this is diametrically opposed to the biblical view that man is made in the image of God,¹³ and that all fatherhood is derived from Him.¹³

It is important to remember that it is not the Father who became incarnate, but the Son. Our knowledge of God is indeed increased as we get to know the Man, Jesus of Nazareth; and the problem for men, of this and every age, is not whether the Man Jesus is big enough to be God, but whether their ideas of God are big enough to fit Jesus. The incarnate Lord did not, however, beget children during his earthly life; he was not the father of an earthly family. He taught his disciples about the Father, he prayed to the Father, he was the express image of the Father;¹⁴ but the 'anthropomorphism' of the incarnation is not an anthropomorphism of Fatherhood.

God the *Son* in his Humanity shows us the nature of God, but it is from the Father that fatherhood is derived. Biological fatherhood does not reveal to us the Fatherhood of God, for this we share with the beasts; but the Fatherhood of God shows us how to grow into that human fatherhood which is distinct from, and higher than, fatherhood in the rest of the animal kingdom.

It is only when we have totally rejected the idea of God made in the image of human fatherhood, or of God as a sort of amalgam of the human sexes, that we can begin to study the mystery of man made in the image of God, without relapsing into heresy.

St. Paul teaches that man, in distinction from woman, is in a special way made in the likeness of God.¹⁵ This point is no incidental aberration, but integral to his teaching about the Godhead¹⁶ and the Church.¹⁷ It does not spring from the woman-hating mind of the Paul of the feminist imagination, but from the Spirit-guided mind of St. Paul the Apostle, whose tender love of women and delicate understanding of them is beyond all measure deeper than feminism. It should be noticed, in passing, that feminists who claim the priesthood for women tend to rely largely on certain texts from St. Paul, while dismissing others as unworthy. On the purely human level, the picture of St. Paul as bogged down in a woman-hating obscurantism, but having rare moments of illumination, when he sees the feminist light, is a distortion which would be funny were it not tragic. St. Paul was a clear thinker. Inconsistency is not a characteristic of his teaching. He was neither deceived by any feminist will o' the wisp, nor was he a misogynist. More seriously, the feminist distortion at this point involves a twisted doctrine of the Holy Spirit, in relation both to Holy Scripture and to the Church. The attempt to abstract a few words of Holy Scripture from their context, and describe these as inspired, while discarding as sub-Christian most of St. Paul's teaching on the relation of the sexes, suggests both that St. Paul was not inspired by the Holy Spirit when he wrote his epistles, and that the Church, the Body of Christ, was not inspired by the Holy Spirit during the long

process whereby the *consensus fidelium* sifted out the books to be included in the Canon of Scripture. It further suggests that the teaching that the Church has drawn, all down the ages, and now draws, from these epistles, is not true but false. It is difficult to reconcile any of this with a true doctrine of the Church or of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the commonest danger-signal of heretical tendencies is the putting forward of a claim that an opinion held by some Christians against both their fellow Christians on earth, and against the tradition of the Church down the ages, is 'a leading of the Holy Spirit', and that anyone who resists it with reasoned criticism, or caution, is resisting him. Feminists who desire the ordination of women to the priesthood are by no means the only people guilty of this form of spiritual arrogance, which has become all too common among Anglo-Saxons in the past few years. It is, of course, important to remember that any attitude so fundamentally unreasonable as that just described springs, not from the people who adopt it, but from the father of un-reason, who characteristically uses it, not only for the misleading of his dupes, but for the exasperation of others.¹⁸

Let us return to the Pauline texts mentioned above. In the eleventh chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul is dealing with a local and temporary problem.¹⁹ Scholars tell us that it was unheard of, in respectable society, for a woman to appear uncovered in public, and that there was only one class of woman who did so. St. Paul makes what he is referring to abundantly clear, by his reference to the punishment meted out to offenders: 'For, if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn; but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled.'

For St. Paul to take vigorous steps to prevent his converts, in the Corinth of the first century, from adopting an attitude towards the current conventions of dress, so lax that it would inevitably have led the outside world to have thought that Christians sat loosely to moral standards, is quite irrelevant to whether women and girls in the twentieth century should be compelled to wear hats in Church.²⁰ But, if we concede that²¹ in this matter of women being covered in Church St. Paul is dealing with a local problem of his own day, can we treat everything that he says, in relation to the question, as part of the local and temporary question? 'But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ' . . . 'the head of Christ is God.' Surely these statements are of permanent doctrinal importance; but, sandwiched between them, is 'and the head of the woman is the man'.²² It is more reasonable and reverent to assume that the Apostle is here enunciating a point of universal truth, which he then applied to the *ad hoc* question, than to think that he allowed his concern for the immediate question so to warp his judgment that he associated a false belief about the relation of the sexes with the very nature of the Godhead.

Those who are infected with the heresy with which we are dealing

would, however, contend that it is not just the question of women being uncovered in Church that is the local and temporary question,²³ but that St. Paul is infected through and through with the sub-Christian beliefs of his own time about human relations. What we have to contend with is the pride that rejects obedience and the acknowledgment of headship in all relations. The obedience a wife owes to her husband is rejected, perhaps as frequently by men as by women, because it is obedience itself that is rejected, above all the obedience man owes to God.

St. Paul's other comparison, of the relation between husband and wife, Christ and the Church, brings out a further point: Christ is indeed Master and the Church looks up to him; but what kind of Master? He 'gave himself for it'²⁴ on the Cross; so must the human husband be willing to give himself for his wife, as she in turn looks up to him.

Thus, the feminism which seeks to iron out the differences between the sexes unwittingly attacks the doctrines both of God and of the Church.

The Christian doctrine of equality

FEW things are less self-evident than the idea that all men are born equal. In mental and physical capacity, heredity distributes its favours with uncompromising distinctiveness. There is a predetermined inequality in the genetic constitution of men.

It is probable, however, that the draughtsmen of the American Constitution were less concerned with biology than with a spiritual concept of equality derived from the Christian religion, even if, for some of them, at second hand. Christians have sometimes argued that it is certain that all men are born equal, since the Bible teaches us, in the Book of Genesis, that God created man in his own image. It would seem, however, that there is no possible basis for the concept of equality on a naturalistic or biological level. Nor is man unique in the realm of nature in this respect. Not only is there an inequality between a cart-horse and a racing thoroughbred, there is also an important inequality between the horse that wins the Derby and the one that does not!

The distinction between 'higher' and 'lower' organisms is one more frequently made and used, in biological science, than it is satisfactorily defined; and it would take us too far from our subject to pursue the question, what it is that makes one organism 'higher' or 'lower' than another. It is sufficient for our purposes to note that there is a broad general agreement between biologists as to the order in which to place organisms, even if they differ widely as to how the terms 'higher' and 'lower' are to be defined. On this broad basis of agreement, it is in general true to say that the 'lower' the organisms, the more equality within the species; the 'higher' the organisms, the more inequality. We will avoid the temptation to pursue the fascinating biological question of the relation of this to the definition of 'higher' and 'lower', and the nature of the evolutionary process. Let it suffice to say that

there is more apparent equality between individual red-snow plants than between the rival pumpkins in a country flower show: more equality between individual bacteria in the same infection, than between the gifted and less gifted child in the same human family. In all the realm of nature, men are probably the least equal of all living organisms.

The religious question is not one that we can bring in if we like, to add weight to a concept of equality which is already self-evident on other grounds. The religious question is fundamental.

The Christian doctrine of equality is not the Christianising of a non-religious idea. On the contrary, political and economic ideas of equality are secularisations (not necessarily in a bad sense) of a religious idea. Rousseau, Marx, and many others, are secularisers in the sense that they pursued the idea of equality with a quasi-religious fervour, having lost contact with the roots of the idea in the Hebrew-Christian tradition; while the early leaders of the English Trade Union movement, following a tradition which ran back to the time of the Commonwealth, secularised equality in a different sense, applying, in the secular field of politics and economics, an idea derived from religion.

The historical attribution of the idea of equality to Greece seems, at first sight, more possible; but, here also, there is the formidable difficulty that the equality of the Greek citizen rested on the basis of a slave-owning society. Was there in the Greek idea an inherent force which would ultimately shatter the economic and social basis of any society similar to that in which it was born? Or was the force injected into the idea from Christian conceptions of brotherhood derived from the New Testament?

It is necessary, however, for Christians to remember that if it was Christians, relying on ideas derived from Christianity, who abolished slavery, it was in a society, supposedly Christian for many generations, that they had to struggle to achieve this end. Even amongst Christians, self-evident ideas do not seem to be so self-evident to some people as to others.

We need something more definite, more clear-cut, more like a doctrine, upon which to base our concept of equality, than the secular ideas we have so far considered; for without this, if the old battles have to be re-fought in new circumstances, we may not be adequately armed; and, in the meantime, concepts of equality which are in fact destructive of society, and rooted in nothing but sentimentality, may spread, to the damage both of human relationships and of the true concept of equality itself.

It is interesting to find a book,⁴⁵ written from the Christian standpoint, and dealing not least with equality in this secular sense, in relation to sociological, political and economic questions, saying that equality is not a Christian doctrine. I personally think that this statement goes too far, but at least it illustrates the difficulty of the question.

Let me then return to the text in Genesis which seems at first sight

to be a hopeful starting-point for the development of such a doctrine. What are we to say about a Christian doctrine of equality based upon the *Imago Dei*? Are we to base it on only the possible implications of a text which is clearly primarily concerned with another subject, namely, the lordship of man over the animal creation?

Again, the text stating that with our tongue 'bless we God . . . and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God',²² is clearly concerned chiefly with the right use of the tongue; but, though reference to the *Imago* could here too be to men collectively being made in the image of God, it is more natural to read it as implying that each man is made in God's image. If this is to be taken as a part of God's revelation in the New Testament, it is an overwhelming argument in favour of the doctrine of the equality of each individual human soul; for, if all souls are made in the image of God, no other difference between them can obliterate this tremendous fact.

One text, which *can* be interpreted differently, is, however, an insecure foundation upon which to base a doctrine. We must turn to the other evidence which points in the same direction.

Those who have argued in favour of priestesses in the Christian Church, have normally, as Hans Cavallin points out in his essay, laid great stress on Gal.3:28. But, quite apart from the question of priestesses, is this text really concerned with the *equality* of one individual with another at all? It does not say, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all *equal* in Christ Jesus', but 'ye are all *one* in Christ Jesus'. It is again not written in a context in which equality is under consideration. Still less, of course, is the ministry of the Church under consideration.

The irrelevance of the text to the cause which it is dragged out of its context to support could not easily be exaggerated. For the moment, however, we are not concerned with such irrelevancies, but only with the question whether this text gives us the basis for the doctrine of equality for which we are seeking; it must be admitted that it does not. Maybe, given a Christian doctrine of equality, the interpretation of this and similar texts can be deepened and enriched, but it does not of itself form any legitimate basis for such a doctrine.

The caution of Daniel Jenkins and his collaborators in *Equality and Excellence* is clearly not without justification. Indeed, having already stated that there is a Christian doctrine of equality, we have now exhausted the more usual grounds on which it is supposed to rest, without finding any secure foundation for it.

There remain, however, three foundations upon which I believe a Christian doctrine of equality can rest: first, individual responsibility before God, especially moral responsibility; secondly, the individual valuing of sinners by God as worth saving; and thirdly, the equality as members, despite their different functions, of members of the Body of Christ.

There is an indication of the idea of individual responsibility in the

regulations for numbering Israel: 'Then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord. . . . This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel. . . . Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above. . . . The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel' (Ex. 30:12-15). This is not the definition of a doctrine of the equality of each human soul in God's sight; but 'the rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less' is an indication that each adult Israelite is of equal value in God's sight, and each must pay equally 'a ransom for his soul'.

It is, however, in the moral responsibility, to which we have already referred, that this point comes out more clearly. 'What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.

Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die' (Ezek. 18:2-4).

'The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him' (Ezek. 18:20).

Here is a clear indication of an individual moral responsibility shared equally by all souls, since all souls are God's.

The same point is driven home in the best loved and most frequently misinterpreted of our Lord's parables. The Good Samaritan was not the man who fell among thieves, but the neighbour who ministered to him. 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' The parable is the story of one of the despised Samaritans fulfilling the love of our neighbours which the lawyer has himself described as being part of the requirement for the inheritance of eternal life.

Samaritans, like Jews, have the same moral obligations laid upon them; and surely, in the context, it is implicit that they have also the same religious obligation to love God, and the same potentiality to inherit eternal life. The emphasis, however, is on an equality of moral obligation which, if it includes Samaritans as well as Jews, includes all mankind.

As all men share equally a moral obligation, so we find St. Paul teaching in the Epistle to the Romans that all have failed: 'for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:22-23). The equality of obligation leads to an equality of need, which in turn leads to the second basis for a Christian doctrine of equality, the valuing of all souls equally by God, in that Christ was willing to die for all equally. St. Paul refers to this in the immediate context of the text just quoted. 'For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendour, and all are justified by God's free grace alone, through his act of

liberation in the person of Christ Jesus' (Rom. 3:23-24 NEB). The care of God for each individual human soul is so written all over the New Testament that it will suffice to mention the twin parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin.

Yet, strong as is the emphasis on the value of the individual soul, this second basis of the Christian doctrine of equality is in no way inconsistent with the third: all those who are baptised into Christ are equally members of his Body. Indeed, the twin parables just referred to owe a part of their emphasis on the value of the individual to the setting of the individual within the whole. The ninety and nine are incomplete without the lost sheep to make up the hundred of the complete flock. The lost coin was more likely to be one of a set of ten, in an ornament, than merely one of ten loose coins in a purse. The ornament would be spoiled with one coin missing, and this was almost as unlucky as losing a wedding ring. The tenth coin was needed to make up the set.

So the members of the body, which Paul refers to in the twelfth chapter of the First Epistle to Corinthians,²⁷ are all equally members of the body, are all equally dependent on each other, and all equally suffer if one suffers.

We have reached, then, a Christian doctrine of equality, firmly based in the theology of Creation and Redemption; but it must be admitted that it has little resemblance to the secular ideas of equality which have dominated the twentieth century mind.

All human souls are equal, for all equally have a moral responsibility. All human souls are equal, for God valued all equally in thinking each worth Christ's dying for. All human souls are equal, for all were created in their freedom, equally capable of reflecting that love which is God's nature, and of becoming members of Christ's Church.

This equality of value is, however, set within an infinite variety of function. The twelfth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians expressly rejects the idea of a body consisting all of eyes or all of ears.²⁷

Every human soul is indeed of equal value in the sight of God, whether it be the soul of the Queen or of a kitchen-maid, of the Prime Minister or of a railway porter, whether it be of a man or of a woman; but it is no part of the Christian doctrine of equality that all Queens must be kitchen-maids, all railway porters Prime Ministers, or all women men. On the contrary, not only are there different callings—apostles, prophets, teachers, etc. (1 Cor. 12:28)—but each individual soul, because he is a member of the Body, has his own individual and unique place within it.

The corruptions of the Christian doctrine of equality totally distort it, making of it an instrument of division, based on personal, class and group greed. This corruption is the just and natural result and penalty of trying to enjoy the fruits of a Christian culture, when the Christian religion has been forsaken. Most of those in the modern world who

struggle and fight for equality have lost sight of the roots of equality in Redemption and Creation, since they have lost sight of the Redeemer and Creator. Inevitably this leads to the twisting of an equality of value into a supposed equality of function. Such an equality has no foundation in fact, reason, or Christian teaching; but true equality is so precious a thing that this strange, unreal perversion of it can evoke the emotion of loyalty. As we have seen already, however, the corruption does not normally rest at the stage of emotional support for a chimera. Soon, equality of different interdependent members of one Body is distorted into bitter quarrels for equality of pay, or equality of status, between independent individuals. Mutual hatred and suspicion spring from the ugly, selfish struggle for personal gain or advantage.

The Christian doctrine of equality presupposes a dependence on, and the service of, other people in the spirit of love. There is a spirit of acceptance on the one hand, and generosity on the other, which reflects in terms of human life the perfect equality and unity in love within the Godhead.

The struggle for higher status, which is too often a characteristic of the humanist search for equality, has no parallel in the perfect unity of the Godhead.

Equality and humility

'LET your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus. For the divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross' (Phil. 2:5-9 NEB).

To feel the force of this, we need to set it beside the doctrinal statement of the Church's faith in regard to the equality of the Three Persons in the Blessed Trinity. 'And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together: and co-equal' (*Quicumque Vult*).

Our Lord is 'Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood' (*Quicumque Vult*).

The difficulty of reconciling these quotations is not primarily intellectual but moral; human pride so distorts the idea of equality that it stubbornly resists the notion that equality and humility can go together.

The Father sent the Son into the world,²² but this sending was not the sending of a slave. He who was equal to the Father 'took on him the form of a servant' (assumed the nature of a slave, in NEB), but of his own free will he emptied himself of his heavenly glory to become man.

The unity of God is unspoilt by any pride or selfishness of the Three Persons towards each other. The Son does not regard it as beneath his dignity to be obedient to the Father, nor the Father seek to assert

himself by tyrannising over the Son.

It is by no means only in the claim that women should be admitted to the priesthood that the Christian doctrine of equality is abused. Twentieth century society is riddled with false conceptions of equality, rooted in pride and envy, and bearing fruit in division and bitterness. It is all too probable that the end of this century, or the beginning of the next, will see a violent reaction towards a hierarchical society, in which men will seek escape from the loneliness of modern man. The fact that this century has already seen the rise of a hideously ugly reaction of this sort, which it required a world war to destroy, should make those who espouse the cause of equality careful lest they so misintepret it as to pave the way for a new Nazism: and those who believe in a hierarchical society, careful lest, in opposing false ideas of equality, they oppose equality itself.

It is perhaps not irrelevant that it is those countries which are most self-consciously dedicated to egalitarian theory that have had cause to complain of 'the cult of personality' within them. Let it suffice at this point to say that men on the whole, however much they approve of modesty, do not associate it with a driving ambition towards greatness.

Yet, in Christian belief, it is Jesus, our Lord and Master, the greatest Man who has ever lived, the summit of human dignity, who is the supreme exemplar of humility.

'Ye call me Master and Lord,' says Jesus in the account in the Gospel according to St. John of His washing the disciples' feet (Jn. 13: 2-10) "and so I am".

The fact that he was so called, and that he accepted and approved being so called, and yet humbled himself to wash the disciples' feet—the work of the humblest slave—seems to the natural man a paradox. Dignity and humility tend to be contrasted. Great men are commended when they treat ordinary folk as fellow human beings. 'So friendly and unassuming' will be the comment of many people on a first meeting with, perhaps, a member of the British royal family, or with one of those members of the aristocracy who seek to live up to the tradition *noblesse oblige*; but the tone of surprise betokens the fact that they do not naturally associate an unassuming manner with greatness.

Again, Jesus avoided attempts to make him king (Jn. 6:15). When Pilate asked if he were a king, though he did not deny it, he made clear that the word was not his choice, and when he went on to speak of his kingdom he explained that it was not one of earthly power and glory. In a similar way his divine glory is not denied, but is hidden rather than published abroad. It is impossible, then, for us as Christians to accept the world's estimate of the nature of dignity. Nor is it possible for us to brush dignity aside as though it had no place in Christian thinking. The dignity of God in Christ was revealed in the humility of Jesus of Nazareth.

But if Christian dignity is revealed in humility, it is not revealed in

the seeking of status. The desire for the priesthood as a status-symbol would instantly disqualify any individual male candidate, and the desire for the priesthood for women *as a status-symbol* of equality with men is equally improper.

It is one thing to recognise the all too pervasive infection of pride, and the danger of its corrupting even the noblest of vocations, either by lurking as a 'hidden' ambitious 'mixed motive' or by tempting into a domineering attitude. It is quite another to elevate such temptations to being, not a danger inherent in the priestly vocation, but a part of the vocation itself.¹

The dangers are real, and against them every Bishop, every priest, deacon and theological student needs constantly to be on guard. For if a vocation may survive and even be strengthened by battling against the subtle temptations to pride inherent in the work of a priest, yet any persistent acceptance by the will of the lust for status, or any other form of pride, will wholly and utterly corrupt any vocation to the priesthood, poison the man's work, and, if not repented of, bring his soul to hell.

When this lust for status occurs in women, not merely as a temptation, but as an accepted aim, it can be no more sinful than it is in man. What is wholly corrupt in essence cannot be made more corrupt by being in one sex rather than in another; but it has an even deeper quality of tragedy, for, as well as its individual sinfulness, it is in a special sense a betrayal of her sex and an abandonment of her calling. It reduces woman to being a mere substitute for man in a pitiful unawareness of her own different and parallel dignity. From the utter humility of the Blessed Virgin's 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord', saint after saint of her sex has followed her in the abandonment of status, and thereby has inspired by her humility not merely her own sex but the whole Body of Christ.

It is of course true that all the saints set before us the example of humility, but it is to the women saints that we turn, not perhaps for the brilliant example of heroic struggles in which pride is abandoned and humility accepted, but for the steady light of continuous unflinching acceptance of humble dependence on God.

It is these women who reveal in its splendour the dignity of woman. It is they who command, without ever asking for it, or wanting it, the reverence of mankind, and not least of men. It is their example which has given, and continues to give, to the priesthood the greatest encouragement: it is their prayers that give the greatest help.

NOTES

- ¹ Mrs. Baxter in *Women & Holy Orders*, Church Information Office, 1966, p. 119.
- ² It is only the type of feminism which culminates in wanting the priesthood for women that is here implied. 'Feminism' is sometimes

used, as we shall see, to cover resistance to the denial of the basic Christian doctrine of equality. I question whether this is a proper use of the term. It certainly is not the sense in which I use it here.

- ² The quotation is from a letter from a very able woman who occupied an important position in the training of women for the service of the Church in the Anglican Communion.
- ³ More recently the issue has also been raised in the Church of Rome.
- ⁴ 'L'Eglise Suedoise d'Etat a-t-elle garde la Succession Apostolique?' by L. -M. Dewailly O. P., in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Theologiques*, July 1938; 'Die apostolische Succession in Schweden', by Theodor van Haag S. J., in *Kyrkohistorisk Arsskrift*, 1944; *The Church of England and the Church of Sweden* (Report of the Archbishop's Commission under the chairmanship of Bishop Ryle), A. R. Mowbray, 1911.
- ⁵ *The Church of England and the Church of Sweden* (Report of the Archbishop's Commission), Mowbray, 1911; Lambeth Conference 1920; *Relations with the Church of Sweden* (Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Committee, 1954).
- ⁷ 'The Church of Sweden' (Report of the Lower House of Canterbury Convocation Committee), 1961.
- ⁸ She returned to her work as a deaconess, which she fulfilled with faithfulness and devotion.
- ⁹ Professor V. A. Demant, in his essay 'Why the Christian Priesthood is Male', in *Women & Holy Orders*, argues persuasively that the reaction is really an extension of the disease, a thought which underlines the importance of the dangers referred to in the next paragraph.
- ¹⁰ Mrs. Baxter in 'The Case for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood' in *Women & Holy Orders* does not go so far as this, but she writes: '... the material image of God is found in the Old Testament (Isa. 49:15; 66:13) as well as that of the Father.' Reference to these texts, and a comparison with the frequency of 'Father' in the words of Jesus in the New Testament, is instructive.
- ¹¹ 1 Cor. 11:7.
- ¹² Gen. 1:27.
- ¹³ Eph. 3:15.
- ¹⁴ Heb. 1:3.
- ¹⁵ 1 Cor. 11:7.
- ¹⁶ 1 Cor. 11:3.
- ¹⁷ Eph. 5:22-33.
- ¹⁸ e.g. V. A. Demant in 'Why the Christian Priesthood is Male' (*Women & Holy Orders*): '... those who contest for the addition of a female ministry to the male one believe that what they take for the spirit of the Age (*Zeitgeist*) is identical with the Holy Spirit (*Heilige Geist*) who always gets involved in support of what one likes to believe!' This is mild. Orthodox Christians can get far more

exasperated than this.

¹⁹ 1 Cor. 11:5-6.

²⁰ St. Paul would probably have been equally as shocked by modern hats as by bare heads.

²¹ It may be of interest to put on record the story behind the joint statement of the Archbishop of Canterbury and York issued during the Second World War, permitting women and girls to come to Church bare headed. When the King called for a National Day of Prayer on the anniversary of the beginning of the war, people were urged to pray in any near by Church at some time during the day. The Day of Prayer was a weekday and what was visualised was that people would visit a church on their way to or from work or during their lunch hour. The present writer wrote to Archbishop Temple, pointing out that vast numbers of girls working in the munition and other factories, even if they owned hats, which many did not, certainly would not dream of going to work in one, and would be inhibited from carrying out the suggestion of going to church to pray, by the belief that no women was allowed to enter a church without a hat. I asked for a statement, not merely removing the supposed ban, but such as would also relieve tender consciences, and show that the practice of girls going bare headed to church (which had for years been the custom in Anglican Churches in China) was not contrary to the Bible. Time proved too short to get a statement out before the Day of Prayer, but the Archbishop's promise that he would deal with the matter was soon fulfilled.

²² 1 Cor. 11:3.

²³ The question as to what is of merely temporary importance and what is of permanent importance is raised in another manner in relation to our Lord himself. Not only psychologically but also physically our Lord could not have chosen tea, or any of the non-alcoholic beverages made possible by modern science, as alternatives to wine for the Holy Eucharist. It would therefore be nonsense to argue that they should not be used for Holy Communion, because our Lord would have provided for their use had he meant this to happen. But is this to say that what he in fact used is not for us binding? May not the scandal of particularity in the choice of Israel, Bethlehem, the first century and the Incarnation itself, run on into the choice of the matter and the minister of the sacraments?

²⁴ Eph. 5:2.

²⁵ *Equality and Excellence*, by Daniel Jenkins, SCM, 1961.

²⁶ Jas. 3:9.

²⁷ 1 Cor. 12:12ff.

²⁸ Gal. 4:4; John 3:17; 4:34; 5:23,24,30,36,37,38; 6:29 etc.

²⁹ See Mrs. Baxter in *Women & Holy Orders*, p. 118.