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WOMEN IN THE CHURCH—A SURVEY OF RECENT OPINION

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Did women take part in the public worship of the church in New Testament times? Had I Cor. 14: 34f. and I Tim. 2: 12 been the only references to the subject in the New Testament, the answer would doubtless have been an unequivocal no.

Second thoughts, however, on our understanding of these passages are demanded by I Cor. 11: 5, which speaks of a woman praying or prophesying, and that, to all appearances, in church. How can such a statement be reconciled with the instructions of I Cor. 14: 34 and I Tim. 2: 11-12, that women are to remain silent in the churches?

I.

To take first the conflict between the two passages in I Corinthians, six possible harmonisations of these verses have been suggested by commentators. The first two of these remove the difficulty by referring the two passages to different situations.

1. Most scholars assume that chapter 11, from v. 2, deals with disorders in public worship and therefore that the praying or prophesying took place at a gathering of the church.¹ Nevertheless, it is open to question whether 11: 2-16 is about *public* worship at all. One scholar at least, P. Bachmann, has regarded this passage as instruction concerning domestic, or family, worship.

His main arguments were these: (i) Chapters 8-10 deal with private and domestic life. 11: 2-16 follows directly upon that section without any explicit change of subject. (ii) It is just as probable that the gift of prophecy was exercised in smaller gatherings as in larger ones. (iii) The words 'When you come together' in vv. 17f. may suggest that here *for the first time* Paul is turning his attention to problems of church worship.²

This is an attractive suggestion, and it is surprising that apart from an admission of its theoretical possibility by Hans Lietzmann,³ who himself held a different view, it has received little attention. It is true, as F. W. Grosheide points out,⁴ that none of these arguments is compelling, yet in historical criticism we do not always demand watertight arguments. Grosheide has two main criticisms to make of Bachmann's view: (i) That the nature of prophecy demands a *public* exercise of it. The gift of prophecy is not intended for the good of the individual but for the benefit of the whole church, and thus a prophet or prophetess would not have prophesied in private.⁵ But we might reply that teaching and gifts of healing were also for the benefit of the whole church, but not thereby excluded from

being practised in private. And was Agabus's prophecy necessarily given in public or for the good of the whole church in the first instance (Ac. 21: 11f.)? (ii) That Paul surely would not have thought it disgraceful for a woman to pray or prophesy unveiled in her own home, before her husband and children.⁶ However, Paul may have felt that by praying (i.e. 'leading in prayer', as praying must mean here) or prophesying, even in the home, a woman is temporarily taking the leading place; this is in order so long as she acknowledges by her covering that she is not abandoning the authority of her husband. It is very possible also that household slaves would have been present at family worship (rather in Victorian style), in which case the worship, though by no means public, is less private than if the husband and children are the only audience.

A further objection to Bachmann's view is the statement at the end of this section 'If any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither do the *churches of God*' (v. 16), which may seem to put this paragraph within a church context. But 'churches of God' may equally well just mean 'Christians everywhere', so that the sense of the verse is: 'If anyone disagrees with the views I have expressed, let me remind him that he is opposing the general practice of Christian people'. There is no need to share Grosheide's interpretation, that the 'custom' referred to is 'not one of praying or prophesying, but of being contentious';⁷ this is a most improbable view, not least because being contentious has only too frequently been a custom in the 'churches of God', both then and now.

2. Grosheide's own view is that the praying and prophesying is public, but not in the congregation, 'not when the congregation officially meets'.⁸ The praying and prophesying must be public, he argues, because 'the praying of which the apostle speaks, be it a form of supplication or of praise, is clearly a praying with and for other people', and the gift of prophecy is likewise given for the sake of the whole church. But they cannot take place in the official services of the church, because this is forbidden by 14: 34. He emphasises that there is no equivalent in chapter 11 of the explicit phrase 'in the churches' found in 14: 34.⁹

The difficulty with this view is to imagine the sort of situation Grosheide envisages, in which women pray and prophesy, neither in private nor in meetings of the congregation. Is it in the street or some public place? One can perhaps imagine prophesying there, but hardly praying. Is it in a 'women's meeting'? If such existed, were they 'public' or 'private'? Why the reference to the praying and prophesying of men in the same context (v. 4)? Grosheide unfortunately does not tell us where he thinks women prayed and prophesied. Further, if Paul permitted women to pray and prophesy in public, why did he regard it as scandalous for them to do so in the congregation?

It seems to me, in fact, that the dichotomy 'public' versus 'private' is a misleading one, and that the only meaning that can be given to 'public' and 'private' in Corinth is 'in the street, out of doors' and 'at home, in the house'. Church meetings and family worship alike would have been private in this sense.

3. No modern expositor can be found to support the once popular view that 14: 34 refers to women chattering in their separate section of the congregation. True, *laleō* frequently did mean 'chatter' in classical Greek, but there is no example of this meaning in the N.T., and the verb is frequently used of authoritative speaking (e.g. 2 Cor. 11: 17; John 8: 44; Luke 1: 70), and has already in chapter 14 been used several times of the speaking of prophets and speaking in tongues.

4. Some have suggested that 14: 34-35, which breaks the sequence of thought between vv. 33 and 36, is a non-Pauline interpolation.¹⁰ Support for this is found in the order of some manuscripts, which place vv. 34-35 at the end of the chapter. But even if these verses are an interpolation, they are not necessarily non-Pauline, and in any case it is easier to assume that the verses have in some manuscripts been put to the end of the chapter because they break the connection of thought than that in others they were wrongly inserted in such an unlikely place. This is too short a way with dissenting verses!

5. Another interpretation is shared by several scholars who have otherwise little in common; these include Hans Lietzmann, E. B. Allo, and Marcus Dods. According to this view, some women in the church were behaving in a manner that was objectionable on two counts: in the first place, they were speaking in public meetings of the church, and in the second, they were not even wearing a covering on their heads while doing so. Rather than seem too overbearing, Paul deals with these faults separately, one in chapter 11, the other in chapter 14. Thus Dods believed that while Paul was against women addressing meetings, 'a mere prohibition preventing women from addressing public meetings will not touch the more serious transgression of female modesty involved in the discarding of the veil. He could not pass over this violent assertion of independence without separate treatment'.¹¹ Lietzmann similarly wrote: 'In chapter 11 the praying and prophesying of women is grudgingly conceded, but the veil is unconditionally insisted upon. In chapter 14 the true intention of Paul becomes apparent: the woman must be silent'.¹² In the same strain Charles Hodge remarked: 'It was Paul's manner to attend to one thing at a time'.¹³ He is here speaking of the propriety of women speaking in public unveiled, and therefore he says nothing about the propriety of their speaking in public itself. When that subject comes up, he expresses his judgment in the clearest terms, 14: 34. In here disapproving of the one, says Calvin, he does not approve of the other'.¹⁴

It may be objected to this view that it gives no answer to the question, Why should women wear coverings if they are not going to take any public part? Its supporters are bound to say that since the veil is not related to praying or prophesying in public—which is not permitted—it must be related to the status of women vis-à-vis men; this is something permanent, and therefore it would follow that the covering must be worn at all times. This is how Exclusive Brethren argue; it is more rational than the Open Brethren's custom of forbidding their women to pray or prophesy in church, but insisting that they should wear head-coverings there, a practice which is logically indefensible.

6. A final possibility is that the silence of 14: 34 should be understood in a sense which did not include praying or prophesying in church gatherings. The restriction of 14: 34 may seem at first sight to be too categorical to admit of this interpretation, but suppose the situation had been this: Paul had allowed, even encouraged, women to pray and prophesy in church under the inspiration of the Spirit, and his views on the subject were well-known. While he was away, some women had not only been praying and prophesying, but also attempting to give teaching and to join in discussion of the meaning of prophetic utterances. If 14: 34 were written against such a background it would be understood that Paul did not intend to debar women from their permitted functions in church. This is the view of J. Hering, that Paul allowed women to pray and prophesy in church, providing they were decently veiled. Women praying and prophesying would be speaking by way of inspiration, and it would be improper to silence the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through them.¹⁵ On the other hand, to ask questions and to discuss the meaning of prophetic oracles would have been to speak 'of themselves', and would be in-subordinate, being under the headship neither of their husband nor of the Holy Spirit.

J. Moffatt interpreted similarly, contrasting Paul with his younger contemporary R. Eliezer, who maintained that a woman should devote herself to her domestic duties and not even ask questions about the Torah. Paul grants Christian women the 'right to ask questions at home, and to speak under the moving of the Spirit in church, [but] pronounces it disgraceful for them to put themselves forward voluntarily in church services where the word was spoken'.¹⁶

The same view is taken by F. J. Leenhardt in his monograph on the place of women in the church according to the New Testament.¹⁷ Paul deplored the 'speaking' of the women because it betokened a faulty apprehension of the correct relationship between husband and wife. The wife was taking initiatives in such a way as to step outside her role vis-à-vis her husband; the error of such women 'stemmed from the fact that they did not realise that the man is the "head" of the woman'. Prophecy on the other hand comes from the Holy Spirit, and when He chooses a woman to speak in the congregation, there is no longer any question of submission to her husband; the only rule is 'Quench not the Spirit' (I Th. 5: 19). Leenhardt is less convincing when he suggests that Paul's real objection to women asking questions was that they disrupted the meeting and did not contribute to edification. If this were so, would not the asking of questions by *men* be equally open to abuse? Leenhardt agrees, but thinks it improbable that men would interrupt in this way—only women would; it is a 'question of temperament'! This may be true in France, but not, one suspects, in England, and as for Corinth, who knows? (Leenhardt tells of an old lady in the south of France, 'an excellent woman, a former teacher, an undoubted Christian, but fond of disputation, very hard of hearing, [who] would position herself on a chair below the pulpit, facing the congregation, and from this strategic position would

interrupt the pastor in order to harangue the audience whenever a statement of the preacher did not suit her'!)

Leon Morris is also apparently a supporter of this view: it is 'possible that Paul contemplated the possibility that a woman might occasionally prophesy in church'¹⁸ (not an extravagantly feminist way of putting it!). But even more doubtful of the possibility were Robertson and Plummer: 'Very possibly the women had urged that, if the Spirit moved them to speak, they must speak; and how could they speak if their faces were veiled? In that extreme case, *which perhaps would never occur*,¹⁹ the Apostle says that they must speak veiled. They must not outrage propriety by coming to public worship unveiled because of the bare possibility that the Spirit may compel them to speak'.²⁰ The text gives no hint of support for this implausible interpretation, the natural reading clearly being that women did in fact pray and prophesy (whether in church or in the family is beside the point here). Further, there can be no question here of the modern oriental full veil,²¹ which is due to Islamic influence,²² and therefore the problem of how a veiled woman could manage to speak (or rather, to be understood) did not arise.

One difficulty, however, in this interpretation is whether praying would in fact have been regarded as speaking by way of inspiration. Prayer is not one of the gifts of the Spirit, like prophecy or tongues, so would it have been thought that the Holy Spirit was speaking through the one who prayed? The answer may well be that (free) prayer was regarded as part of the function of the prophet and is therefore omitted from catalogues of the gifts of the Spirit; if this is so, the close connection between prayer and prophecy both in I Cor. 11 and 14, as well as in I Th. 5: 17-20, is the more easily understood.²³ We also have the phrase 'praying in the Spirit' (Eph. 6: 18; cf. Jude 20; Rom. 15: 30), and if we compare the new-found freedom of extempore Christian prayer with Jewish liturgical formulas, we may well think it not improbable that the early Christians felt their prayers to have been inspired by the Spirit. An interesting sidelight on early practice of prayer comes from the Didache, where after the formula for the eucharistic prayer we read 'But let the prophets give thanks as much as (or, in whatever terms) they wish'.²⁴

II.

In the second place, the references in I Tim. 2: 8-12 to the place of women in the church should be considered in the light of I Cor. 11: 5.

It is sometimes said that because v. 8 commands that the men (*andres*, the males, not *anthrōpoi*, human beings) are to pray in every place, women are excluded from praying in some places, presumably in church. The same conclusion is reached if, following a somewhat different interpretation, we understand 'in every place' as 'wherever you meet for public worship'.²⁵ Most scholars take this view, and comment, for example: 'Men (not women) are to pray publicly in church',²⁶ or 'The men, whose place it is to conduct the public worship'.²⁷ J. N. D. Kelly suggests interestingly that the stress laid here on the *men* may reflect a tendency in

Ephesus to follow the Corinthian custom and abandon the Jewish practice of recitation of the prayers by men alone.²⁸

Here also, however, several alternative views may be proposed.

1. Some commentators, noting that v. 9 lacks a main verb and that one needs to be supplied from v. 8, read 'I desire likewise that the women should pray in modest apparel . . .'.²⁹ This view, although it has the merit of giving full weight to the word 'likewise', leaves us with an improbable construction in v. 9: two clauses set side by side without any connective particle. Most agree that what should be supplied from v. 8 is simply 'I desire', so that the clause runs 'I desire that the women adorn themselves with comely apparel'.

2. Few would go so far as to say of v. 9 that 'it has no reference to the demeanour of women while in church',³⁰ and that the contrast is therefore not between men and women in church, but between modes of behaviour appropriate to the sexes—the men praying 'without wrath and doubting', the women clothing themselves with modesty. While it may be readily granted that these instructions about female apparel were intended to have a wider reference than church gatherings (the author does not mean to imply that outside church hours Christian women may dress as they please),³¹ the context (especially vv. 8, 11-12) plainly points to a church situation.

3. Attempts at reconciliation of these verses with I Cor. 11 may be abandoned altogether by denying the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. Their author may then be thought to have imitated, in a more rigorous form, the rule he read in I Cor. 14: 34. F. J. Leenhardt, for instance, speaks of the enormous distance that separates this formulation in I Timothy from the genuine Pauline utterance of I Corinthians: 'another spirit breathes in these pages . . . It appears to us neither biblical nor evangelical'. To make matters worse, the author supports his categorical prohibition by some 'deplorable theology', to which Paul would never have assented for a moment (for example, to make Eve primarily responsible for the Fall is in poor taste, as well as bad theology). In short, it is necessary to choose between Paul and the author of the Pastorals.³²

We may well feel that to set down Biblical contradictions side by side and to be told to take one's pick is not the way to go about interpreting the Bible; contradictions have to be treated far more subtly than that. Sometimes it will be a case of a contradiction between two authors because each is presenting one side of a two-sided truth; sometimes the contradiction will be explicable in terms of promise and fulfilment; sometimes the contradiction will only be apparent because the writers are using categories different from ours. But surely not either-or! Further, even if the Pastorals are not Pauline (and they may well not be, at least in the way we have been accustomed to think),³³ they are still Scripture, and the difficult task of interpretation is not shelved by a decision against their authenticity.³⁴

4. Perhaps the most satisfactory approach is to argue that the praying of v. 8 is not the same kind of praying as in I Cor. 11. The prayers and supplications for kings and those in authority, which are conducted with uplifted hands, seem somewhat more formal than the spontaneous Spirit-inspired prayers we know of the Corinthian church. There is in fact considerable evidence in the New Testament for the co-existence of free prayer and liturgical forms in the early church,³⁵ and it would be a not unnatural distinction to restrict the leading of the formal prayers to the men (which was also the case in the synagogue), while giving opportunity for a woman to pray (or prophesy) under the inspiration of the Spirit. It is not without significance that the specific prohibition in v. 12 is of a woman's teaching, not of praying or prophesying.

That women did in fact speak in the early church under the inspiration of the Spirit seems to be the most popular opinion among the more recent expositors, and it is indeed a view which has few difficulties and much to recommend it. But Bachmann has not been answered, and his interpretation remains a challenge to those whose sympathies incline them to the view of Héring and Leenhardt. None of the other positions, in my opinion, has a very high degree of probability.

1. Thus, for example, J. Héring writes: 'No exegete has ever doubted that the point there [11: 5] concerns women speaking in Church gatherings' (*The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* [ET] [London, 1962], p. 154).
2. P. Bachmann, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Leipzig, 1905), pp. 353ff.
3. *An die Korinther, I, II*, 2nd edn. (Tübingen, 1923), p. 76.
4. *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 1953), p. 252.
5. *op. cit.*, p. 251. So also E. B. Allo, *Saint Paul: Première Epître aux Corinthiens* 2nd ed. (Paris, 1956), p. 257.
6. *op. cit.*, p. 253.
7. *op. cit.*, pp. 251, 261.
8. *op. cit.*, p. 341.
9. The objection of D. E. H. Whitely (*The Theology of St. Paul* [Oxford, 1964], p. 224) to Grosheide's view, that 'the whole subject of I Cor. xi. 2-16 is public worship, begs the very question Grosheide is discussing.
10. So Bousset, J. Weiss, Anderson Scott (cf. Whitely, *op. cit.*, p. 224); and A. J. B. Higgins, *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. M. Black, H. H. Rowley (London, 1962) p. 1003.
11. *I Corinthians* (London, 1887), p. 255.
12. Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
13. A proposition I should not care to defend.
14. *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, 1877, r.p. 1958). pp. 208f. Cf. E. B. Allo, *op. cit.* pp. 258f.
15. Héring, *op. cit.*, p. 201.
16. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London, 1938), pp. 233f.
17. *La place de la femme dans l'église d'après le Nouveau Testament* (Montpelier, 1948) pp. 16, 34-39.
18. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London, 1958), p. 201.
19. My italics.
20. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, 1913), p. 325.
21. Cf. F. J. Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 16; H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. iii (München, 1926), p. 427.
22. B. S. Easton, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. 5, p. 3047.
23. So G. Friedrich, s.v. *prophètes*, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, vol. vi (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 854.

24. x.11.
25. W. Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh, 1924), p. 30.
26. A. R. C. Leaney, *The Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (London, 1960), p. 52.
27. E. F. Scott, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1936), p. 24.
28. *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1963), p. 65.
29. M. Dibelius, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 3rd edn. revised by H. Conzelmann (Tübingen, 1955), p. 37; D. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1957), p. 74. C. K. Barrett also supplies 'pray' as the main verb of v. 9, but apparently regards the women's prayer as silent (*The Pastoral Epistles* [Oxford, 1963], p. 55).
30. N. J. D. White, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. iv (London, 1910), p. 107.
31. B. S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1948), p. 124.
32. Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-44.
33. They may 'represent the posthumous recension of several pieces of Pauline correspondence and other fragments, together possibly with notes on his oral instruction on church order' (F. F. Bruce, *An Expanded Paraphrase of the Epistles of Paul* [Exeter, 1965], p. 287).
34. This at least is the common view; I myself think a good case can be made for expelling from the canon writings that can be shown to be inauthentic.
35. O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (ET) (London, 1953), pp. 12-14, 21-25.

IRVINGITE PENTECOSTALISM AND THE EARLY BRETHERN

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Irvingism like the Brethren movement was the product of a widespread quest for purity within the Church and for spiritual revival among Christians. There were spiritual revivals in French speaking Switzerland in the first quarter of the 19th century, there was a Roman Catholic revival at Carlshuld, north of Vienna in 1827 and 1828, and there had also been a deeply spiritual movement in Russia under the influence of the Director of St. Peter's Theological College, in 1820. Irvingism and the Brethren movement were similar to these movements in their origins. Greatly dissatisfied with contemporary Christianity, and awaiting the second coming with expectancy, there were many people with a real spiritual experience of God and his truth in Christ.

One can discern three particular strands in their outlook and each of these is very apparent in the teaching of Irvingites and Brethren alike. First, separation from the world. Second, belief in the imminent return of our Lord. Third, a high doctrine of the authority of the Church under the government and direction of the Holy Spirit rather than human forms.

The world for these people took a variety of forms, but in the final analysis, it was represented by anything that could tempt the believer to esteem the material and visible world more highly than unseen spiritual reality. Hence the comforts derived from luxuries, carpets, insurance societies and entertainment could be worldly. (Lord Congleton had