'WOMAN'S HEAD IS MAN'

A DOCTRINAL REFLECTION UPON A PAULINE TEXT

In any discussion about the status and role of women within the Christian Church, Paul's statement in I Corinthians 11.3 is bound to be a storm-centre. The text, as translated by the New English Bible, reads:

> But I wish you to understand that, while every man has Christ for his Head, woman's head is man, as Christ's Head is God.

For some this will be a proof-text against the ministry of women. Some, taking the alternative translation 'a woman's head is her husband', will associate this text with Ephesians 5.22 and find support for the view that family life is only healthy when the wife submits to her husband as spiritual head of the home. Others will find this text evidence of Paul's male chauvinism, to be rejected as a deplorable cultural limitation in the Apostle. Still others, however, will be a little embarrassed by a text which seems out of harmony with Paul's own affirmation in Galatians 3.28, that in Christ 'there is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female'.

In fact, this brief statement about 'headship' takes us right to the heart of a theology of covenant that I believe to be an essential point of perspective upon the place of women within the Christian community and the ministry. My own conviction, which it would be well to state at the outset, is that women should have exactly the same opportunities as men to use the gifts that God has undoubtedly given them within the Christian ministry, and that there is no theological case for considering men, whether as husbands or church members, as spiritual leaders of women simply by virtue of their sex. But it is certainly not my purpose here to patronise the Apostle Paul by defending him against accusations from those (rightly in my view) concerned with women's liberation. Rather, I believe that a reflection upon this text, in the light of similar New Testament materials, will provide a clue to the nature of relationships between men and women which will make for true liberation of both partners. At the same time, doctrinal reflection will raise the question about how we are to use Holy Scripture in deciding questions of ethics and life-style within the Christian community today, an issue which is bound to be important for us as Baptists with our traditionally high view of the authority of Scripture.

The incident which sparked off Paul's weighty theological statement in I Corinthians 11.1-12 seems to have been quite slight, as has often been the case in the development of Christian doctrine. The question at issue was whether the Christian women at Corinth should pray and prophesy in the assembly with their heads uncovered as the men did. We notice immediately that Paul assumes that the women *are* moved by the Spirit to participate fully in leading public worship. As C. K. Barrett puts it, 'If Paul had thought it wrong for them to do

this he would certainly not have wasted time in discussing what, in these circumstances, they should do with their heads'.(1) The point is only whether they should wear a head-covering when offering public prayer, in accordance with the Jewish practice of women wearing a veil in public. This acceptance of the women's part in worship seems, of course, to be inconsistent with Paul's apparent prohibition of the practice in I Corinthians 14.34-35. We must either conclude, with some commentators, that the latter verses are a textual interpolation from a later person, shocked at Paul's liberality,(2) or suppose with other commentators that Paul is addressing himself to a particular group of women who were disturbing worship.(3) Paul's argument in I Corinthians 11 is that the women should be veiled when speaking in the assembly, and he draws support from three appeals - first to the order of creation by God (vv.8-11), second to common-sense notions of what is 'natural' (v.13), and third to custom (v.16).

We shall need to return to all these sources upon which Paul relies, but for the moment it is the first, and its connection with the argument about 'headship' which concerns us. Paul argues that a woman should keep her head covered, because 'woman's head is man'. This may well strike us as the most substantial and permanent of Paul's arguments, and appears to have an application beyond the question of women's hats; it reappears, as we have already noted, in Ephesians 5.22 in the different context of family life. Verse 3, in its brief compass, covers a vast scope of relations within the Godhead and within humanity. It could scarcely be wider or deeper in its theological perspective. But what we must not assume is that this verse sets up a chain of subordination, as if there were a hierarchy of headship, in the form God-Christ-Man-Woman, with woman at the bottom of the pecking order. In the first place, the word 'head' itself *(kephale)* does not mean a 'ruler', and is better translated as 'source' or 'origin', like the head of a river. Paul here is drawing our attention to the story of creation in Genesis 2, in which Eve is portrayed as being formed from Adam's rib; as a matter of order of creation, the man is the 'source' of the woman (see verse 8). So too God the Father is the 'origin' of Christ the Son. Similarly, the phrase 'every man has Christ for his head' probably refers to Paul's concept that the Son is the source of all creation, in the sense that he is the pattern of wisdom according to which all things come into being (see, for example, Colossians 1.15-18).(4) Logically, then, although the male is being reminded by Paul here that he also has a head, Christ is actually head of 'Man', or humanity as a whole. There is a parallel here with the statement in Ephesians 5.23 that Christ is the head of the new humanity, the Church, which of course includes men and women. There is no basis here for the idea that a woman is only related to Christ through the man; both are 'in Christ' (v.11). Though the woman is said to reflect the 'glory' of man in verse 7, whereas man mirrors the glory of God, Paul does not deny that woman is also the *image* of God. Even if only implicitly, there is an echo here of the first account of creation in Genesis 1.28: 'in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'.

Thus, in the key verse 3, we have several sets of relationships being placed in analogy to each other: God-Christ, Christ-Humanity,

Man-Woman. Karl Barth points out that the apparently untidy order in which man, Christ, woman and God are mentioned in the text makes clear that they are not being arranged in a scale: 'they contain neither deduction from above downwards nor induction from below upwards'.(5) This is not a hierarchy at all (God-Christ-man-woman), but a comparison of sets of covenantal relationships which we are invited to reflect upon, and there is bound to be some openness about the conclusions we draw from doing this. Though Barth himself, as we shall see, concludes that there is a proper subordination of the woman, we should take note of his qualification that the meaning of this relationship cannot adequately be defined 'in theory, but in the practice of human existence as a being in encounter'.(6) What covenant means in any context cannot be fully known in advance. The fundamental principle to which Paul is pointing us is that the male-female relationship must be set in the context of relationships within God and within the partnership between God and the world. As Christian believers, we need not be restricted in this reflection by what Paul himself understood by, for example, the statement that 'God is the origin of Christ'. Our understanding of the being of God as a Trinitarian community of 'persons' is the result of several centuries of later thought by the Christian church, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and there is no reason why we should deprive ourselves of those insights when we reflect upon the analogy between the human male-female relationship and the divine Father-Son relationship. While we must begin with careful New Testament scholarship, discovering what the Apostle actually meant to say, this is not the end of the story. We must ask what meaning this has for us, in our time; though 'our' meaning should not contradict Paul's intention, it may well add new dimensions.

When we place the sets of relationships (God-Christ, Christ-Humanity, Christ-Church, Man-Woman) side by side, it becomes clear that a basic feature of them all is the difference of function between the partners. Each partner has his or her own distinctive contribution to the relationship; creator cannot be confused with creature, nor can the divine Father and Son simply be regarded as different names for a general divine essence. This suggests that in the male-female covenant, there is also a particular contribution made by each sex which cannot simply be replaced by the other. The differences must not be obliterated in belief about fundamental equality in Christ; the 'otherness' of male to female (D. H. Lawrence in his novels often called it 'strangeness') must be respected and allowed for as a factor that enriches the relationship. Here Christian theology has a contribution to make to a debate in the feminist movement as to whether women and men should simply be regarded as one species of 'human beings' who happed to have different sexual organs, or whether there are distinctive female qualities which can be idenitified and which male society neglects at its peril. This is a question to which I intend to return. However, I suspect that the assertion of differing functions will be common ground among people who take widely differing views about the submission of women to men. The critical question for our present discussion is whether, in the case of the male-female partnership, the different functions include superordination and subordination respectively.

There is a widespread conviction that while Christian men and women share an equal status and honour in Christ, the particular function of women (and especially wives) is to submit to the spiritual leadership of men. The fact, it is proposed, that the man takes the initiative and has the final say in decisions in the family does not mean that the woman is any less equal, or that the man is superior in any way. Or, it is urged, the fact that the man alone should be a minister of word and sacrament in the Church does not make the pastoral ministry of women of any less value. It is simply a matter of function as distributed by God. As Barth puts it, accepting this approach, 'What place is there to speak of little or much? There is assigned to each that which is helpful and right and worthy'.(7) Now, there is no doubt that this view can be advanced in a sensitive way, which aims at removing any element of domination from the 'headship' of the man, and which stresses the place of sacrificial love on both sides. Proponents willingly underline, for example, the statements of the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 11 and elsewhere about the mutuality and inter-dependency of functions between man and woman. Barth finds the focal verse in I Corinthians 11.1-13 to be: 'neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord' (verse 11). Similar is 7.4-5; 'The wife cannot claim her body as her own; it is her husband's. Equally, the husband cannot claim his body as his own; it is his wife's'. The headline for the section about the submission of wives to husbands in Ephesians 5 is actually the command to them both, 'be subject *to one another* out of reverence for Christ'(v.21).

Even more profoundly, the advocates of the 'submission in equality' approach draw out conclusions from the parallel sets of relationships to which our key text about 'origins' (I Cor.11.3) directs our attention. Once again, the most sensitive exegete here is Karl Barth, who stresses many times that these covenantal relationships show that the place of submission is one of honour and glory. If the role of the woman is compared to that of Christ in his obedience and humility before his Father ('Christ's head is God'), then we find that in Christ exaltation and lowliness are in harmony, not in contradiction. He is most the Lord *in* his service, most majestic in his humility, most divine in his suffering humanity. If we want to know what divine nature is really like, we look at the cross. Moreover, since male and female are 'in Christ', their respective functions of leadership and submission are not theirs at all but Christ's; 'he is the sum of all subordination and stands relatively much lower than woman under man'.(8) Woman only represents the submission of Christ, as the man only represents his superordination: their functions are 'the affair of Christ', and they have equal honour (and the same lack of their *own* honour) in being assigned these roles. When we turn to the analogy between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5.22-23), then we find Barth stressing that the husband must love his wife with the same self-giving love as Christ loved the church; this is what being 'the bearer of primary responsibility' in the relationship means - not oppressing the other, but taking the way of the cross. This is a familiar point with many exegetes, but Barth adds a less familiar insight about the role of the wife. If she is being compared with the church whom Christ loves, then she actually has the honour of representing the Christian community. The 'advantage

of the wife, her birthright' is that she, not the man, attests the reality of the church as it listens to Christ. If the wife fulfils her function in being submissive to her husband, then

> the wife is not less but greater than her husband in the community. She is not the second but the first. In a qualified sense she is the community. The husband has no option but to order himself by the wife as she is subordinate in this way.(9)

I have quoted Karl Barth as an example of the extent to which the view of 'submissive but equal' can be taken. It is hard to see how it could be stated better. But I have to say that I am left deeply uneasy. For all the stress upon the honour of the woman in attesting the humility of Christ and representing the community, we are left asking whether she is truly free if she must always play this role. Is it really necessary to make submission a female function? Is there not more than a hint of male condescension in this kind of exegesis, trying to persuade the woman that her subordination is really all for the best?(10) Might we not place far more emphasis upon Paul's statements of inter-dependency, mutual submission and equality between the sexes? Actually, there are already some elements in our passage, I Corinthians 11, that move us in this direction. For we must not neglect the context of verse 3, the query about head-covering that sparked the theological statement off, and which contains some important clues to Paul's intention.

It is assumed by many commentators that Paul insists upon the woman's covering her head as a sign of the man's (or her husband's) headship over her. Curiously, she is commanded to wear an 'authority'(v.10) on her head, rather than the expected and implied word 'veil', and the authority is usually understood as belonging to the man. This interpretation supports the idea of the subordination of the woman in God's creative order, and the angels as the guardian of that order are portrayed as being anxious to see it preserved. For this reason the woman wears a covering 'because of the angels'. However, this conventional exegesis has recently been boldly challenged by a number of commentators, among them M. D. Hooker, C. K. Barrett and F. F. Bruce.(11) They can only understand the curious reference to wearing 'authority' as indicating the new authority of the woman herself to share in worship. While the woman is the glory of man according to the old creation, in the sense that she derives her being from him and so is subordinate to him, yet 'it is not her role in Christ, in whom such distinctions are removed' (C. K. Barrett).(12) The woman must wear a veil as the token of her own authority to pray and prophesy, and as a sign to the guardians of the order of creation (the angels) that she has the right to do what she now does in Christ. This interpretation fits in well with Paul's preceding assertion that a woman would bring shame on herself by praying bareheaded, since in the Adamic creation she reflects the glory of man; in Christian worship she effaces the man's glory by covering her head, so that God alone receives glory. While this has often been understood as supporting the superordination of man (only he is allowed to reflect God's glory directly), it can also be understood as underlining the woman's own new authority (she no

longer functions as a reflection of man's glory).

If we accept this line of interpretation, this still leaves us with the question as to how far the Apostle Paul was prepared to go in declaring the removal of woman's submission to man. The commentators who take this view limit it, for the most part, to the participation of women in worship. They presume that Paul would maintain the context of the Adamic creation in terms of a general submission of women (and wives) in accord with the principle of 'woman's head is man'. A more far-reaching application of the view of woman's new authority would be difficult to reconcile with Paul's statements in Ephesians 5.22 and Colossians 3.18 (if indeed these letters are directly Pauline), though it would be consistent with the sweeping declaration in Galatians 3.28. What we can surely say is that we can detect a new spirit in Paul's argument, bursting open old forms of thought with the new life of Christ. Even if he is only applying the new authority of women to the situation of worship, this is bound to create tensions with the old social order that we, in our time, might see resolved in a total application of Paul's insight. We are even more encouraged to take this path when we see the esteem in which Paul himself held the ministry, and indeed the leadership, of women within the Christian community (see, for example, Romans 15.1-7, with the prominent place given to Phoebe, Prisca and Mary).

This exegetical point prompts us to a general point of principle about the use of Scripture in determining Christian life. We should make it our aim so deeply to understand the response of the biblical writers to God's will in their time, that we are able to make our response in ours. God's demand upon our lives, which is his eternal purpose for human life, is bound to come to us as commands in specific circumstances. But we must take care not simply to identify the concrete form of the demand (the command) in one time and place with the eternal demand. The eternal 'principle' of God's relationship with humankind is covenant, a relationship of partnership set up by God's own loving desire. The covenant itself is prior to all expressions of it as covenant laws, which are necessarily bounded by time, space and culture. God's eternal purpose *could* only apply in a specific way to specific people if it *did* limit and accommodate itself to us in utter divine humility. But we shall only find the divine 'Word' which creates and sustains human relationships now by listening to the way that people heard that Word in their time, and bore witness to it. The common factor in their response and ours, in the way they heard the demand and the way we hear it, is the eternal purpose of God for divine-human community that lies behind them.

Thus the belief of Paul about 'headship' or 'origins' in I Corinthians 11.3 clearly directs us to understand male-female relationships in the light both of God's covenant with the world, and of his own relationships within his Being which (following Karl Barth) we may dare to call a 'covenant' between the Father and the Son in the love of the Spirit. We may trace through these analogies of relationship a principle that different functions are exercised by the covenant partners, but this is bound to be worked out in different ways at different times, and cannot be contained in any system of rules. Paul's conclusion that the different functions in male-female

relationships include the distinction between 'headship' and 'submitting' is, we may say, due to the cultural context of his time. He has so modified the idea in the light of the love of Christ and the new creation in Christ, that we may judge the kind of 'submission' of which he speaks to be highly liberating for women and wives in his own social world. This would be even more the case if we were to accept the exegesis of I Corinthians 11 which recognises a new authority for woman in Christ, but would still be true without it. God's demand, we may say, took the form at that time of a sensitive submission of wife to husband, but in our own world God's demand for liberating love will take a form that cannot properly be called 'submission'. It will be a more extensive application of the principle of inter-dependency which Paul himself gives us.

The need to penetrate in this way to the principle behind the image of 'headship' is made clear by the argument of Paul himself in I Corinthians 11. He supports his instruction about head-covering not only by the theological argument we have been considering, but also by an appeal to nature and to custom. He assumes it to be self-evident that his readers will answer 'yes' to the question, 'Does not nature itself teach you that while flowing locks disgrace a man, they are a woman's glory?' But the common-sense reaction to this question will vary widely from culture to culture, and a modern response would probably be 'no' (judging by the variety of hairstyles on offer in our age). Nor could Paul today hope to squash resistance by simply pointing out that no other Christian congregation he knew allowed its women to be bare-headed. Even modern Christians who take a strong view of the subordination of women are likely to dismiss the command for head-covering as a cultural ornament that need not be complied with. They will tend to view it as a culturally conditioned form of what *they* would regard as the 'eternal principle', that of submission of the woman to the headship of the man. But once we have started down this road of dispensing with cultural forms, it is open to ask whether the 'eternal principle' has in fact been correctly identified. As I have been arguing, the possibility arises that the principle lies behind the specific form of 'headship', in the fundamental covenant of distinct partners.

Indeed, we notice that Paul's argument about woman as reflecting the 'glory' of man depends upon following the creation narrative in Genesis 2, where Adam is created directly by God and Eve only indirectly from man as his 'help-mate'. This gives Paul the order of 'origin' between male and female, even if he is willing to challenge this old order from the stance of the new creation. But Paul could not have argued this from the creation narrative in Genesis 1.27-28: 'So God created man in his own image, male and female created he them'. Far from a sequence of sexuality, there was a Rabbinic tradition that this verse described the initial creation of human beings as androgynous (dual in sexuality), an idea that has persisted in such Christian thinkers and artists as Jacob Boehme, William Law and William Blake. Paul, as we have seen, does supply an implicit echo of the Genesis 1.28 account in verse 7 here, when he refrains from calling woman the image of man. We may say, then, that understanding the covenantal relationship between man and woman to take the form of the 'headship' of the man, Paul naturally finds most

illumination in the second account of creation in the book of Genesis. This was how scripture 'spoke to him' in his culture. We find that the author of I Timothy in his time also relied strongly upon Genesis 2, and felt it necessary to repeat and indeed to strengthen Paul's own approach to the submission of women in Christian love (I Timothy 2.11-12). In our time, we are likely to read chapter 2 of Genesis in the light of chapter 1, rather than the other way around, so underlining Paul's own words that 'woman is as essential to man as man to woman... and God is the *source* of all' (v.12).

The words of the Apostle Paul that 'woman's head is man', thus point us beyond that phrase, liberating in its own time, to the eternal principle of covenant which is displayed in the relationship between the divine Father and Son, in the partnership between God and the world, and in relations between the sexes. These are analogies upon which we are bidden to reflect by Scripture, though since they *are* analogies we must not expect exact correspondences. For instance, we notice an overlap between the terms of the analogies in Barth's presentation of the humble obedience of Christ, which is the centre point of his whole theology. In the comparison of husband and wife with Christ and his church, it is supposedly the wife who is to be submissive, representing the community; but, in dealing with the analogy of God as the head of Christ, Barth rightly points out that there is no submission as utter and complete as that of Christ himself. No one else has been so abased. So from the perspective of one analogy it is the husband who is to represent the sacrificial and humble love of Christ, while from another it is the wife. Taken against this background, the distinction between the 'submission' of the wife and the 'love' of the husband in Ephesians 5 seems to have evaporated. It has been swallowed up in the glory and the humility of the cross. It is then an elusive task to try, as Barth does, to allot the characteristics of Christ's superordination and subordination, lordship and service, divinity and humanity, to man and woman respectively. Barth asserts that 'His is the place of man, and his is the place of woman' (13), but the very elusiveness of this 'placing' ought perhaps to warn us that while human beings can bear the image of Christ as true humanity, his attributes cannot be exclusively distributed between the sexes. This might in fact well lead us to a view of an overlap of true male and female characteristics in men and women, a suggestion to which I shall return.

An exact correspondence of 'origins' also cannot be envisaged between God and Christ on the one hand, and man and woman on the other. While Paul no doubt thought of Christ as having his source in God in the sense of God's sending him forth as his agent in creation and redemption (like the Old Testament picture of the Wisdom of God), from the viewpoint of developed Trinitarian theology we will want to speak of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, and the Father as the 'fount' of the Godhead. As Barth puts it, it is the freedom of God to choose eternally to be God in three-fold 'repetition' of the divine 'I', in the modes of Son and Spirit as well as Father(14). Even if we accepted the story in Genesis 2 as a literal account of the generation of woman from man, it is now the case (as

Paul points out), that 'it is through woman that man now comes to be'. There is a reciprocity of origins here that cannot be true of relations within the Godhead, where the Father always sends the Son, and the Son is always sent. No exact comparison can then be made between God and man, Christ and woman. But talk of 'headship' points to a quality of humility and obedience within the divine Being Itself; the humble service of Christ in the cross tells us something which must be eternally true of the inner being of God – humility is in fact a divine quality. Human wisdom, imagining what a God ought to be like, will construct a dominating and immutable God, a benevolent despot. But in his 'foolishness' (I Cor.1.25) God reveals what he actually chooses to be, a God who freely limits and lowers himself for the sake of fellowship with his creation.

The biblical picture of a God who desires fellowship and partnership with his creatures, allowing them the true freedom to make their own contribution to his enterprise of creation, should cause us to re-think whether the word 'submission' is really the best one for the relation of the world to God. The insistence upon the submission of women (and wives) to men often stems from a hierarchical view of the cosmos, in which there is a chain of domination beginning with God and ending with woman (or perhaps children). But God in his divine humility does not coerce his creatures; as Old Testament prophets such as Hosea and Jeremiah make clear, God suffers pain when his people are disobedient, rejecting his loving persuasion towards fulness of life. The insight that there is a humility with God, and a filial obedience which makes the Son the pattern of true humanity, also however has another application to the male-female relationship.

From the Trinitarian viewpoint of belief not in three gods but One Personality, we must develop some such concept as 'perichoresis', or the indwelling of each Person in the other. So, again using Barth's useful terms, while the Son is the 'elected God' because he is chosen to be identified with the man Jesus, he freely shares in that choice and so can also be called the 'electing God'.(15) A Trinitarian concept of God envisages the three 'persons' as mutually and completely participating in each other in intimate relationships, so that God is one complex Personality in three distinct modes of being. A recent Roman Catholic theologian, Heribert Mühlen, has drawn the analogy here with human personal relationships, perceiving that it is only when one person recognises the difference of another from himself that closer communion is achieved. So, he concludes, within the Trinitarian community of God,

> The distinction of the divine persons ... is so great that it could not be conceived of as greater, while their unity is so intensive that it could not be conceived of as more intense.(16)

This Trinitarian doctrine of God provides us with a theological basis for understanding the relationship between male and female, following the clue that it is when the difference of function between them is recognised that the community between them is most whole. In the light of the analogy with the diversity in God's being, Christian

theology may expect to find some 'gender differences' in human existence, or distinct characteristics of personality and approach to life that can be called 'male' and 'female', beyond the basic biological differences. Theologians ought, however, to be open and questing in discovering *what* these qualities are, and *how* they are to be connected with the particular functions of men and women in personal and social spheres. At the same time, the kind of analogy Paul draws with the Father-Son relationship may also lead us to look for a 'perichoresis' in human sexuality, a blend of male and female characteristics in both man and woman, with a difference only in emphasis. It is, of course, well established that in their physical make-up, males and females possess genetic materials of both sexes. While no straight line of connection should be drawn from this biological fact to an overlap of personal and social functions (as we shall see), such a blend is at least consistent with biology. The sharing of 'gender' characteristics would also be in a metaphorical, though not in a literal, accord with the Rabbinic view of androgyny in the original creation of Genesis 1.28, and it would fit in with Paul's strong belief about the reality of 'one flesh' in marriage. It is, however, clear that Paul is opposed to the kind of literal androgyny that was being fostered among gnostic groups, who believed the (biological) sexual differences to have been abolished in the new age with the result that they took a negative view of procreation and fertility. The need to oppose this a-sexuality may well have led Paul to the emphases he makes in I Corinthians 11.

As I indicated earlier, the Pauline theology expressed in I Corinthians 11.3 will give support to that dimension of the feminist movement which *does* find distinctively feminine characteristics in human life, and which laments their being overlooked in a male-dominated world. There is however a strong opinion, especially (but not exclusively) among radical feminists, that all so-called 'feminine' aspects of the human personality are gender roles created by a patriarchal culture, and are part of the oppression of women by men. They insist that the only differences between men and women are biological, or 'reproductive role specialisation'.(17) It is men who have turned sexual differences into gender differences through social stereotyping, in order to subordinate women and limit their opportunities ('The woman's role is in the home'). However, as Elaine Storkey points out, there is often a 'double-take' in feminist attitudes here,(18) where gender differences are in principle denied, but at the same time a woman-centred culture is recommended in which distinctive qualities can flourish. In this alternative to male society, mutual creativity is to be fostered rather than competitiveness, intuition is to supplement (but not replace) analytical thinking, and there is to be a reconciling spirit in place of possessiveness.

If these admirable qualities emerge from a society centred upon women, is it not being implied that they are somehow 'womanlike'? We might detect something of this ambiguity of approach in the work of the New Testament scholar and feminist, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her comments on I Corinthians 11. Denying gender differences as oppressive stereotypes, she opts for a translation of I Corinthians 11.11 as 'In the Lord woman is not different from man'. In her view, Paul is describing a hierarchy of source between God, Christ, man

and woman simply in order to find an argument against the loosening of hair, which was typical of orgiastic behaviour in worship; he never intended thereby to promote symbolic or gender differences between the sexes.(19) My own argument, incidentally, has been rather the reverse on this point - that Paul *is* propounding gender differences, but *not* a hierarchy. Finally, however, in her vision of a feminist spirituality for today, Schüssler Fiorenza commends the forming of a liberating '*ekklesia* of women', in which God can be worshipped in the images of 'female human existence and language', and which lives by the power of 'life-giving Sophia-Spirit', or divine wisdom symbolized in female form.(20)

In drawing attention to this ambiguity I am not presuming to identify a self-contradiction in feminist theology at this point. Rather, it alerts us to a reality in sexual existence that is obviously very hard to express, and which we might make different attempts at grasping. Of course, we must recognise that gender stereotyping has been a powerful factor in limiting woman; a vivid example is the 'submissive but equal' argument I have been concerned to oppose here. Any idea of distinctively feminine attributes must not serve to define a range of jobs and professions 'suitable' for women, but rather to identify the distinctive contributions of women within all fields of human endeavour, including the ministry of the church. Nor would genuine gender differences necessarily stem from genetic factors alone; we might find a complex mixture of biological factors *and* of healthy social roles that women play because of their sex, especially motherhood. Women's groups have increasingly been involved in the peace movement, believing they have a particular insight as women and mothers into the priority of peace and the need for human beings to live in harmony with their natural environment. Feminist theologians have rightly emphasised aspects of 'motherhood' in God, alerting us to the feminine images for God in the Bible, particularly with reference to the Person of the Holy Spirit.(21) We ought to observe from this present study that a particular view of 'fatherhood' against which feminist theologians have reacted, a dominating monarchic figure, is certainly not implied in Paul's analogies of human-divine relationships.

I have tentatively suggested that a reflection upon the analogy between divine and human relationships might well lead us to the view that every person, man or woman, possesses a whole range of male and female characteristics which is more than a biological factor. This spectrum of gender, which might be metaphorically called 'androgyny', would be the context within which any genuine gender differences should be placed. The task of women's movements might then be to get men to recognise and employ their feminine aspects that have lain dormant, and to achieve this the women may themselves need to use an aggressiveness often labelled 'male'. For instance, in a recent interview on BBC Radio Terry Waite, the special envoy of the Archbishop of Canterbury, agreed with the woman interviewer that he had been successful in his missions to get hostages released because he took an approach that might usually be dubbed 'feminine'; he also acknowledged that feminine characteristics had had to be awakened in him by groups whose outlook he had at first found disturbing.(22) However, while some feminists have found the metaphor of

'androgyny' (or gender-sharing) a useful concept, others have been highly suspicious of it as a concealed form of gender stereotyping. As the theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether, points out, this is especially the case when the conclusion is drawn that men and women should organise their identity around a core of male and female characteristics respectively.(23)

It seems, as Ruether maintains, an elusive and potentially divisive enterprise to label some psychic capacities as male and others as female, even if they are blended in each sex. However, the difficulties do not necessarily invalidate the idea of gender differences altogether. Ruether herself suggests that 'women are right when they instinctively feel they have a specifically female way of developing their persons that is different from men's'.(24) Her explanation of this is that there is a female way of integrating the different elements of the personality, but that the elements themselves are not to be differentiated as male/female. However, as soon as we begin describing this 'feminine way' we surely end up with a distinctive set of characteristics once again, unless this feminine way is simply 'success' against male 'failure' to achieve wholeness of personality. Ruether herself seems to suggest the latter, seeing men as fostering a basic divisiveness in personal life and in society.(25) This tends, however, towards the kind of radical separatism from the whole male way of life that we find in the work of Mary Daly, and which Ruether herself criciticises as reversing the male heirarchicalism, 'making woman normative humanity and males 'defective' members of the human species'.(26) We also notice that the qualities often named as those fostered by women's communes are strikingly similar to the patient, self-giving and reconciling love that Paul believes to be the work of the Spirit in all believers (I Corinthians 13).

Rosemary Ruether's insight about a 'feminine way' points us towards a more complex kind of gender-difference and gender-sharing. We might perhaps think of a range of characteristics in different proportions in men and women, and also a blend of different ways of integrating these elements. Distinctive male and female functions will lie somewhere, mysteriously, in the midst of these factors. Though it will be very hard to give an exact definition of them, the difference can (as Ruether herself says) be 'felt'. The important thing is not to make a theoretical analysis of the male/female contributions, but to allow both to be worked out in practice. It is only when women fully participate in all areas of human work and Christian ministry, and only when men participate as fully as possible in what is usually regarded as 'women's work', that these distinct contributions can emerge. Thus a belief in the gender differences which are presupposed in Paul's talk of 'headship' *must* lead to full equality of women in work and service. Only then shall we begin to discover what these distinct functions *are* which enrich human relationships and community. Perhaps then we shall be able to talk about them more accurately, or perhaps then there will be no need for talk at all.

I do not think, therefore, that it will help us today to enforce Paul's statement that 'woman's head is man' as any kind of governing principle. But we *do* need to gain an understanding of the covenant

in divine and human relations that lies behind Paul's statement of 'headship'. In such a covenant, the partners each have their distinctive contribution to make, and yet in their mutual indwelling they share their functions and characteristics with each other. Since the saying in I Corinthians 11.3 summons us to reflect upon this kind of covenant, we cannot do without it. It stands as a sign-post to the meaning of the declaration that 'In Christ there is neither male nor female'.

NOTES

1 C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, A. & C. Black, London, 1968, p.250.

2 The disturbance in the syntax offers some evidence for the theory of interpolation. This view is preferred by Barrett, op.cit., p.333.

3 This view is preferred by F. F. Bruce, in his commentary *1 and 2 Corinthians, New Century Bible*, Oliphants, London, 1971, p.135; he suggests that these particular women were debating 'too ardently'. Other commentators translate the verb *lalein* as 'chatter'.

4 So Barrett, op.cit., p.249.

5 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol.III, Part 2; as edited and translated in S. D. McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1981, p.181.

6 Barth, op.cit., p.157.

7 Ibid., p.181.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p.184.

10 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza identifies this kind of argument as gender stereotyping by a male culture; see her book *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, SCM Press, London, 1983, p.207. There is an explicit criticism of Karl Barth on this point by Joan Arnold Romero, 'The Protestant Principle', in *Religion and Sexism. Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1974, pp.328-329.

11 The formative study was by Morna D. Hooker, 'Authority on Her Head. An Examination of 1 Cor. XI.10' , *New Testament Studies* 10, 1963-4, pp.410-416; in agreement are Barrett, op.cit., pp.253-255, Bruce, op.cit., p.106. The same point is made by E. Schüssler Fiorenza, op.cit., p.230.

12 Barrett, op.cit., p.253.

13 Barth, op.cit., p.184.

14 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Transl. and Ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1936-77, Vol.I, Part 1, 2nd edn., 1975, pp.350-1.

15 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol.II, Part 1, p.103.

16 Heribert Mühlen, *Die Veränderlichkeit Gottes als Horizont einer zukünftigen Christologie*, Aschendorf, Münster, 1969, p.26. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, transl. D. Guder, T.& T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1983, p.318: 'Lovers are always alien to themselves and yet, in coming close to each other, they come close to themselves in a new way'.

17 See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk. Towards a*

Feminist Theology, SCM Press, London, 1983, p.111.

18 Elaine Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism*, Third Way Books, SPCK, London, 1985, p.104 cf.p.109.

19 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, op.cit., pp.229-30.

20 Ibid., pp.346, 350.

21 See *The Motherhood of God. A Report by a Study Group appointed by the Women's Guild and the Panel on Doctrine on the invitation of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, ed. Alan E. Lewis, Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1984, pp.31-43. Also see Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Motherhood and God*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1984, pp.128-139.

22 Terry Waite in conversation with Rosemary Harthill, broadcast week beginning 28 April 1986.

23 Ruether, op.cit., p.111.

24 Ibid., p.113.

25 Ibid., p.112: 'Androgyny, then, is basically a male and not a female problem. Females do not need to adopt this concept to express their quest for psychic wholeness'.

26 Ibid., p.231. See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1973; Daly has replaced the 'male' image of God with the symbol of an Earth Mother, linking the feminine and nature.

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REVIEW

50 Anos de Historia Bautista en Nicouragua by Dr A. Parajon and the Revd A. Ruiz. 243 pp. Obtainable from C.B.N., Apourtado 2593, Managua, Nicaragua, C.A.

Those interested in the present situation in Nicaragua, and able to follow the Spanish, will find this a useful volume. Here you will find the story of the English-speaking congregations of the Atlantic Coast (and Corn Island in particular) that date back to 1852 and which have developed with some help from Jamaica. Here too is the story of the widely esteemed Eleanour Blackmore: 'Ia gran apostol' from a church in Chester who began work on the Pacific Coast in 1903 and who, after the comity agreement in Panama in 1916, was employed by the North American Baptists' Home Mission Board. That the work was seen as part of Home rather than Foreign Mission was itself significant. The story is of the establishment of churches, the birth of the Convention in 1936 and the growth of institutions which today include a Seminary, a Secondary School, a University-Polytechnic, a Hospital, an Old People's Home and a medical agency, called Provadenic.

JOHN BRIGGS