

*Priesthood*  
**BIBLICAL STUDIES**

**S. PAUL ON  
THE MINISTRY  
OF WOMEN**

LONDON GUILDHALL UNIVERSITY  
FAWCETT LIBRARY

W. J.  
SPARROW SIMPSON

227.  
082  
6214

P

PAMPHLET



CITY OF LONDON POLYTECHNIC  
FAWCETT COLLECTION

Calcutta House  
Old Castle Street  
London E1 7NT

3900047332✓

~~26214~~

(P) 227.0826214

Presented by  
Emil Oberholzer

17-6-69

BIBLICAL STUDIES

S. PAUL ON THE  
MINISTRY OF WOMEN

BY

W. J. SPARROW SIMPSON, D.D.

LONDON:  
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING  
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE  
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN CO.

1920



BY THE REV. CANON  
W. J. SPARROW SIMPSON, D.D.

---

The Letters of St. Augustine. (Hand-  
books of Christian Literature.) 10s. net.

Reconciliation between God and Man.  
3s. net.

French Catholics in the Nineteenth  
Century. (Studies in Church History.)  
5s. net.

Christ's Perpetual Intercession. 4d. net.

Revision of the Prayer of Consecration.  
4d. net.

Noneonformists in Anglican Pulpits.  
4d. net.

S. Paul on the Ministry of Women.  
6d. net.

The Ordination of St. Paul. 6d. net.

The Diocesan Synod. 1s. 3d. net.

---

LONDON: S. P. C. K.

## S. PAUL ON THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

IF the problem whether women may be constituted preachers to the mixed congregation is to be rightly decided, the decision must be based on Christian principles. These principles must be studied in Scripture, and especially in the teaching of S. Paul, because he is the chief exponent of this subject. Attention must be fixed on the two main passages in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where the apostle regulates the demeanour of women in the assemblies of the Church. The two passages are 1 Cor. xi. 5 and 1 Cor. xiv. 33, and the verses following.

In the former place the apostle lays down the dogmatic principles that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man" (verse 3). On the basis of this principle he rules that "every man praying or prophesying with his head covered dishonoureth his head. But every woman



praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoureth her head."

The second passage occurs in the fourteenth chapter. Here S. Paul says:—

"Let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church."

These are the two passages. The question is, What is their interpretation?

## I

We may place first what may be called *the feminist interpretation*, that is, the exposition which makes S. Paul an advocate of women preachers in public worship.

1. It is asserted that when S. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. xi., "every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoureth her head," he tacitly gave permission that women should preach to the general congregation. For "prophesying," it is said, means preaching and giving instruction. And the preaching which S. Paul contemplates

is evidently to take place in the public worship of the Christian Church.

And all that the apostle concerns himself to do about this preaching by women is to regulate its conditions. He only insists that the woman must be veiled. He cannot therefore have intended to forbid her to preach. For you do not regulate the conditions of doing something which you intend altogether to forbid. Consequently this regulation of the conditions under which women were to prophesy involves a tacit permission that they might preach. So far, then, from forbidding a woman to preach, the apostle is actually in favour of the Women's Movement.

2. But then there is the second passage to be dealt with. In 1 Cor. xiv. 34 the apostle says: "Let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak."

It is admitted that this appears at first sight very much like an absolute prohibition against women preaching. And the feminist expositors are divided as to the solution of this difficulty.

(1) Some assure us that this second passage is an *interpolation*. It is a prohibition which S. Paul never wrote. It has crept in



unawares. It has no apostolic authority. It is not genuine. If 1 Tim. ii. 12, "I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man," be quoted in support, the quotation is valueless, because the Pastoral Epistles are not genuine. Consequently we may ignore this second passage altogether.

(2) Others are not prepared to go as far as this. They are unable to dismiss the passage quite so easily. No, they say, it is not an interpolation. It is genuine. There is no doubt that the apostle wrote it. But the fact is that even the wisest of men are not always wise. It is a *contradiction*.

Either the idea of forbidding the practice had not occurred to him when he wrote the earlier passage, or he forgot what he had written, or he changed his mind in the course of writing the letter, and withdrew what must be called the tacit approval of the earlier passage, leaving it all the while unerasd, or he dictated his letter to his secretary and omitted to revise what he had written.

(3) Others, again, are not satisfied with this. It is not a contradiction. But in this second passage S. Paul has been *misunderstood*. What S. Paul forbids is not preaching, but talking, interrupting, chattering in church:

a failing to which Corinthian women are supposed to have been particularly addicted.

## II

Now, there are obvious criticisms to be made on this feminist interpretation.

1. Consider this second passage a little more. "Let the women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak."

(1) Has S. Paul's intention been entirely *misunderstood*? Did he really refer to nothing more than interruptions and chattering? But this is contrary to the Biblical use of the word translated "speak." When the Epistle to the Hebrews declares that God, "having spoken in the prophets" hath "spoken unto us in His Son,"\* it is evident that the meaning is instruct or teach. Or when our Lord declared: "the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day,"† it is clear that the meaning is not mere talking but teaching. Then the Biblical use of the word "speak" does not allow of its restriction to superficial talk or chattering. Moreover,

\* Heb. i. 1.

† S. John xii. 48.



talking in church is not a failing confined to women.

(2) Then as to the theory that the passage is an *interpolation*. It might seem enough to say that no MS. omits the passage. Moreover, it is not proved that the Pastoral Epistles are not genuine. In any case the words are part of the Canon of the New Testament. The Church must have thought that their contents expressed the apostolic belief.

(3) Then as to the opinion that this second passage is a *contradiction* to the first.

Before this opinion can be accepted there are at least two points which deserve to be considered. One is that S. Paul is admittedly one of the most acutely logical and penetrating minds that Christendom has ever known. It is therefore natural to pause before asserting his inconsistency. The other point is that the asserted contradiction depends on the interpretation which his former words receive. There is more than one interpretation of the passage about women prophesying. It is therefore reasonable to give the apostle the benefit of the doubt.

2. Let us therefore consider what these other explanations are of the passage about women praying and prophesying.

(1) Some say that it refers only to

instruction given by women in private or sectional gatherings, probably composed of women, and not to the public assemblies of the Church.

(2) Others, again, are persuaded that here S. Paul is referring to a case which he is convinced ought never to occur, and which he intends to condemn, after he has discussed the whole subject and reduced it to just principles, and which indeed he does actually condemn in the later passage in the fourteenth chapter.

Now it is clear that none of these interpretations of the passage concerning women prophesying contradicts the apparent meaning of the passage concerning women keeping silence. For whether the former passage refers to giving instruction only in sectional gatherings of women, or to a condition of things which, in S. Paul's opinion, ought never to occur; in either case it is perfectly consistent with a prohibition against women preaching in the mixed assemblies of the Church. No contradiction between the two passages need exist.

It should further be remarked that the feminist explanation of S. Paul's words sets to work in a very questionable way. What it does is this. It first takes the passage about women prophesying as being obvious and



clear. Having assumed that there can be no doubt about the meaning, it then proceeds to bring into harmony with it the passage about women keeping silence. But this method offends against a very important principle of interpretation. The principle is that passages which are obscure should be explained by passages which are plain. Now, considering that the passage about women keeping silence in the churches is clear and not easily mistaken (as the general concurrence of the vast majority of expositors shows), whereas the passage about women prophesying is much more uncertain and disputed; to interpret the former by the aid of the latter is to explain the obvious by means of the obscure.

### III

Setting, then, this interpretation aside, we come to what may on the whole be fairly called *the traditional interpretation*.

First, with regard to *the earlier passages* in 1 Cor. xi., let us agree that prophesying is the same thing as preaching.

And further, let us agree that the passage refers to public instruction of the mixed

congregation by women; since it is not explicitly restricted to sectional meetings. Then certainly S. Paul does not condemn this practice here. But it does not follow that he tacitly approves. For it may well be true that the case is one which the apostle considers ought not to happen at all, but that he withholds a condemnation of it, because he prefers first to discuss the matter thoroughly, and to state the fundamental principles upon which his decision is based, thereby to put his readers in possession of his reasons, and to bring them to a frame of mind more favourable to securing their obedience. This temporary withholding of a condemnation may be the diplomatic procedure of a great mind which is well acquainted with the qualities of ordinary human nature, and sees instinctively that his readers must be led and cannot be driven.

That this sort of procedure is one of S. Paul's own methods is unquestionable. It has been long ago pointed out by commentators of the first rank that S. Paul does precisely this very thing elsewhere in this same Epistle.

Consider then what the situation is against which S. Paul contends.

It is that the women, or some of them, in the Church at Corinth, were overwhelmed by



a flood of new and most impressive Christian ideas concerning the spiritual equality of the sexes. They are all one in Christ. There is neither male nor female. These splendid illuminating ideas had taken such strong possession of their imaginations that they rushed to the conclusion that spiritual equality involved identity of function. They attempted, therefore, to carry this into effect in the general assemblies of the Church. They appear (1) to have laid aside their veils which formed a distinctive symbol of their womanhood; (2) and to have claimed identity of function with the men in prayer and prophesy. That was the situation.

1. By way of meeting this situation and regulating it, S. Paul maintains that the natural, that is the Providential, constitution of man and woman, the order of the creation, the Creator's will, involved the principle that the man was the head of the woman. The spiritual equality of the sexes revealed in Christ has another aspect of the truth, but it did not cancel the law divinely imposed at the creation. There is in Christianity as well as in Nature a principle of subordination.

2. This principle of subordination must according to S. Paul be maintained when men and women assemble in Christian worship.

He insists that in these assemblies a woman must be veiled: the veil being a recognised symbol of her subordination. When the apostle asks, "Is it seemly that a woman pray unto God unveiled?" he clearly does not refer to her private prayers nor to family devotions in the home. What he is concerned to regulate is the relative position of men and women when taking part together in the public worship of the Church.

3. Moreover, it is the relationship of men and women all throughout the mixed worship which S. Paul is contemplating. He does not confine his attention to official acts. When he speaks of a woman "praying or prophesying" he certainly does not mean that she must put on a veil when she leads the prayers or gives an address, but need be veiled no longer when her distinctive task is completed. It is obvious that S. Paul intends a woman to be veiled during the entire course of the common public prayer. She is clearly not to appear at all in the general worship without it. Thus S. Paul is not only concerned with a woman preaching or prophesying, but also with a woman's presence in the general congregation. He makes regulations which are designed to be observed by women during the entire course of the public devotion.



4. This is the reason why S. Paul cannot at this point content himself with forbidding a woman to preach : Because he is concerned with a far larger and more comprehensive subject ; namely, the general attitude of a woman, under all circumstances whatever, while sharing the general worship of the Church with men. If S. Paul had at this point prohibited a woman from prophesying, he would not have achieved his purpose ; his purpose being to regulate her entire behaviour in public devotion. S. Paul therefore concentrates attention on the veil and the principle of subordination.

5. It seems to follow that the words "praying or prophesying" must in this context be understood in a wider meaning than elsewhere. "Praying" must not be restricted to official leadership in prayer. It must include uniting in the general devotions of the congregation. And, in the same way, "prophesying" must include all utterance of praise.

The meaning of *the second passage* (1 Cor. xiv. 34) seems quite plain.

After regulating at considerable length the whole procedure with regard to prophesying and emotional utterance and the interpretation of it, during which discussion S. Paul

speaks constantly of prophets but significantly makes no reference to prophetesses, the apostle adds a proviso to the effect that the whole of these regulations apply to the men, but do not include the women.

It should be further noticed that S. Paul bases this prohibition on four foundations :—

On Scripture (verse 34) ; on reason (verse 35) ; on the universal practice of all churches, which (verses 33 and 36) involves the corresponding duty of the local community to comply with the general rule ; and on his own apostolic authority (verses 37-38).

That S. Paul forbids a woman to preach in the mixed assemblies of the Church is confirmed by *the History of Interpretation*. It is the traditional construction which has been placed upon his teaching. This holds true not only of ancient and mediæval exposition, but also of the great majority among *modern* interpreters. It would be no easy thing to say how many commentaries and criticisms have been written upon these two passages *during the last half century*. But an investigation of some forty writers yields the following results. About thirty support the traditional view. Some ten adopt the feminist view. Nearly all of these date since 1900. They are the product of the last



nineteen years. That is precisely the period during which the feminist claim to preacher-ship and priesthood has developed. Now, nineteen years is a very short period in the history of interpretation. It is natural to suggest a caution before committing ourselves to a revolutionary change of front with regard to the meaning of S. Paul on so important a matter.

Most Churchmen are aware of the existence of the very valuable Report on the Ministry of Women recently presented to the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is a vast and elaborate treatise of some 300 pages. But it is chiefly concerned with the historic evidence subsequent to New Testament times. Of the sixteen appendices only two are concerned with New Testament interpretation. It must be confessed that this is meagre. And considering that one of these discussions on the Biblical evidence says that "when S. Paul orders that women should keep silence in the churches, it is unnatural to suppose that he is withdrawing a permission so recently acknowledged," while the other remarks that "one does not like in understanding so great a mind as that of S. Paul, to be over-critical as to consistency," it is obvious that no presentation of the traditional exposition of S. Paul

has been included in this voluminous report. Consequently the impression given is one-sided. The whole of the weight of influence is thrown in the feminist direction; very much as if there were no other interpretation which held the field, and was at least deserving of statement and discussion. This one-sidedness only illustrates the popularity of the feminist view. But it is, to say the least, unfortunate.

It becomes, therefore, all the more necessary that attention should be called to some of the abler recent exponents of the traditional view.

The drift of the passage about women keeping silence is given by Bishop Robertson and Dr. Plummer in the following terms:—

"When I say that all in turn may preach, I do not include your wives. They must keep silent in the assembly. Utterance, whether in a tongue or in preaching, is not allowed to them. . . . Perhaps you think that you have the right to do as you please in such matters. What? Are you the Mother-Church or the only Church, that you make such claims?"

The exposition given by Bachmann in Zahn's Commentary is: "As in all the Churches of the Saints (it is the rule) that the women (that is in Corinth also) keep



silence in the assemblies of the Church. For it is not permitted unto them (that is, in accordance with the providentially ordered nature of things) to speak, (whether that speaking be prophetic or ecstatic or of any other kind)."

It is then quite plain that very weighty recent expositors understand S. Paul as he has been traditionally understood.

*To sum up*, then, the apostle's teaching on this subject. S. Paul's ruling principle is the principle of subordination. This principle rules out as not permissible the placing of women in the Church in the position of instructors *to the men*. They may not preach to the general congregation because such action would contradict the providential constitution of Nature which Christianity does not change. The order of the human creation is not reversed by the order of grace.

Philip's four daughters who prophesied cannot reasonably be introduced to neutralise the apostle's principles. Everything depends upon the conditions under which they prophesied. And that is exactly what we do not know.

But it is perfectly in keeping with apostolic principles that a woman should pray and preach *among women* in the Church.

For the principle of subordination only forbids her to give public instruction to men, or to mixed assemblies of men and women in the general worship of the Church. This principle is not violated if a woman leads the prayer of women, or gives instruction to women.

And of course it will be remembered that "in church" does not mean the consecrated building. That had no existence in the time of S. Paul. It means the sacred assembly of the general Christian congregation, in whatever place they were collected.

Further, S. Paul's prohibition of women as official preachers for the mixed congregation does not at all prevent them from exerting most invaluable unofficial influence. There is the case of Apollos, the learned Alexandrian, who taught only a preparatory message until Priscilla and Aquila "heard him," and "expounded unto him the way of God more carefully." \*

It is possible, of course, although we do not know it, that Priscilla did much more in instructing Apollos than her husband did. But her instructions did not in the least disobey S. Paul's prohibition, for she had no official authority and simply held informal

\* Acts xviii. 26.



conversation. Thus while Apollos, the distinguished preacher, owed his Christian knowledge largely to a woman, he held the official place while she kept silence in the general assembly; which is exactly the Pauline principle.

## IV

So far then in exposition of the Apostle's meaning. The further question now confronts us: *What is the value of S. Paul's teaching on the subject for modern life?*

Much has of late been written in order to set S. Paul's teaching on women's ministry aside. It has been contended, among other things, that his arguments are not convincing; that his authority is not decisive; that his outlook was restricted; that his regulations were of a temporary nature. It is further asserted that he once caught a glimpse of a nobler view, and that in his religious ideas he differs from Jesus Christ.

Now, at any rate, all these objections prove conclusively that the objectors are convinced that S. Paul does not approve what they desire. If the feminist interpretation were correct these objections would be superfluous. They assume that the traditional

explanation of the Apostle substantially represents what he means.

Then further, contemplating these objections as a whole, it seems self-evident that if you once admit the right of the individual to set aside S. Paul's teaching on one important subject upon such grounds as these, it is impossible to prevent the application of this destructive method to many other departments of the apostle's teaching as well.

1. As to the objection that S. Paul once caught a glimpse of a higher principle when he wrote the memorable passage, "there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus,"\* this passage is appealed to as overriding all inferior notions of disqualification for office in the Church on the ground of sex.

But this interpretation of the passage misconceives its purpose. What S. Paul is here concerned to proclaim is the equal value of every member of the Church in virtue of incorporation with the Body of Christ. Neither racial nor social nor physical differences can affect the share of each individual soul in the privileges of Redemption.

\* Galat. iii. 28.



But S. Paul is not in the least concerned with the question of ecclesiastical functions or official ministries. The Church in which he was ministering contained within it ministerial distinctions. He himself was a conspicuous illustration of the principle of official functions assigned to one and denied to others.

The spiritual equality of all Christians is one subject; the diversity of ecclesiastical functions is another. S. Paul never confused them; nor must we.

2. Some recent writers assure us that there is a marked contrast on this subject between the teaching of S. Paul and the teaching of our Lord. Their spirit, we are told, is different. Christ directs in broad generalities; S. Paul in particulars and hard details. Christ is more gracious and comprehensive; S. Paul is a Rabbi more or less disguised. S. Paul's authority for us, say some, is not decisive. The disciple must give way before his Master. The ultimate authority is not S. Paul but Christ.

Now certainly we shall not dispute that the supreme authority for Christians is Christ. But neither shall we forget that all we know about Him comes through His disciples' minds. They are His exponents. They are His

authorised exponents, for He selected them. And if He is what the Church believes Him to be, this applies to S. Paul as well as to the Twelve. For S. Paul's conversion was not only a remarkable coincidence; it was a providential determination. He was just as truly Christ's selection as were the other apostles. And if you think of the influence which he has exerted over Christendom it would be serious to arrive at any other conclusion.

Now, Christ our Lord was acutely conscious of His apostles' limitations. The Gospels are full of it. "How is it that ye do not understand?"

Nevertheless, Christ combined that consciousness of their limitations with a perfectly serene assurance that they will not seriously misrepresent Him. He wrote nothing. He left the presentation of Himself to the world entirely in their hands. What was the secret of this confidence?

It is revealed in the words: "I have many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all the Truth." That is the reason why they will not misrepresent Him.

And that certifies them as His authorised exponents.



Moreover, the outstanding fact remains that Christ never set a woman among the number of His twelve apostles. Also that His mother's position in the Church was one of reserve and reticence and not of official publicity. She was no preacher to the general congregation. She did not preside among the faithful. She neither celebrated the Eucharist nor gave instructions to the mixed assembly.

3. The question has been raised of late how far S. Paul's teaching is applicable to the present time. Grant that his regulations on the Ministry of Women in Church were suitable for and appropriate to his contemporaries, does it follow that they are still appropriate nineteen centuries afterwards? Modern conditions are utterly different from the old. The place which women occupy in the social order is entirely changed. New regulations are required by new conditions. And S. Paul himself, were he now alive, would probably be the first to revise his ancient and now obsolete prohibitions.

What are we to say to this? We must say that a Scriptural direction may certainly grow obsolete. Certain disciplinary injunctions contained in the New Testament undoubtedly refer to temporary conditions.

The order to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood and from things strangled is a case in point.\* But it is difficult to see how this can be the case with S. Paul's injunction: "let your women keep silence in the churches." For S. Paul, in giving this injunction, goes down to fundamental principles. He bases the injunction on the principle of subordination. And this principle is for him one of the essential Christian realities. It is founded in the constitution of human nature. There is for men and women, according to S. Paul, identity of spiritual privilege but diversity of religious function. Their office in religion is not the same. Since therefore S. Paul bases his injunction about the work of women in the churches on fundamental principles, it seems impossible to take his decision as a temporary regulation.

FAWCETT COLLECTION

V

But, after all, besides the interpretation placed upon S. Paul by individual expositors, there is the interpretation placed upon his teaching by the practice of the Church.

\* Acts xv. 29.



There is no real question what that practice has been with regard to the Ministry of Women. No one really doubts that the Church has never admitted women as preachers to the mixed congregation. Indeed this is precisely the complaint made against it. Only last year inquiries were made, for the purposes of a committee on the subject, what the prevalent opinions were in other Ancient Communion. Replies were received from Roman, Russian, and Greek ecclesiastics. They all agreed that a woman cannot be permitted to preach before the general congregation. The concurrence of the ancient churches of the East and West makes the question inevitable whether the English Church would be well advised to diverge from an interpretation of S. Paul in which the rest of the Ancient Communion agree.

In the Report of the Joint Committee of Convocation presented to the Bishops of the Province of Canterbury, in 1919, there is an emphatic repudiation of the idea that women could be ordained to the office of priesthood. That repudiation is based on the ground that such ordination would be "wholly contrary to the immemorial and consistent custom of the Catholic Church."

The refusal of priesthood to women could

hardly be expressed in stronger terms. But nevertheless the report goes on to recommend that women should be preachers to the general congregation. Now this recommendation is not consistent with the reason for which priesthood is refused them. For it seems historically certain that it is just as contrary to the immemorial and consistent custom of the Catholic Church for a woman to preach to the general congregation, as it is for a woman to be a priest. Tradition no more supports the one than it does the other.

Those who, on the ground of tradition, deny that women may be priests and yet recommend that women may be preachers, are relying upon the custom of the Catholic Church in one instance and rejecting it in another. But if the appeal to the tradition and custom of Christendom has decisiveness in the one case, it must be decisive in the other also. To accept it in one case and reject it in another is virtually to undermine its authority for the case which is accepted. For this selectiveness makes private judgment the final arbitrator about the value of universal traditions.

I feel sure that this criticism is exactly what advocates of the women's claims to the priesthood will make. They will say, You



have destroyed the basis of your own objection to conceding us the priesthood; since you refuse it on the ground of tradition, and yet, in the face of that same tradition, you allow us to be preachers. I do not think that such criticism would be easy to refute.

Indeed it seems quite clear that this Report to the Bishops of the Southern Province has weakened its own refusal of priesthood to women still more, when it goes on in a later passage to observe that "to look to the Past alone for guidance, and tenaciously to cling to mere precedent is incompatible with belief in the present guidance of the Spirit of God."

For on what ground is this refusal of the priesthood to women based, if not on contemplation of the Past and clinging to precedent? Advocates of the women's claims to priesthood will not unreasonably inquire whether if the evidence of custom and tradition may be set aside in favour of their preaching, in order to adapt the Church to modern changed conditions, may not the evidence of the same custom and tradition be also set aside in favour of their becoming priests?

I feel sure that the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of the principle of tradition is

open to and will receive exceedingly damaging criticism. I do not see how it can be consistent to take this double line. Either accept tradition or reject tradition. But you cannot reject it in one case without compromising your acceptance of it in the other.

I desire most earnestly to suggest a caution in drawing the contrast, which is now so popular, between *the guidance of the Past* and *the guidance of the Present*. The guidance of the Past is spoken of as mere precedent. The guidance of the Present is called the guidance of the Spirit. This is constantly implied when it is not actually stated. It is constantly assumed that somehow or other the guidance of the Present can be relied upon independently of, or in contradiction to, the Past. Now this whole assumption, widely prevalent no doubt, is, I submit, seriously misleading, and takes for granted the very issue which it proposes to determine.

(1) The guidance of the Past is *not* mere precedent. It is the guidance of the Spirit. And it is the guidance of the Spirit over a very considerable area both of space and time. It is extended universally over Christendom for a duration of nineteen centuries. It is in fact the whole process of the historic evolution of Christianity until the present day.



That is a guidance which, when practically unanimous, is, I submit, profoundly impressive.

(2) On the other side there is the guidance of the Present. There also is unquestionably the guidance of the Spirit. But it is the guidance of the self-same Spirit. And we cannot be intended not to recognise an equal authority at least in the guidance of the Spirit in the Past. For it is a guidance of nineteen centuries as compared with the guidance of nineteen years. Moreover, we are in the rush of a great novel movement whose popularity is large, but whose limits and whose principles are anything but clear. It is easy to be carried away in the rush of its popularity. It is difficult to resist. We have to distinguish popularity from the guidance of the Spirit, and the methods permissible for the world from the methods permissible for the Church. We are to adapt the Church's life to new conditions, but not to allow the ancient principles to be swept away.

Those who maintain the traditional interpretation of S. Paul are sometimes thought to deprecate women preaching before the mixed congregation as being what is popularly described as the thin end of the wedge, and

calculated to encourage women to claim the priesthood also. But this is a complete misunderstanding. What the advocates of the traditional interpretation deprecate is the treatment of the subject on the basis of mere expediency. The Church must face the problem of women's ministry as a whole. So far as Scriptural prohibitions are concerned, it is the woman preacher who is distinctly forbidden: the woman bishop or the woman priest is not even contemplated. And those who recommend that women should preach to the general congregation, while disallowing any claim of women to be ordained to the priesthood, must give their reasons for this restriction of the priestly ministry to men. If the reason which they give is the practice of the Church, it is a reason which also applies to the preaching office for women. And if this practice of the Church is founded upon principle in the one case, is it not also in the other? The fact is that either you must maintain that the spiritual equality of men and women involves identity of religious functions for the sexes, or else you must maintain diversity of functions. If you maintain the former, then women may be priests as well as preachers; if the latter, then you virtually accept the principle of S. Paul.



30 THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

And you must give a reason why there should be this diversity. And what reason can you find except the argument of S. Paul, that the principle of subordination is inherent in the providential constitution of human nature and also in the order of grace ?

THE END



