

AL/1934

To Miss Z. Fairfield.

(Copy)

...I am afraid unbelievers will not be wanted at a conference, not in the least because we want to shut ourselves up against hearing the other side (it would be impossible to do that even if we did want it!) but because the purpose of the Conference will be to work out as wide a basis of agreement as possible. My own position is as yet by no means clear. Though I am quite clear on the principle, or the main issue, there are in my mind no end of unanswered questions and hazy doubts as to details. I think that this is true of most of the people whom I have found sympathetic. We want to meet together in order to help one another to clarify our views. We want to be able to be absolutely frank and to make the most of our difficulties in order to get one another to clear them up when possible. I cannot help feeling that the presence of anti's would be a check upon the frank expression of our difficulties... The facts which you bring forward are all I think quite incontrovertible and they all have weight. But I do not think that they bear down the scales when opposed by other facts. For instance:-

1. Our Lord was human; his humanity is of infinitely greater prominence than his sex. But for the masculine pronoun how does his sex come in? I don't mean that he was sexless; what is sexless is not human and he was human. But I cannot feel that his sex was anything more than accidental. In becoming Man he had to become either a man or a woman but he is "Man" primarily and essentially, "a man" secondarily and accidentally. Why he became a man and not a woman we cannot possibly tell. We cannot tell why we were born women not men; it seems to me as useless to speculate about one as the other. The most we can say if we are determined to speculate is that had he been born a woman in Palestine in the year 1 he limitations of his surroundings would have been considerably narrower and his sphere of influence considerably less extensive.
2. Motherhood is not incompatible with priesthood. Certainly a woman priest with young children would have to abrogate her priestly functions for a time, but why not?--if, as we are agreed, motherhood is her supreme function. When her children were old enough to leave her free for other duties she could resume her priestly work with all the wealth of wisdom and the fulness of humanity that motherhood should bring, to aid her. And then so many women are not mothers.
3. I am very ignorant as to the conditions of life in Palestine in our Lord's day, but I suppose it was the case that nearly all women married as a matter of course at a very early age. Jews generally have a great many children. Jewish widows normally remarry. Thus most of the women in our Lord's circle who were not occupied with domestic affairs would have been comparatively old women and old people are not normally quick to adapt themselves to new notions and new ways of life. I don't remember that there are any unmarried women mentioned in the gospels except Mary of Magdala and the woman who was a sinner and (presumably) Martha and Mary. The latter one can imagine as a suitable person for the office, but perhaps she was no freer than the married women; after all Lazarus must have needed a good deal of attention after his return from the tomb!
4. Yes, 2000 years count for a great deal. The tradition of centuries cannot be brushed carelessly on one side. But Our Lord's warnings



against making a fetish of tradition are very strong. (100)

And Harnack, as well as other critics, believes that there is evidence to show that the teaching of Christ had an astonishing effect upon women in the early days of Christianity, drawing them out, pushing them forward and making them so prominent in Church life as to call forth from S. Paul and others (who were steeped in the Rabbinical tradition of women's inferiority) shocked and reproachful outcries against their unprecedented boldness. Supposing there were indeed in Christ's teaching the germ of genuine "feminism", the development of which S. Paul and the Fathers held in check for 2000 but which was now beginning to sprout and spread like the grain which has lain for centuries in the old Egyptian mummy cases? .....

I do not think that they bear down the scale a when opposed by other facts. For instance:-  
1. Our Lord was human; his humanity is of infinitely greater prominence than his sex. But for the masculine pronoun how does his sex come in? I don't mean that he was asexual; what is asexual is not human and he was human. But I cannot feel that his sex was anything more than accidental. In becoming man he had to become either a man or a woman but he is "man" primarily and essentially. "a man" secondarily and accidentally. Why he became a man and not a woman we cannot possibly tell. We cannot tell why we were born women not men; it seems to me as useless to speculate about one as the other. The most we can say if we are determined to speculate is that had he been born a woman in Palestine in the year I he limitations of his surroundings would have been considerably narrower and his sphere of influence considerably less extensive.

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4. Yes, 2000 years count for a great deal. The tradition of centuries cannot be brushed carelessly on one side. But our Lord's teachings