

Double Image



Men Women and God

THE BULLETIN OF MEN WOMEN AND GOD

Lost in Translation

Lost in translation - a frightening concept especially if the 'lost' is 'you' or 'me'. Although most of us reading this issue of Double Image are aware that inaccurate translations of biblical text have diminished both women and men it none the less remains true that thousands still hold to such misrepresentations and many more thousands are still suffering from its effects. So we find that it is not ridiculous to include a reminiscence about Harriet Baker from the dawn of the twentieth century in an MWG bulletin from the dawn of the twenty first century. We still need the scholarship of people like Howard Marshall to give clear confidence to women to abandon lostness and find their voice. Those like Julia Murphy who tread in Harriet's footsteps offer us fresh perspectives of how to be men and women of God in the now. The church in this century still needs to invest considerable energy in calling out the offerings of female disciples and Rosie Ward's research is a very significant part of that.

This issue of Double Image draws substantially on our Autumn conference so that more of you have the opportunity to share in what was said. The prayer of Tagore on page 2 is an offering to sustain our hope in drawing us towards the new way of being.

MWG were very privileged to have Professor Howard Marshall come all the way down from Aberdeen to speak at our recent one day conference in London. Howard is Emeritus Professor of New Testament Exegesis at Aberdeen, President of the British New Testament Society, Chair of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians and former chair of the Tyndale Fellowship. Howard, very properly, enjoys a reputation for rigorous objectivity in exegesis of the New Testament, especially in Luke-Acts and the Pastoral Epistles. His selected publications occupy a whole page print out from the University of Aberdeen Divinity home page. His encouragement underlines the commitment of MWG to the plain teaching of the New Testament about spiritual gifts, none of which seem gender-linked, rather than reliance upon human cultural traditions based upon a couple of prooftexts of notorious difficulty.

Lost In Translation - Inclusion In The Church

1. The publication of an inclusive-language version of the NIV led to strong opposition from those who feared that this would appear to give an unwarranted biblical basis for egalitarian understanding of passages regarding the place of women in the church and its ministry and leadership.

2. Since no biblical translations are free from error, the presence of some errors of judgment in any given translation does not constitute a reason for rejecting it outright.

3. Bible translations face three general problems

a. *Language change.* The coinage of new words, the non-use of older words, and shifts in meaning of existing words.

b. *Language differences.* Languages do not have a one-to-one relationship to one another. Their structures differ: examples from differences in second-person pronouns and uses of initial capital letters.

c. *Language inadequacies* We have gender-based third person singular pronouns (he/she) but a common gender plural pronoun (they).

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4. Changes have taken place in the English language, so that the 'generic' use of certain words to refer to both males and females is found misleading by contemporary users and needs to be replaced by 'inclusive' language. We cannot shut our eyes to this shift or try to reverse it if we want to communicate meaningfully.

5. Consequently some contemporary Bible translations use devices like 'brothers and sisters' to translate Gk. *adelphoi* that was formerly translated as 'brothers' (understood to include 'sisters'). This does produce some awkward forms of words, including the use of plurals ('they') for the awkward 'he or she'.

6. Such changes do not and need not affect language used of God who is recognised to transcend sexuality but is not referred to directly in Scripture by feminine forms. They must also be sensitive to the danger of giving the impression that the biblical writers gave roles to women that were not in fact part of their culture (e.g. there is no need to substitute 'archers' for 'bowmen' and give the misleading impression of posses of female combatants in ancient armies).

7. This patriarchal understanding in the Bible reflects the culture of the time. It has been argued that the production of the Bible in this setting was providential, indicating divine approval of the cultural understanding and requiring us today to accept it (L. McFall, *Good Order in the Church*, published online at <http://www.btinternet.com/lmf12>).

In Christian congregations men and women were seated separately; the latter were required to be completely silent, and they were to be taught by their husbands at home. The terms by which Paul addresses his readers, such as *adelphoi*, are to be taken to refer purely to 'brothers' (males).

8. The main part of the paper (incorporating material from my article 'Brothers embracing sisters?', *The Bible Translator. Technical Papers* 55:3 [July, 2004], 303-310) is devoted to a refutation of this last, linguistic point.

a. Women were equally recipients of salvation with men and were included in references to 'disciples'.

b. There are frequent references to women as believers, which makes it unlikely that they were not included in references to 'disciples'.

c. Paul refers to 'sons and daughters' of God (2 Cor 6:18) and to congregations as 'children' of God, thus thinking of them all as one and addressing them collectively.

d. References to people generally as *anthropoi* include women. The language may be male-centred but it includes and does not exclude women.

e. Nothing suggests that men and women were rigidly separated from one another in a congregational meeting.

f. 1 Peter moves easily between different groups in the congregation (including women) and the whole body. The same is true of passages like Colossians 3-4 and Ephesians 5.

9. McFall's claim that in non-biblical Greek *adelphoi* is never used of brothers and sisters together is disproved by the linguistic evidence.

10. It follows that the correct translation of *adelphoi* is normally 'brothers and sisters' (except where the context requires otherwise). In fact defenders of 'inclusive' translation are to be found among both complementarians and egalitarians.

Your Love

Let Your love play upon my voice and rest
on my silence.

Let it pass through my heart into all
my movements.

Let your Love, like stars, shine in the
darkness of my sleep and dawn in my awakening.

Let it burn in the flame of my desires and
flow in all the currents of my own love.

Let me carry Your love in my life as a harp
does its music, and give it back to You
at last with my life.

from *The Heart of God* - prayers of Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941)

Mutual love and submission in marriage

Howard Marshall

In this paper (based on my chapter 'Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage: Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:21-33', in Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca M. Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* [Leicester: Apollos, 2005], 186-204) I invite you to discuss the validity of the methods employed and the correctness of the results achieved in arguing for a Christian marriage relationship characterised by mutual love and mutual submissiveness.

1. The two passages must be considered in their *epistolary contexts*; this shows that they are both descriptive of the kind of behaviour which is

(a) required of believers who live 'in the Lord' and

(b) possible for them through the power of the Holy Spirit in the new resurrection life that they share with Christ.

2. The passages must also be seen in their *historical context*. There is a background in the social/moral teaching of contemporary ethicists who summed up life in the typical Graeco-Roman household in terms of three relationships: husband/wife; parent/child; master/slave, where one and the same person can be husband, father and master. In such relationships this patriarchal figure had authority, and the three other types of person were required to be submissive and obedient. The Christian teaching assumes this situation and gives similar instructions, requiring the authoritarian figure not to abuse his position and those under him to be submissive. In particular the husband is to treat his wife lovingly.

3. There is a *concealed danger* of thinking that all of this instruction can be taken over basically unchanged into the world of today, whereas in fact there are significant differences. The nature of parental authority over children has somewhat changed and is not so absolute as it was. We no longer have slavery, but a much more complicated system of employment with important rights for workers. Slavery is no longer considered a legitimate system that is compatible with Christian ethics. Although not mentioned here, the concept of the absolutist ruler and the totally submissive subjects (1 Peter 2:13-17) has been rejected in favour of some kind of democracy. Thus in each of these relationships the structures have changed, and we have to ask how the first-century teaching is to be reapplied to them. In so doing we do three things:

a. We look for the *underlying principles* that found expression in ways appropriate to the ancient institutions and we then ask how these principles can be applied appropriately in our different situations.

b. We consider the teaching of Scripture *more widely*, recognising that the significance of particular passages may be different when they are seen in the context of the canon, and specifically in the light of the new revelation brought in Christ.

c. We recognise that Scripture says certain things whose significance may not have been *fully realised at the time*, and these may profoundly affect our understanding. The paradigm here is the way in which, although slavery is not condemned outright, Paul

makes a statement about treating your slave as your brother 'both in the flesh and in the Lord' (Phlm 16); the implication of this in the light of biblical teaching about men and women being made in the image of God and being the objects of his saving love in Christ is that treating your brother or sister as your chattel and possession under your absolute authority is fundamentally wrong.

4. This leads to the suggestion that if we had to *re-apply or re-interpret* the teaching about the other relationships, the same is likely to be true of the marriage relationship also. Obviously the contemporary secular understanding of marriage is not superior or correct in every particular but rather it is different, and we have the two tasks of

(a) evaluating critically modern ideas of marriage and

(b) asking how Scripture is to govern the marriage relationship today.

5. The *position of the wife* in NT times was generally (but not always) that she was seen as being the possession of her husband, with no place in public life. This is particularly seen in Jewish practice with regard to adultery. If a wife had an affair with another man she was regarded as committing adultery against her husband and could be punished for it; however, if the husband had an extra-marital sexual relationship, he was not regarded as being guilty of adultery against his wife. As part of the wider teaching of Scripture, we have to note the fundamental, revolutionary teaching of Jesus that a promiscuous husband was committing adultery against his wife (cf. Mark 10:10-12), and we might note also the way in which Paul attributes marital duty not

only to the wife but also to the husband (1 Cor 7:3-4). Such teaching is based on an underlying recognition of equal rights between marriage partners whose implications are just beginning to be recognised.

6. How does this affect the biblical affirmation of *submission*? Although Paul does speak of wives being 'submissive in everything' (Eph 5:24), just as he does of children and slaves (Col 3:20, 22), there is surely some difference between what happens in these relationships, and I would suggest that complementarians in fact do not insist on this absolute submission in every particular of life.

7. Further, there is an instruction in Eph 5:18 that believers are to be *subject to one another*. The current complementarian understanding of this is that the subjection actually applies only to the inferior partners in the relationships of submission in the household or of subjects to a ruler. The broader context is that Paul does speak very emphatically of mutual slavery (Gal 5:13), and of counting others more highly than yourself (Phil 2:3-4; cf. Rom 12:10); similarly John speaks of washing one another's feet (Jn 13:14) and Peter of mutual humility (1 Pet 5:5), all of which suggests relationships of self-denial and mutual respect and submission. If we take this broader context seriously (as we must!), it qualifies what is said about submission in marriage, not in the sense that wifely submission is abolished, but rather that husbandly submission is required as well: it is mutual submission. Each spouse must think primarily of the interests of the other.

8. Husbands are in fact called to a level of *sacrificial love* for their wives like that of Christ for the church. But if they love their wives in this way, then they are not going to impose selfish demands for sub-

mission upon them. Interestingly, the wives are not told to love their husbands, but nobody would say that this means that they are not required to do so. The relationship should be one of mutual love and consideration.

9. But what about the way in which the husband is said to be *the head of the wife*, just as Christ is the head of the church? Clearly this fitted the patriarchal society in which the husband did act as the head of the family unit and not least in marriages where he could well be several years older than his wife and she was probably poorly educated. G. D. Fee has argued that the thought of headship is more concerned with nourishment and guidance than with authority, so that the body is dependent upon the head and therefore it is appropriate to be submissive (cf. *Discovering*, 149-55). But at the same time the husband as the head is responsible for the welfare of his wife and he must be very conscious of her needs and desires. Despite the analogy with Christ as the head of the church, the husband is a sinful human being and must be continually aware of his weakness and ignorance.

10. Alongside the theological reasons given for the attitude, two practical considerations will have been at work. One is the need for believers to *conform to the practices of society* so that they would not be accused of upsetting the status quo; it may well be that some women, like some slaves, were claiming more freedom than society could tolerate. The other is that 1 Peter 3:1-2 indicates clearly an *evangelistic motive* whereby women behaved in such a way as to commend the gospel by their quiet witness; here it must be remembered that for a wife to adopt a religion different from that of her husband was probably quite a daring, possibly apparently rebellious

thing to do (compare the position of some Muslim wives today if they convert to Christianity).

11. Thus the argument is that *Scripture itself moves us* to a recognition of a kind of way of life for husbands and wives in which both partners are called to love one another and both partners are called to be submissive and considerate to the other within their common obedience to Christ. This goes beyond what Scripture actually commands, like much else, including the abolition of slavery and the promotion of democracy. Hence, the essence of my case is not that submissiveness by the wife is abolished, but it is balanced by the attitude of the husband who must also be submissive to his wife, just as he is to be to other believers; likewise, although it is not actually said in these two passages, the wife is to love her husband (cf. Tit 2:4) just as he is to love her.

12. Not all agree with the position taken here (see the critique of my paper by G. W. Knight, III, in *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 10:1 [Spring, 2005], 38-42). An alternative is so-called '*love-patriarchalism*' in which the wife is submissive, but the husband treats her with such consideration and care that the submission element is minimal. W. J. Webb (who personally favours a 'complementary egalitarianism') discusses the possibility of a 'ultra-soft patriarchalism' that adheres to submission but does so in a gentle manner, and that in practice may differ but little from the kind of more egalitarian model that I have been suggesting (*Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

At our recent day conference at LICC, during a Q&A session, the question was asked 'why are we still discussing the issue of women in church leadership after all this time?' It was a valid question and a number of helpful answers were offered. The best answer to the question is perhaps found *throughout* the history of the church in the lives of the faithful women who entered ministry to the glory of God in obedience to the *whole* witness of Scripture. This account from 100 years ago is of one such woman.

The Daily Chronicle *Wednesday February 24th. 1909.*

WOMAN AND THE MINISTRY: MISS HARRIET BAKER AS PASTOR AT HORSTED KEYNES

This small village in Sussex is one of the few places in England where a woman has been accepted as minister, Miss H. Baker having occupied that post for some fifteen months. She is not the first woman to have enjoyed this honour, for Miss Gertrude von Petzold was minister of a Unitarian church at Leicester; recently she accepted a call to a church in the United States.

Miss Jane Brown was called to the pastorate of Brotherton, a mining village in Yorkshire, in which she officiated for some years. I am also informed there are women pastors in Wales. When Mrs. Martindale, late of Horsted Keynes a few years ago, she found no Congregational places of worship. She is devoted to "Independency", the sect to which two of England's greatest men, Milton and Cromwell, adhered, and after a time she decided that a Congregational hall in Horsted Keynes would have a field of usefulness.

The money was collected, largely from her friends and family; amongst the former should be named Mr. W. A. Hounsom, J.P., who contributed very generously. The hall is a beautiful little building, admirably adapted to village needs, substantially built and tastefully furnished. It cost £1,873, and was opened in June 1907 free of debt.

Mrs. Martindale relates that as she was reflecting how best to attain the ends she sought, she came down to breakfast one morning to

find two letters on her plate. One was from a lady who had often preached by invitation and who indeed has very considerable gifts for preaching, Miss Harriet Baker, offering to take some of the services at the new hall. The other was from the authorities of Hackney College, Hampstead, to say that they would be glad to have the new hall as a practicing field for the students.

Both offers were accepted. Miss Baker, besides preaching, had formerly conducted large and successful Bible classes at Brighton; one of these has developed into a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon gathering and was a distinct success. It is admitted on all hands that she is a cultured and attractive speaker; nor are her gifts lessened by careful preparation.

It was arranged that Miss Baker should now reside in Horsted Keynes, taking alternate Sundays with the students of Hackney College. She also takes the week-night service, besides conducting cottage meetings, and in the summer open-air services in the neighbouring villages of Birch Grove and Danes' Hill. [sic] She also gives lectures frequently, having had great experience and a long list of acceptable subjects. The hall possesses an excellent lantern presented by a friend, and the lectures are generally illustrated by slides.

I wend down to Horsted Keynes for the express purpose of hearing Miss Baker preach. Her style is refined,



the matter well arranged and thought out. The sermons lasted each half an hour, and were fully equal to the high level usually found in the Congregational Church. I was struck by the relatively large number of heads of families (Horsted Keynes is only a small village) who listened to Miss Baker's soft melodious voice and excellent delivery with the closest attention. I have heard American women preach, so that for me it was not a new experience. I simply had confirmed an opinion formed years ago: That to have a woman in the pulpit is becoming and decorous; I know it is in accord with the practice of the early Christian Church. From the pulpit-cushion hung down an embroidered scroll, "Holiness becometh thine House", and the holy lives of women whose lips and hearts have been touched by the living principle of religion become that House also. As I listened to Miss Baker's excellent sermon, there floated into my mind a little scene from an American book read many years ago. A working man who attended a church under a woman pastor was being chaffed by his comrades. He replied something like this: "There

ain't so much o' the woman on't as you'd suppose. She just gives the word, and we hear it. And she works on them growin' lads something wonderful; they now come to church reg'lar. The marriages too seem to hold; you can't get out of them any easier because a woman's tied the knot!"

Most people with whom I have spoken have the same feeling about a woman preacher as about a woman lecturer. If the necessary gifts, culture, and, above all, the call to the work, we should beware

of permitting prejudice to assume the mastery over reason.

In the pulpit Miss Baker wears a black gown and cap. She has already baptized some of the youth of Horsted Keynes. She presides at the communion table, and on the very day of my visit, a paper was being signed by the householders as a preliminary step to enable marriages to be solemnized in the hall. It is well known that Congregationalists usually pray extempore. Miss Baker possesses a gift for prayers, and led the devo-

tions of the little church with dignity and reverence.

Her services at Horsted Keynes have been highly appreciated, but perhaps a small village is not the best field for her talents and it is thought that before long she may find a wider sphere in a large town.

C.S. BREMNER.

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Any information about the subsequent ministry of Miss Baker would be gratefully received.

Tim Woolley

Women in Leadership

Rosie Ward

- **Can women be leaders in the Church?**

'The claim that women have never functioned as presbyters in the "orthodox" church is simply untrue.'

Kevin Madigan & Carolyn Osiek (ed) *Ordained Women in the Early Church* (John Hopkins UP, 2005)

'Ministry and leadership in the New Testament are a co-operative venture, whose success depends on the gifting and empowering of women and men committed to serving Christ and his church.'

Linda Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Baker, 2000)

'Those who support the ordination of women to priestly or Episcopal ministry cannot be dismissed as treating scripture in a cavalier fashion...'

Tom Wright, *Women Bishops: A Response to Cardinal Kasper*: see www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk

- **Do women make good leaders?**

'Meet the new boss: Women rule!'

Tom Peters, *Essentials: Leadership* (Dorling Kindersley, 2005)

'We need to move from a transactional to a transformational model... women tend to be more adept at this than men... The controlling style of leadership must give way to this empowering, connective style if the church is to reinvent itself to meet the missional challenges and opportunities of a new day.'

Eddie Gibbs, *Leadership Next: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (IVP, 2005)

- **Do women lead differently?**

'Women have many exceptional faculties bred in deep history: a talent with words; a capacity to read...non-verbal clues, emotional sensitivity; empathy; patience, an ability to do and think several things simultaneously; a broad contextual view of any issue; a penchant for long-term planning; a gift for networking and negotiating; an impulse to nurture; and a preference for cooperating, reaching consensus, and leading via egalitarian teams.'

Helen Fisher, *The Natural Talents of Women* (Ballantine, 1999)

- **What barriers do women face in aspiring to senior roles? (in the Church and professions generally)**

'Recent research suggests that the most important barriers to women's advancement include the challenge of combining work at senior levels and family life, stereotyping and inhospitable organizational culture, lack of role models and exclusion from formal networks.'

Opportunity Now, *Breaking the Barriers* (Catalyst and Opportunity Now, 2000)

Women in Leadership: Resources

Belleville, Linda L, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Baker Books, 2000).

Belleville answers the following three questions: 'In which ministries can women be involved? What roles can women play in society? Can women hold positions of authority?' Deals with Bible passages used to limit the ministry of women.

Bilezikian, Gilbert, **Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness** (Zondervan, 1997).

A biblical foundation for the call to community, including discussions of ministry and leadership which affirm the equality of women and men as leaders.

Coughlin, Linda, et al (ed), **Enlightened Power: how women are transforming the practice of leadership** (Jossey-Bass, 2005)

40 short articles on aspects of women and leadership for the twenty-first century.

Fisher, Helen, **The First Sex: The Natural Talents of Women and how they are Changing the World** (Ballantine Books, 1999).

A visionary picture of how women's special gifts such as cooperation, intuition and web thinking are changing different aspects of society.

Helgeson, Sally, **The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership** (Doubleday, 1990).

Classic book on the nature of female leadership, using diary studies of women leaders.

Nixon [Ward], Rosie **Liberating Women for the Gospel: Women in Evangelism** (Hodder & Stoughton, 1997).

An exploration of Scripture, history and the contemporary experience of women in evangelism, including preaching, personal evangelism, the family, and church planting.

Porter, Jeanne, **Leading Ladies: Transformative Biblical Images for Women's Leadership** (Innisfree Press, 2000)

Puah and Shiprah, Miriam, Deborah and Esther: four female archetypes from the Bible who represent women's experiences and perspectives.

Porter, Jeanne, **Leading Lessons: Insights on Leadership from Women of the Bible** (Augsberg, 2005) Eight scripturally-based studies of women leaders.

Storkey, Elaine, **Created or Constructed? Great Gender Debate** (Paternoster, 2000).

In what ways are women and men really different, and where do these differences come from? Excellent introduction to issues of psychology, sociology, philosophy and theology.

Thomson, Peninah, and Jacey Graham, **A Woman's Place is in the Board Room** (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Research-based study of why so few women make it to senior executive positions in business, and how the situation might be changed.

Willhauck, Susan, **Backtalk! Women Leaders Changing the Church** (Pilgrim Press, 2005). Stories and strategies for change, drawing on feminist and womanist theology.

Wright, Tom, '**Women's Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis**' - CBE/MWG conference paper 2004, available on Fulcrum website: www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk

And for something different, the film **Whale Rider**, a low budget film from New Zealand, is about a Maori girl 'called' to lead. Beautifully filmed, wonderfully acted, fab score.

Also see www.cpas.org.uk/womeninleadership



RE-TURN

Recovering the image

February 2007 saw Ellen Armstrong, Sereena Baker and Phil Baldwin facilitating a week end workshop in Hackney exploring why it is vital for Christians to be bothered about gender and justice issues. The week end was the annual gathering of SPEAK.

SPEAK looks to transform situations of injustice through linking people together to use their voice and pray for change. "Through bringing change to situations of injustice we want to share our faith in an all loving and all powerful creator God".

Want to know more? Browse the website www.speak.org.uk

Body Image- 'Any Body'

AnyBody is committed to encouraging a change in cultural attitudes towards bodies, food and eating so that women and children of the next generation can learn to be happy in and look after their bodies. They challenge the distorted and tyrannical grip that the fashion and diet industry have on the health of our mind as well as our bodies and ask the government to take an honest look at what influences individuals' health behaviour and to support realistic programmes to bring about change to tackle issues such as obesity. They also encourage individuals to learn to celebrate and cherish the bodies they are in. AnyBody calls for a reality check, of which every and any body can be a part.

To take a look at their website, and to consider signing their petition calling for more body diversity on the catwalk, see <http://www.anybody.org/>

Feminisation of the Church

What follows is a very truncated version of Julia Murphy's session on the feminisation of the Church but I hope it gives you enough to 'chew on' and to energise you to new endeavour! Julia's bibliography is also included so that you can follow up some issues in more detail if you wish.

I first started thinking about this whole issue of the feminisation of the church because I was concerned about the absence of men from our churches. I kept hearing the phrase being banded about, and it obviously wasn't intended to be complimentary to women.

Many tensions in the Church today result from the ongoing shift in our society away from patriarchy. That's another easy phrase to bandy around, so let's define it here as 'the institutionalised male dominance over women and children in the family'. In fact, I want to argue that complex and painful divisions about women in leadership stem partly from the so-called "crisis of masculinity" within contemporary society. This has come about possibly as a reaction to the advances of feminism, rather than from any clearly defined theological basis. In a broad Church, differing theological and political positions on the role of women will also co-exist and this causes tension as women and men try to live and work alongside one another.

One might assume that most *women* would regard the word 'feminization' in a positive light. Carrie Sandom of Reform, however, seems to believe that more *men* in leadership would halt the advance of feminization, apparently seeing women in leadership positions as off-putting, even damaging. Given that men have been leading a numerically female-dominated

Church for 2000 years I have to say that her point seems overstated. Surely, what we're looking for is balance if the Church is adequately to represent Christ's body on earth.

Christina Rees, a lay member of Synod, seems to see things rather differently. She was quoted in the Times as saying,

"The characteristics associated with the Christian lifestyle, namely patience, gentleness and kindness, are normally associated with feminine qualities....Jesus showed many feminine traits as well as masculine

Christ did not come to make men more feminine; He came to restore them to real manhood. There is no indication from Scripture that emasculation is a requirement of the Christian walk. Men must give up many things to follow Jesus. Manhood is not on the list. But men do not realise this. Millions of men worldwide perceive the church to be feminine, and what they encounter on Sunday morning only confirms their worst fears...

ones. The church could do with a strong dose of feminisation to help it to become more Christ-like."

Some of you may have come across the book, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* by David Murrow, an American writer with some interesting things to say; some good, some not so good. I think the title of Murrow's book is excellent and I know many men have read it and found much to agree with. Who could argue with this, for example:

Christ did not come to make men more feminine; He came to restore them to real manhood. There is no

indication from Scripture that emasculation is a requirement of the Christian walk. Men must give up many things to follow Jesus. Manhood is not on the list. But men do not realise this. Millions of men worldwide perceive the church to be feminine, and what they encounter on Sunday morning only confirms their worst fears...

Now we get to the nub of the issue. Fear is fundamental to Murrow's and Podles' analysis of what is happening in the Church. The trouble is that the drift of Podles' book is almost superstitious.

'Men, he believes, should always keep their guard up against women... Men should be afraid that relationships with women might effectively erase a man's identity. Somehow he believes that femininity is intrinsically more powerful than manhood. Manhood is tenuous, and femininity is contagious... No wonder some of his readers are so frightened.' So writes Sarah Sumner, an American academic who has critiqued his book. As she points out, his views seem firmly located in the Catholicism of the middle ages, when men's dilemmas were 'focused upon a stereotype of womankind which left them feeling intensely vulnerable and unprotected. Women were seen as possessing a powerful and potentially destructive sexuality...'

Reform was set up in 1993 because some evangelicals were concerned about a drift from the authority and perspicuity of Scripture, and the 'issue' of women's ordination was one of several areas where conservatives felt aggrieved. Their main objection was, as they put it, that 'biblical Anglican tradition...appears to be rejected by the leadership of our church. The

grounding of the Church of England is no longer in the Holy Scriptures but in the episcopate.'

For Reform, all discussion about the ordination of women seems to start from the premise that anyone endorsing it cannot take Scripture seriously: in practice, this means anyone disagreeing with their interpretation of the essential texts - a somewhat subjective approach!

I'm sure I don't need to rehearse the conservative view of women's ministry here but Reform set out in their covenant an uncompromising position, summing up that God's way of life for his people includes

The unique value of women's ministry in the local congregation but also the divine order of male headship, which makes the headship of women as priests in charge, incumbents, dignitaries and bishops inappropriate.

Currently, half of all ordination candidates are female. In 2005, 260 women and 264 men were ordained as priest. Far from competing for incumbencies, however, a sizable majority of ordained women serve as Non-Stipendiary Ministers (NSMs), work as chaplains or for employers where sex discrimination is illegal. Given that parity has been reached in priestings, it is significant that women are still under-represented in key appointments.

Whereas 47% of NSMs are women (near parity), women in overall leadership are a distinct minority (13.8% of stipendiary posts being held by women). Despite most churches still being led by men, church attendance is plummeting, having fallen most sharply in the 1980s, before women's ordination was passed by Synod.

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Certainly, it is no secret that strong (male) role models attract men to our churches. Probably strong male leadership has the same effect. Men are more likely to stay in such churches, for a variety of reasons. The trouble is that conservative concerns about the low attendance of men overall can neither be dismissed, nor solely attributed to the feminization of

Many saw the gospel promise of a new identity in Christ as liberation from the bonds of patriarchy.

church leadership, *given that so few women actually lead churches*. Other factors simply have to be taken into consideration.

Feminist scholars see things rather differently, among others, Elaine Pagels quotes Tertullian as saying,

"These heretical woman, how audacious they are. I mean, they teach, they baptize, they preach, they do all kinds of things they shouldn't do. It's horrible, in short."

And she goes on to point out that we know that there was a great deal of ferment in these early communities about the role of women. She doesn't look back and see a picture of a Golden Age of egalitarianism but rather a new, unformed, diverse, and threatened movement which allowed a lot more fluidity for women in certain roles

for a while, in some places and not in others.

Christianity was understandably attractive to women within a patriarchal context. Jesus afforded women respect and dignity, recognising in them the divine image, a recognition contrasting strongly with contemporary Jewish culture where women had neither independent status nor inheritance rights.

Many saw the gospel promise of a new identity in Christ as liberation from the bonds of patriarchy.

Outside the Jewish culture, Patrician women were well educated and freed women were fully involved in retail and commerce. Many freely chose Christ.

Historian Rodney Stark points out, 'it is easily forgotten that the early church was so *especially attractive to women* that in 370 the emperor Valentinian issued a written order to Pope Damasus 1 requiring that Christian missionaries cease calling at the homes of pagan women'.

The fact is that women were there from the earliest times in greater numbers than men and we know that women have tended to dominate church memberships and churchgoers during the last three centuries'.

Evidence suggesting a 'golden age' of men attending church is scanty. Although pre-industrial Britain was a religious society, even during the great religious awakenings of the 18th/19th centuries, records indicate that a larger

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proportion of women converts than men remained in the Church. The appeal to women of Nonconformist evangelists like John Wesley and George Fox is well documented, and it is suggested that early Methodism must have seemed liberating to large numbers of women because women were allowed to hold class meetings more often than men, and initially they were encouraged to preach.

There was also a growing recognition that women have a greater propensity to conversion than men. Apparently, the ancient sources and modern historians agree that primary conversion to Christianity was far more prevalent among females than among males. Moreover, this appears to be typical of new religious movements in recent times.

Sociologists Walter & Davie, in a 1998 report, were curious as to why 'in western societies, women are more religious than men on virtually every measure of religiosity'. They suggested that feminists were too busy worrying about the lack of women in the chancel to examine the reasons for high numbers in the pews. Also of interest to our topic is the fact that twice as many women as men responded at Billy Graham meetings. This is barely 50 years ago. Were there more women than men at the rallies? I don't know but we could speculate on that!

History, Sociology and Gender Studies all bear witness to the long-established prevalence of women in the Church. We do need to consider some of the evidence of Gender Studies to avoid falling into the trap of gender stereotyping.

Walter & Davie reinforce the view that churchgoing in pre-industrial Britain was considered a public duty, thereby explaining why men were more visible at public worship,

dropping off once faith became more of a private choice.

There are some studies by Geert Hofstede on culture and gender that contribute much to our understanding of the different attitudes towards leadership within the Church. He suggests that in leadership terms masculine and feminine cultures create different role models. The masculine leader is assertive and decisive, a lonely decision-maker who looks for facts discretely rather than engaging with others in dialogue to find the solution to a problem. The leader in a feminine culture, whether male or female, is less visible, intuitive rather than decisive, and accustomed to seeking the views of others. Apparently, the UK is defined as a relatively masculine culture, featuring joint 9th in Hofstede's list of more than 50 countries.

Men are reluctant to concede that the culture of the Church has been predominantly female, despite scriptural references to the Church as the Bride of Christ.

Hofstede's study reveals the dangers inherent in presuming gender

If work used to define masculinity it does not do so any more. A revolution has occurred.

stereotypes. His findings reveal that both men and women have feminine and masculine characteristics. The truth behind the discrepancy in church attendance can remain hidden behind assumed stereotypes.

After WW2 women had been obliged to return to their domestic roles in order to release employment for men. Roy McCloughry points out that by the 1960s, things were changing and, as a decade, it was unprecedented. Attitudes towards war, racism and sex altered radically, with public demonstra-

tions, assassinations, the contraceptive pill and the resultant sexual revolution. It was a time of turbulence and excitement throughout the West. Traditional Christianity was increasingly coming under scrutiny. We saw the collapse of Christendom. Whether the sociological changes that accompanied this were the cause or effect is a moot point. Women began to demand equality in the workplace and greater recognition in the home. As more women entered that traditional bastion of maleness, the workplace, so men began to lose confidence, resulting in a crisis in masculinity.

And here perhaps we begin to get to the real issue for some men. It is not just that the church is being feminised - however you interpret that - but men's masculinity has been undermined over the last few years.

Here's a great quote from Anthony Clare - famous for his series *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* on Radio 4.

Men today are in shock. They still dominate the citadels of power, the boardrooms and cabinet rooms of the developed and developing world... but... they can surely hear... the masses calling that their time is up. Men can go on defining themselves in terms of what they do but it has become a great fraud, a confidence trick they persist in playing on themselves... If work used to define masculinity it does not do so any more. A revolution has occurred.

The alleged crisis in masculinity has fuelled a longing in men for a return to the more recognisable manliness of earlier stereotypes. Robert Bly touched a nerve in 1991, calling men back to the wild man of ancient literature. He believed that the 'soft' receptive (and therefore more feminine) men who emerged from the 1960s and 1970s had lost something truly life-giving. It was a hugely influential

book, particularly in the US, combining as it did mythology with New Age philosophy. McCloughry offers a Christian critique of Bly's work on the 'wild man'.

It seems to have been forgotten that the roots of the wild man experience was in *holy* men who had set aside the world to focus entirely on God. It shows the vacuous nature of modern culture that Bly's followers do not recognise holy ground when they find it...A spiritual pilgrimage of any depth has to be about risk-taking rather than the risk-avoidance of a materially obsessed world. But the wildness of God emanates from the holiness, the 'otherness' of God... Wildness is another way of describing the beauty of holiness. The complaint against the Church is that we have tamed the person of Jesus and made him 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild'... The issue remains power, but Bly deals with everything but the power that enslaves, the power of sin and evil.

A best-selling publication builds on Bly's thesis, calling on Christian men to return to God's intention of what it means to be a man. 'Christianity, as it currently exists, has done some terrible things to men.' It has tamed them. Despite some stereotyping of men and women, there is much in this book that merits attention, as it offers insights into men's deepest longings and needs, their frustrations with how to live in today's world and Church. Like others, Eldredge sees masculinity as being under threat, though he is much more comfortable discussing emotion and the expression of it. Despite differences in their theology, Podles, Eldredge and Murrow have important things to say about male identity and spirituality, which may have a significant bearing on the future of the Church.

But Jesus does not teach that men are more important than women, nor that they have authority over

women. Nowhere in the creation narrative is being female or feminine portrayed as a bad thing. Part of the gospel message seems to have been lost in translation.

The so-called crisis in masculinity remains unresolved. Within the Church, some men feel beleaguered and this has resulted in a hardening of their theological stance.

It is beyond dispute that, numerically, the leadership of the C of E is becoming feminized. Inevitably, with increasing numbers of female clergy, the culture of the Church will be affected - positively or negatively, depending on one's viewpoint. This essay has unearthed no evidence that increasing feminization has contributed to an accelerating decline in church attendance, or to the imbalance of the sexes within congregations. It seems that women have always outnumbered men in church. Women also live longer - a factor seldom mentioned with regard to this particular debate.

The largest gap in church today is of men *and* women in their twenties. Of those who attend, only 3.4% are in this age bracket. Priorities for evangelism, however, still seem to be to children, or through

The complaint against the Church is that we have tamed the person of Jesus and made him 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild'...

women's groups, taking advantage of the greater predilection of women towards things spiritual. Evidence in the US suggests that strategic evangelising of men is much more effective.

Sadly, the conservative wing of the C of E has expended much energy on internal theological disagreements rather than asking itself tough questions about how the

predominantly male leadership got it so badly wrong over the last century. Whilst men may be attracted to churches where strong male leadership is modelled, the majority of conservative evangelical churches are not actually growing. They are simply declining at a slower rate than other churches.

The feminization of the Church is a reality, but if the Church is to prevent 'the death of Christian Britain', which Brown rather prematurely announced in 2001, it needs strong and fearless leaders, male *and* female, who will confidently, urgently and unitedly, present the authentic and attractive Jesus who brought good news of salvation to women and men alike.

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