

1305 Church, Mission and Ministry Week 8a Women in Ministry

TABOR COLLEGE PERTH WOMEN AND MINISTRY SEMINAR - 6TH JULY 1996
AN INCLUSIVE THEOLOGY FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Lecturer: John Yates

A. INTRODUCTION

1. ‘Inclusive’:

- opposite of excluding on the basis of prejudice (pie-judgment)
- will resolve into a question about the nature of the gospel of the kingdom of God
- not to be defined ideologically, but in terms of Christ i.e. the fullness which is in Him, and ours ‘in Him’ (Col. 2:10)

2. ‘Theology’

- not derived from any source (e.g. social sciences) other than the witness of the Word of God
- will relate to the being of God; not abstractly, but God as known in revelation i.e. God ‘for us’

3. ‘Christian Ministry’

- not defined by patterns of leadership or roles outside of the Church
- ministry will be defined by the life and work of Jesus (Mark 10:45; John 13:1-20; Phil. 2:5-11)

B. STRUCTURES OF CREATION

1. Genesis 1:26-28

26 God said,

“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.’

28 blessed them and said to them “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

a. The foundational biblical creation text.

b. The starting point for understanding the ‘image of God’, and so what it means to be human in all relationships.

c. ‘let us’ (v.26) - Christian theology refers this to the Trinity

- unity in diversity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- God is (inwardly) being-in-relation (love).

d. The meaning of ‘man’ being created in the ‘image of God’ is made clearer by the order of the Hebrew word sequence:

a	b	c
1. And created	God	man in his image
c'	b'	a'
2. in the image	of God	created he him
c"	b"	a"
3. male and female	he	created them.

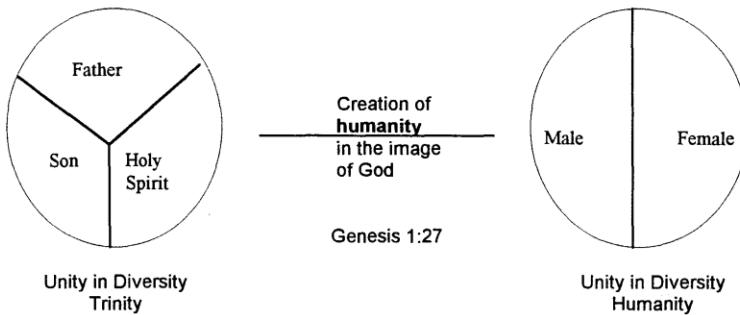
Lines 1 and 2 form a reverse parallel (chiasm), but line 3 is a complementary parallel to line 2.

This means: (i) ‘image of God’ in line 2 = ‘male and female’ in line 3.

(ii) the ‘them’ of line 3 (a”) is ‘male and female’ (c”) of the same line, and so is equivalent to ‘man’ in line 1(c).

In other words: male- and – female = image of God.,

- e. This can be represented diagrammatically:



- f. The male-female difference is the only essential difference within humanity, gender difference opens up the possibility for fellowship with another of a different yet complementary kind; this reflects the unity and glory of the Godhead.

N.B: The image of God as such is not related to marriage. Gender and sex are not identical. Many gender relations do not involve sex e.g. sons, uncles, nephews, brothers or daughters, aunts, nieces, sisters.

- g. The primal commandment of Genesis 1:28 'be fruitful.....multiply.....have dominion' is a consequence of what it means to be in the image of God. In this (at least potentially) men and women equally share in the order of creation.

N.B: The NT emphasises that Jesus is the image of God (2 Cor.4:4; Col.1:15; Heb 1:3). This incorporates His unique nature as God and man, plus the fact that the Church is His bride (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:7ff).

2. Genesis 2:18-24

- a. Is this passage describing
 (i) the ideal man-woman relationship, or
 (ii) the ideal husband-wife relationship?

(The difficulty arises because the first man and woman are necessarily a married couple).

- b. If (i), then the details of the text make it clear that all women should be subject to all men in all situations. This is because it is not a cultural but a creation order - based on the fact that the origin of the woman is the man.

In terms of an order of authority this is:
 God > Adam > Eve > Animals

- c. If (ii) then the boundaries of super-ordination and sub-ordination outlined in this text are limited to marriage. It is clear that from the point of her creation out of Adam, Eve is his wife (2:25). The repeated mention of husband and wife throughout the temptation

story and its consequence (3:6,8,16,17,20) reinforces this. Finally, the judgements pronounced in 3:16 relate to the marriage situation

d. It seems that Genesis 2:18-24 expounds the way in which man and woman in the covenant of marriage will fill out the original command of Genesis 1:28.

C. STRUCTURES OF THE FALL

a. The Fall is a reversal of the true order of creation (Gen. 3:1-7).

Animals > Eve > Adam > God

b. The judgements of Genesis 3:14-24 restore the original order but in such a way that they will be attended by conflict and suffering.

c. The dominance of the husband referred to in 3:16 is a description of the outworking of divine wrath. As such it cannot be taken as normative for any male-female relationships.

d. In practice, male dominance and oppression in general can be viewed as a result of human rebellion and divine judgement.

N.B: Male perceptions of women are first formed of mothers who are wives under the God-ordained authority of husbands.

D. STRUCTURES OF REDEMPTION

1. The Plan of God

a. The plan of God is an outworking of the eternal inner trinitarian life of God. All things will be worked out in the order: ‘from’ the Father, ‘through’ the Son and ‘by’ the Holy Spirit (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 1:11-13; 2:18 etc.)

b. This order involves a unity of mutual love that expresses itself in the obedience of the Son to the Father. The super-ordination and subordination in God is for the purpose of service and other-centred glory e.g. John 17:1-4.

c. To submit to the Father in His earthly life (humiliation) is the glory of the Son, to elevate the Son with authority is the glory of the Father (exaltation) e.g. Phil. 2:5-11.

d. It is precisely in His obedience in love for the Father, and pre-eminently in the cross, that Jesus is the image and glory of God (2 Cor. 4:4).

e. The authority which Jesus possesses, both over the Church and the universe (Matt. 28:18; John 17:2; Eph. 1:22, 5:23; Col. 1:18) is given to Him as the obedient suffering Servant of the Lord (cf Luke 24:26).

f. It is because he has given his life for the world and the Church (Mark 10:45; John 6:51; 10:14ff; Eph. 5:25 etc) that he has this authority. As the mediator of eternal life he has authority to give life.

g. The purpose of the plan of God, outworked by the present authority of Jesus, is that everything might be summed up and reconciled to God through Christ (Eph. 1:10; 2:16; Col. 2:18-20). The ultimate goal is a new humanity and a new creation ‘in Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:15) giving honour to the Father.

2. The Means of the New Creation

- a. The means by which this plan will be accomplished is the Incarnation: ‘the Word became flesh’ (John 1:14 cf. I Cor 15:47; Gal. 4:4; Phi!. 2:6,8; Héb. 2:9,14).
- b. Since Jesus will be the head of a new order of creation, he is the ‘second Adam’ (Rom;5:12 if; 1 Cor. 15:22,45 if) who represents all men and women.
- c. The reconciliation of the fractured and rebellious condition of fallen creation under the wrath of God (objectively) achieved at the cross (John 12:31; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).
- d. This includes the undoing of the alienation between men and women due to the Fall (Gen. 3).
- e. The resurrection is the beginning of the new world order, for Jesus has died to the old age of sin and now lives to God (Rom. 6:9-10).

3. The Content of the New Creation

- a. The content of the new creation is Christ (Ram. 6:4-5). So to be ‘in him’ is to be in the new creation realised in him by his resurrection from the dead. (Ccl. 2:9-10). What Christ has received from the Father - authority to rule all things for the Church (Eph. 2:22), he shares with his body so that it is his fullness (Eph. 2:23).
- b. If the new creation in Christ is a genuinely eternal or eschatological reality, then the relationships within the body of Christ must be genuinely eschatological. Men and women must essentially relate in ways which will be permanent and witness to the reality of heaven. This excludes a male:female pattern of superordination: subordination.
- c. This includes a share in the gifts of ministry (Eph. 4:9-11), which are an expression of Christ’s risen life. Through these gifts Jesus is bringing about relational reconciliation upon the earth (2 Cor. 5:20) both by building up his body and by putting his enemies under his feet (Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Cor 15:25). This is the coming of the kingdom of God with power, the message and ministry of which is the content of Christian service (Cal. 4:11).
- d. The gifts of ministry are our sharing in Jesus’ reception of authority as the exalted of the Father. These gifts are in principle available to be received equally by men and

women for the service of Christ, as we are all equally sons of the Father through the Son (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:4-7).

f. Gifts and ministries then are diverse expressions of sonship received in Christ. Means by which we share in His inheritance (for His sake and that of others) to the glory of the Father (cf. Phil. 2:11).

g. Neither men nor women then should look upon ministry as a means of self-gratification, personal advancement or spiritual promotion. The form of ministry in Christ is the form of the life of Christ, sacrificial love for the sake of others. We are called to submit to the Son as he disperses the gifts of the Father for the cause of bringing glory to God. This is to truly live as sons. To refuse to either receive from God, or to receive from those whom God has appointed to give (women or men), is to deny the glory of God.

h. Such giving and receiving is possible only by living under the authority of the risen Christ (Rom. 1 :3-4) who must be submitted to through ‘the obedience of faith’ (Rom. 1:5).

i. The personal presence of the risen Christ is realised through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33; 17-18) who is the power of the coming age (Heb. 6:5) where all things will be made new (Rev. 21:5).

E. A NOTE ON MARRIAGE

a. The institution of marriage precedes both the event of the Fall and the order of redemption. Marriage therefore is a genuine and permanent creation order.

b. Jesus teaches that marriage belongs to this age only (Luke 20:34-36). As such, marriage is not a genuine eschatological or new creation order.

c. In Ephesians 5:31 -32 Paul refers to Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”. This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the Church.’

The union of husband and wife in marriage is a type or pattern of the essential reality which is Christ as Ideal Husband and Church as Ideal Wife. This latter order is genuinely eschatological, and so eternal.

d. As a genuine creation order in the present time the superordination - subordination pattern for husband and wife remains in all conceivable circumstances of marriage.

e. Since in the Church both husband and wife receive from Christ as Head and Husband, then nothing in the order of redemption in Christ (in terms of ministry) contradicts the order of marriage. A husband may receive ministry in the Church from his wife as she represents Christ for this is not part of her role as his wife.

Appendix 1: Summary of Beliefs Concerning the Ministerial Equality of Men and Women

M. B. Smith, *Gender or Giftedness* World, Evangelical Fellowship 2000

APPENDIX B SUMMARY OF BELIEFS UNDERGIRDING HIERARCHICAL THEOLOGIES

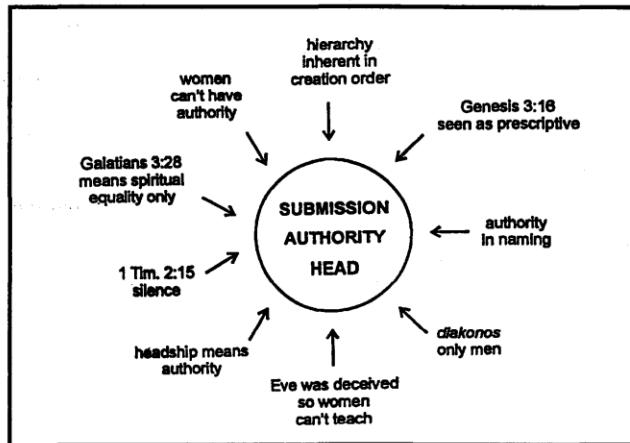


Figure 4

Woman is subject to the man as Christ is subject to the Father. Generally traditionalists will say that women are not inferior to men, but that while they are equal spiritually, they have different functions. That is to say, their function is based on their gender. The Biblical basis for that is the belief that head means authority and since Christ is the head (authority) of the church and man is the head (authority) of the woman, she is to be submissive and cannot have authority over the man. Therefore, she cannot teach men or preach the word.

In this paradigm, the following meanings prevail:

'ezer knegdo	- helper equal to means subordinate
kephale	- head means authority
authentein	- translated authority
sigao	- means cannot speak
hypotasso	- means submission of the wife to the husband and then is carried over into the church to mean submission of the women to the men

There are 3 core texts:
Ephesians 5:22 - submission
1 Timothy 2:15 - I do not permit
Ephesians 5:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 - head

Galatians 3:28 is understood to have spiritual meaning, but not to have any impact on the current behaviour.

SUMMARY OF BELIEFS UNDERGIRDING GIFT BASED MODEL

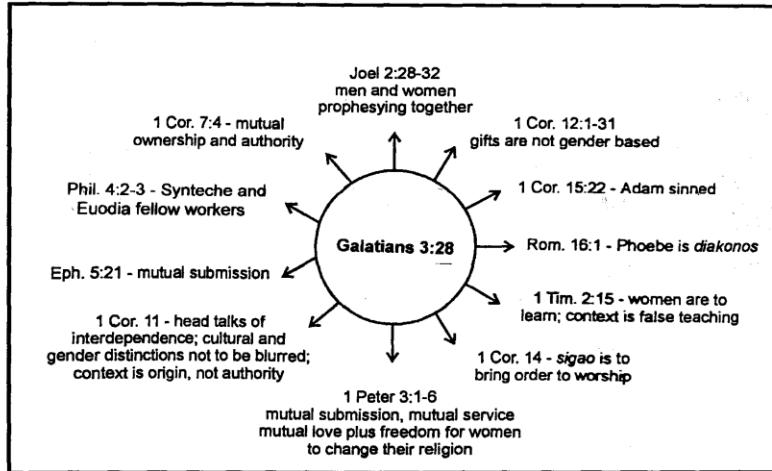


Figure 5

Men and women are equally created in the image of God, to live together in community and serve within that community on the basis of their giftedness by the Holy Spirit. Service within the community is not determined by gender. The essence of community is mutual submission and mutual responsibility: each one is to be a servant, contributing to the building up of each other according to their gifts.

In this paradigm, the following meanings prevail:

<i>'ezer knegdo</i>	- helper “equal to” means face to face, suitable to
<i>kephale</i>	- head means source
<i>authentein</i>	- is recognized as an unusual word which suggests dominance
<i>sigao</i>	- means a voluntary silence in order to pay attention
<i>hypotasso</i>	- is a voluntary submission and is used in the context of mutual submission

There is one core text: Galatians 3:28, which summarizes the equality of all people in Christ and has both spiritual and practical implications because the daily living out of our identity in Christ can never be separated from the eternal reality of our life in Him.

Appendix 2: The Trinity and Subordinationism

More or better theology wanted from Moore (Kevin Giles press statement)

In the last thirty years Moore College theologians have vehemently opposed the ordination of women to the priesthood on the basis of a God-given differentiation of sex roles grounded in an unchanging social order established in creation by God before sin entered the world. This teaching has been supported by arguing that just the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father his ‘head’ so women are permanently subordinated to men. In 1999 Sydney Synod endorse a report by the Sydney Doctrine Commission that asserted the Son was eternally subordinated to the Father in his person and nature.

In his important book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (IVP Academic) Kevin Giles, a graduate of Moore College and one time Senior Student, examines these arguments so well rehearsed in Sydney but stemming from the North America scene.

His thesis is that to eternally subordinate the Son to the Father in person or role is to undermine the primary doctrine of the Christian faith, namely the ‘co-equal’ Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to the creeds and Reformation confessions of faith it is heresy. Moreover, he shows that the eternal subordination of the Son in person or role is rejected by Athanasius, Augustine, Calvin and Warfield, by most Reformed theologians, virtually all mainline Protestant theologians and all Roman Catholic theologians. Those who argue for the eternal subordination of the Son are a very small minority at the end of a very thin branch

This leads him to question role differentiation and creation given social ordering as the basis for the continuing subordination of women. He shows these arguments are novel, a post 70’s androcentric construct. Historical theology and the Bible know nothing of role differentiation or a once given social order established in creation. In the Bible men and women are differentiated by their God-given natures not roles, and the ideal always lies in the future not the past. The whole Bible is predicated on the eschatological hope of a new heaven and a new earth where the perfect may be realised. The apostolic exhortations to women to be subordinate are exactly of the same kind as those to slaves, practical advice to people living in a culture where the subordination of women and slavery went unquestioned and unchallenged.

Rather than the orthOdox doctrine of the Trinity supporting the permanent subordination of women it stands in opposition to it. In the Trinity we have a model of relating in which no one person is before or after another, each is subordinated to the others in love and the three do everything in perfect unison: they work as one. Thus the Athanasian ôreed, which all Anglican Clergy must endorse, speaks of the divine three as ‘co-equal’ in person and authority.

Kevin continually returns to the basic question of how evangelical theology is ‘done’. He rejects the idea that theology can be formulated simply by quoting texts and giving one’s interpretation of them. In the fourth century Asian dispute over the eternal subordination of the Son Athansius was faced with an opponent who had numerous texts that on face valued seem to support his case. To rebut the Arains Athanasius had to argue that what is primary and central in scripture must guide the theological interpretation of scripture, and the theologian facing new questions must extrapolate from what is actually said in

scripture. The new question facing Christians in the post 70's epoch is: what should be believed about the male—female relationship in the world, the church and the home in a culture that has repudiated patriarchy? No Christian in earlier times was confronted with this question. It is an entirely new issue thrust upon Christians by God's own work in history. Moore College theologians have not been able to concede that a profound change in cultural context often changes how the scriptures are understood and applied, despite the numerous historical examples that can be given. Social context does bear on the interpretation of scripture and changes in social context do produce new interpretations of the Bible that come to prevail.

Appendix 3: Gospel and Culture

Gospel and Culture with Special Reference to the Pastoral Epistles

1. A Starting Point: the effect of the Christian walk on those presently outside the church
a This is a notable feature of the Pastorals (1 Tim 3:1 6:1 Tit 2:58 1 C) Cf 1 Tim 3:10; Tit 1:6f.)

b. It accounts in part for the unusual features f these letters compared to the earlier Paulines Even if one disagrees with the majority view in scholarship that Paul did not author these letters, they do seem to reflect a later and more settled situation in relation to ‘Christianity’ than other earlier works. For example there is no theology of church government in the Corinthian letters.

c. This means that the question of the shape of the presentation of the gospel in the form of the life of the church, a not just in verbal proclamation, takes on some details not as central as in other works This is the r for the prominence mentioned in ‘a’ above.

2. Godliness as a form of life: *eusebia*

a. The above Greek term, which could be translate as “piety”, “devotion” or “godliness- is only used of the manner of life of Christians in the Pastorals and 2 Peter. Elsewhere (Acts 10:2,7, 17:23 cf. Acts 3:12) it is used of religious forms which, whilst not in themselves saving, represent a point of contact for the apostolic preaching.

b. It seems to follow, especially in the light of “1” above, that the *eusebia* of the Christians is not completely discontinuous with the *eusebia* of Jews, “God - fearers” and pagans. (More on the underlying principle for this below.)

c. Particularly in the Pastoral epistles, “godliness” may present itself, at least in the first instance, as a good moral way of living and not essentially, to the observer, as “religious truth”.

d. Implicit in this claim, to be explored in more detail below, is the inference that culture, this being the mode f life all societies recognise, each in their own individual and contextualised way, as vital for the preservation of life and identity, contains **necessarily** points contact for the gospel

3. Culture as the Repository of the Common Grace of God.

- a. In his preaching outside of the synagogues, Paul sees the hand of God in natural provision, recognised at some level by the beneficiaries, as the point or the proclamation of the gospel (Acts 14:17; 17:24 - 28).
- b. The connection between nature as the vehicle of grace and the grace in the gospel is prominent in Paul's anti – ascetic teaching in the Pastorals as he confronts the false "Christian" teachers (1Tim 4 -4 on sex and food; etc).
- c. Paul's point seems to be that it is vital that the "pagans" come to see that the source of the goodness they **know** objectively in their lives (Romans 1:18 - 21, 32) in the "natural "sphere of creation and culture, is the God and Father revealed in Jesus Christ (this is especially clear in the Areopagus address in Acts 17).
- d. False piety, usually expressed in some form of legalism, communicates to the observers and hearers that the God being presented is other than the source of what they already enjoy. This of course creates an enormous obstacle, in terms of God's own self revealing work, to the Spirit's communication of the gospel.

4. Culture,Gospel, "Godliness" and the Orders of Creation and Redemption

- a. The rhythm of natural existence and the orders of human government are the gift of God in the preservation of human life ultimately for the coming of Messiah and the new creation (Gen 8:20- 9:7; Ps 104; Rom 13:1 -7).
- b Whatever sin does to these orders (even global warming) it cannot undo the orders as such, they are the sovereign gift of God. He does not stop sending the rain, causing the sun to rise, satisfying the human heart with food and gladness, giving to men and women the gift of marriage and children, speaking through the stars and so on. All these things exist by the divine decree. The whole earth is filled with his glory (Isa 6:3).
- c. The above means that culture, as the interface between human society and the environment in which it is placed by God, is necessarily a bearer of divine general revelation. Whilst the content of this general revelation is as unchanging as God himself, culture varies across time and space. Whilst it would be hard to deny that some cultures are less 'godly' than others in the sense used above, no culture can completely suppress the truth of God's righteousness by its own unrighteousness without self - annihilation. No such culture exists.

- d. The above can be expressed in terms of “divinely created orders”, the structure or shape of reality given by God to the world, and embedded in the heart of culture, as a preserving reality and point of contact for special revelation/saving grace which is to come.
- e. It is important to notice that this perspective on “the orders” is central to the framework of the Pastorals. God in the Pastorals is the Creator and Redeemer of every element of human existence in the broadest sense (1 Tim 2:2, 5; 4:10). Salvation takes on a very objective sense.
- f. For Paul, *eusebia* means to live a life in accordance with the divine orders. This necessarily includes the relationship between husbands and wives. (Note also the orders relating to finance 1 Tim. 6:6.).
- g. It is impossible to present a “culture tree gospel”. This notion is not only empty of content but undesirable. The God who all men and women objectively know (in their hearts) as the giver of all good in culture, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ,must be expressly shown by our *eusebia* to be the one and the same true and saving God of all people (1 Tim 4:10).
- ## 5. Incarnation as the Defining Point of the Relation Between Gospel and Culture
- a. The above is not definitive, in as much as the boundaries between nature, gospel and culture are not specified. The nexus between these realities can only be defined by their Creator, that is, by the sovereign God.
- b. The Incarnation as the “enfleshment” (John 1:14) of the unchangeable Word of God, the content and revelation of the gospel), is God’s own ultimate and complete self definition in terms of his sovereign freedom over his own orders of creation and culture. The Incarnation is the revelation of the plasticity of the “orders” in God with a view towards world redemption.
- c. The Christian starting point on any subject can only be the person of Christ, in whom is found the absolute beginning and end of all the “orders” of God. (This is a enormous subject but reference could be made to Eph 1:4, 10; Col 1:15-20; 2:2-3; Rev 1:17; 22:13.). The importance of this statements that all of scripture is to be read through Christ who gives to it its final meaning for he as the Word of God is its ultimate and proper content. To ignore this as a controlling principle of prayerful interpretation of scripture will mean inevitably to succumb to those elements of our own culture which are -not informed by Christ.
- d. A particularly important example of this is the interpretation of Genesis. Genesis 1 -2, including the relation between Adam and Eve, is a creational type of the final unity between Christ and the church (Eph 5:31 42) The ultimate meaning of man and woman, and husband and wife, cannot be found apart from the revelation of who God is in Christ.

To deny this would be to attempt to give a non - Christological definition of the image of God. (Note, this is not just a post- fall reality cf Rom 5: 12)

e. The subject under review comes under intense illumination when we pick up Paul's point in 1 Tim 3:16: "Without a doubt, the mystery of *eusebia* is great: 'He was revealed in the flesh'

Jesus Christ, as a first century Galilean Jewish male with a local accent and a world view appropriate to his times (there is no empirical science in the Gospels etc.) is the reality of the divinely self -defined interface between gospel and culture. His flesh is the *eusebia* of God, the form God takes on to give revelation that the one encountered already in the orders of creation is the same one who comes as Saviour. (In passing, it should be noted how many of the parables of Jesus and his miracles have a creation context rather than a straight exegesis of the Old Testament.)

f. if the Incarnation of Jesus is the revelation of the inner meaning of the Christian *eusebia*, then the essence of godliness must be to live a manner off life as completely as possible at the interface that God has (and is) establishing between nature/culture and gospel. (I would like to open up 1 Cor 11:14 some time, as I believe the term crucial here, *physis*, often translated "nature" would support my Pastorals based argument)

g. The exact nature of this possible interface can only be perceived in the light of the final work of God in Christ. Two statements are relevant here:

(1) the relationships between men and women in the End cannot be hierarchical, not only because marriage ceases with death, but because this is expressly stated in scripture (Gal 3:28).

(2) the glory of the nations comes into the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:26); this can only include the perfection, rather than the abolition of

h. It therefore lies within the sovereign freedom of God over culture and creation to give revelation within culture and church, that is, both general and special revelation, in any way that is compatible with the final reality revealed in Christ.

i. Since:

(1) contemporary western culture already adheres to the equality of men and women in decision making, and

(2) since this is compatible with the final state of the church where all believers will rule with Jesus as one with him their Head and Bridegroom (1 Cor 6:2 -3:

Rev 5:10 etc) it cannot be rejected as a cultural aberration incompatible with the gospel. (To try to legislate such full equality in the first century would have been exactly such an aberration, hence the situation that seems to be reflected in 1 Tim 2:8ff.) N.B. this does not open up the door to every cultural deviation. Homosexuality for example is not permissible, it is based on a denial of the ultimacy of the revelation of God in the difference between male and female, not only between ourselves, but primarily between the Bride and her Bridegroom (Rev 19:7ff.).

j. The mark of “godliness” in church relations, as a culturally connected entry point under the sovereignty of God, necessarily includes equal roles for men and women in decision making and ministry. To deny this is to deny, in some degree, the possibility of the “enfleshing” revelation of the Word of God in, our own time and generation

6. The Kingdom of God, the Church, Religion, The Gospel and the Future

- a. The principles outlined above can be applied much more broadly.
- b. The sovereign ruling power of God over creation, culture and in gospel is the kingdom of God,
- c. The gospel of the kingdom creates the church, the church exists for the kingdom, not vice -versa. (This is a major and extensive theme, for example. in the Synoptic Gospels eg. Matt 16:16 -18).
- d. Where the church abuses and reverses this principle the result is “religion”.
- e. Under such circumstances, God the Father and Christ discipline the church by giving it over to that which it desires in it’s own heart, that is, to define itself powerfully in cultural terms, or over against culture in some form of counter- cultural idealism. The former leads to triumphalism, as in classical Roman Catholicism, the latter to various sectarian groupings, perhaps in some of the Anabaptist Communities (like the Hutterites).
- f. It follows that if we do not move where God is moving in the gospel - culture interface we cannot experience the fullness of the revelation of the gospel in it’s current enfleshment. We will share the fate of the majority of Jewish believers of first century, who never seemed to pass beyond the strictures of the law (Acts 20:17 - 26), such expressions of devotion, not inappropriate as “godliness” in Jerusalem had no future when God removed the Temple and the cult on which they depended.

7. Final Remarks: Scripture. Culture and Eschatology

- a. To deny that the Bible is cultural is to deny its continuity with the humanity of Christ.
- b. To treat the Bible as only cultural is to treat Jesus as other than the eternal Word of God and to deny the possibility of eternal reality (salvation in him).
- c. The only possible way to read scripture is Christologically in terms of the revelation given in Christ himself. This is to see in it, at one and the same time, the human and the divine, the eternal and the temporal.
- d. That these 2 natures are not contradictory is the revelation of Christ himself who speaks to us on earth from heaven, this revelation is genuinely eschatological and enfleshed in the reality in which we all (diversely) live.

e. None of this can be known through either reading the Bible as a book of timeless propositions, nor through the lens of cultural as such, but only in the deepest intimacy of the Word and prayer. May this be our desire, for it is the bearer of the hope of the world.

John Yates 27.5.00.

Postscript : 28.5.00

1. The above leads to the conclusion that “To be a true Australian is to be a Christian.”
2. When God gives us forms of presentation of the apostolic gospel which touch the heart of what we hold most dear in the culture, he, (not the British or the Americans etc.) has given us, this will necessarily evoke a revival which will transform the nation at its depths and give it a new expression of its identity.
- 3: Such a work of God will, by nature, “hold” due to its eschatological power.
gospel and culture6