

# SPECTRUM

## St. Paul and women

I was reading a book the other day that again made the same claim. Paul, apostle and writer of numerous books and letters in the Christian Scriptures, advocated the submission of women. Men were to have authority over women. Worse still, the book stated that Paul's anti-women stance was responsible for much of the subsequent misogyny, oppression and subjugation of women in the Christian church up to the present. Ergo, Christianity, but particularly the church, is no safe haven or resting place for women who seek spiritual wholeness.

No doubt men have clobbered women with the Pauline texts for centuries. No doubt ecclesiastical institutions have firmly entrenched their patriarchy as a result. And many argue, prominent feminists included, that such is because of Paul's writings.

Has male dominance occurred in the church due to the teaching of Scriptures, and especially that of Paul? Or is it possible that patriarchy was already a dominant feature of that time period? Did the biblical writers, Paul included, introduce as best they could new and liberating ideas and notions for women in an environment generally hostile to them? There is increasing evidence to suggest that misdeeds have been perpetrated not because but in spite of what Paul was actually stating. Is it possible then that we have grossly misread him?

One passage in particular has been hailed as Paul's most blatant anti-feminist position. In 1 Timothy 2:12 he states: "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent." That verse has drawn the ire of feminists, let alone women in general, for some time. Yes, Paul was issuing a restriction. But was it temporary and for a specific purpose, or was a universal and timeless dictum?

It was not uncommon in the early period for Christians to gather in the houses of wealthy women. Practice dictated that whoever owned the home became leader of the gathering. The host then was responsible for proper order, decorum and teaching, as mentioned in the longer passage (1 Tim. 2:8-15).

The passage states that (both men and) women were to dress appropriately. Wealthy women were known to dress extravagantly for public gatherings. But in this context it was not appropriate, especially because of the affects it would have on those in their midst considerably less affluent.

Both men and women were also to conduct themselves appropriately. There was concern for disorder during worship. This was often due to an over-enthusiasm, not infrequently experienced by women who found new freedom in Christ.

Paul, and his side-kick Timothy, were most concerned about what was being taught in these gatherings. Syncretism became an increasing threat to a movement that was not only new, but also quite radical. Thus, they were watchful for false notions, fruitless discussion, worldly fables, and foolish controversies. They sought people with good judgement and sound teaching to become the leaders.

This was a particular concern for the women who were provide

leadership. In a society where they had very low status, few would have had opportunities for learning, especially in Jewish Scriptures and the new teachings of Jesus and Paul. Good leadership for sound teaching therefore, required careful and quiet study. Women (and men) were to keep silent, until they were sufficiently educated to teach "knowledge of the truth", that is, the true (and liberating) message of the gospel.

Further references in the same passage to Eve and "salvation through childbearing" has also irritated feminists. All too often it kept women domesticated. But, is this what Paul had in mind?

No doubt Paul wished to emphasize childbearing was a positive experience. His was a clear statement against the

Gnostics, who tended to denigrate marriage, let alone childbearing. But again, recent scholarship has indicated that we have seriously misconstrued the reference to Eve and childbearing.

Eve, as the first mother, played a crucial role in the first redemptive process by virtue of her begetting children, thereby gaining her salvation. Women at the time of Paul, however, would be saved not simply by bearing children, but by learning (quietly, silently) true teachings, especially before they taught others. They would gain salvation if they remained in faith, love and holiness, with good mental judgement. This, of course, applied equally to men.

Was Paul anti-women, or was he, like Jesus, a liberator of women in a society that tended

to wear their oppression. It is my hunch that Paul also sought equality for women, more so than many are willing to grant. But we will only know for sure if we are willing to wrestle with documents, and without foregone conclusions.

Many will not accept this view of Paul. That boils down to differences in interpretation, if not hermeneutics. So be it. More important, however, is that those who hold Paul responsible for the misogyny, oppression and subjugation of women perhaps have not given him a fair hearing or reading.

That places great stumbling blocks before women (and even men) who wish to embrace a Christian spirituality, yet have been taught to see only a misogynist Paul. Paul himself was concerned about false teaching. So ought we.

### Metanoia by John Valk

## If you think we are radical... well

### The Wimmin's Room

The Wimmin's collective has gotten a lot of flack this term for "going too far" and being "too radical." You know... just another bunch of feminists having "HERstoronics." (Great letter by the way, Alison. I can always use a good laugh by Friday).

Actually, since we work as a collective, it's not really accurate to lump us all under the heading of radicals... because we're not. There is a lot of diversity even among ourselves. However, yes, some of us are radical... myself being one. Personally I don't think one can ever be too radical. I mean, where would we female students be if it weren't for our "RADICAL" sisters at the turn of the century. We sure wouldn't be at university and we definitely wouldn't be voting.

Okay, so in today's context, what's going too far... well I guess it depends on what scale you measure it on and what kind of world you want to leave for your daughters and sons. At Conservative little ole' UNB, maybe the list of professors who the Wimmin's Committee is concerned about (and the list does exist and if the moron who wrote the articles in the Brunswick bothered to actually talk to the members of the wimmin's collective instead of just making up the facts as he saw them, maybe he would have a better understanding of the issue)... anyway as I was saying, maybe that could be seen as radical.

But I found this great article in Ms. Magazine that makes me wonder if we've really gone far enough... yea, I know I'm opening another can of worms. But, I really think we're just scratching the sur-

face here and if we're going to be labelled radical we should really live up to it like our trend-setting American neighbours...

- Students have filed or threatened lawsuits at Yale, Sangamon State University in Illinois and Westfield State College in Massachusetts over the lack of action by university administrators on the issue of sexual harassment policies.

- At Princeton last year, students threatened to picket and boycott an English professor's classes if he was reinstated after a year's suspension due to charges of sexual harassment.

- At Simon's Rock in Massachusetts, 16 students, calling themselves the defense Guard, bypassed school procedures that they called inadequate, surrounded four separate faculty members and chanted loudly that each was a sexual harasser.

- At Brown's University women waged a guerrilla resistance campaign against date rape. First a man's name was scrawled on the wall of a women's room in Rockefeller Library. Within days more names were added. It grew to 15 names then 30 names of men to avoid - men who raped and assaulted.

- At Duke University, a group called the Date Rape and Sexual Assault Task Force turned the tables on men for one night this past March.

When members caught male students walking around the campus alone at night, an activist would suddenly descend, tag him with a bright orange sticker that say "Gotcha" and give him information about rape and sexual assault.

- Lesbian and gay students from

Princeton, State University of New York at Stony Brook, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, among others, have been instrumental in banning military recruiters from campus because of anti-gay policies.

- In April 1990, fraternity brother at the university of Texas at Austin spray-painted on a car: "Fuck coons" and "Fuck you niggers, die." Another fraternity distributed a T-shirt with the head of Sambo superimposed on Michael

Jordan's body. But, the provocateurs didn't count on reaction from a new student government leader - Toni Luckett. She is an African American senior who got herself elected president by a coalition of progressive groups - rudely surprising fraternities and sororities who usually won. She led a thousand students on a protest march in front of the state supreme court building and a fraternity house.

Now THAT'S radical.

IF YOU'RE NOT EATING SQUARE PIZZA...



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