

Home and Household

1. One of the pressing issues facing the Church today is whether there is any place for 'hierarchy' within the family. The title of a recent collection of essays on gender is self-explanatory: *Discovering Biblical Equality: complementarity without hierarchy*. Significantly, however, the writers are generally at pains to deny hierarchy within the Trinity (although hierarchy is, strictly speaking, the wrong word), on the grounds that all 'hierarchies' are essentially rooted in sin. Any attempt to argue for a subordination of women to men is therefore equally sinful, and indeed heretical:

Because the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity categorically and unambiguously rejects the *eternal* subordination of the Son and the Spirit in being *and* work, it does not and cannot be used to support the subordination of women to men, nor to demonstrate that personal equality can be reconciled with permanent role subordination. (Kevin Giles, 'The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women', *op cit*, 352)

2. According to Giles, subordination can only ever be temporary, and is an expression of 'fallen human relations, where some rule and others obey'. There are many criticisms that could be levelled specifically at this thesis, not least that the subordination of Christians to godly leadership in the Church must be a result of sin (Heb 13:17)! But the crucial point is that questions about the relations between men and women may have unexpected ramifications when we consider their meaning for our doctrine of God. We cannot therefore treat this area lightly or dismiss it as a 'storm in a teacup'.
3. The debate about subordination within the Trinity has become quite heated — and the reason is not hard to find, for if subordination has no final place within the Trinity, it may be argued it has no proper place within relationships of *equality* between men and women in a gospel framework. Yet it is hard to avoid finding at least some subordination within the relationships of the Trinity:

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (Jn 6:38)

Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Co 15:27-28)

4. Moreover, there is a major difficulty if we exclude subordination from relationships of equality, for then humility becomes not a virtue but a response to someone else's vice!
5. One aspect of the position adopted by Giles and others is that subordination may be freely offered, but cannot be required within the nature of equal persons or relationships of equality. However, the Trinitarian language of Father and Son once again suggests this is not the case:

Jesus gave them this answer: 'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.' (Jn 5:19)

Here there is a clear 'flow' of obedience from the Son to the Father, just as we find a corresponding 'flow' of trust from the Father to the Son:

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son ... (Jn 5:22)

It is evident that the dynamic of this relationship could not be reversed without the Father somehow ceasing to be 'fatherly' or the Son similarly abandoning the essence of 'sonship'. Yet we do not feel the Father — or any father — is arrogant or authoritarian in

acting like a Father, any more than we feel a son's personhood is diminished by acting like a son. Hence we need not feel that a wife is any lesser a human being by her 'subjection' to her husband.

6. That such subjection is appropriate is evident from Ephesians, where Paul observes that it is required by the relationship between Christ and the Church:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (Eph 5:21-24)

Provided we accept Paul's position (endorsed by *Book of Common Prayer*), that marriage is 'an honourable estate ... signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church', we must similarly accept that the submission of a wife to her husband and the self-sacrificial love of a husband for his wife are non-optional.

7. However, we find in the Bible much more to family life than merely the submission of wife to husband or the self-sacrifice of husband for wife. To begin with, the home is the place where the story of salvation is learned and enacted:

For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (Ex 13:6-8)

To this day, *Kiddush* (the Sabbath ritual) and *Pesach* (the Passover) are family occasions, presided over by husband and wife in the home, not the rabbi in the Synagogue.

8. Again, the instilling of love for God and the knowledge of his word is entrusted to the community organised around the home, not delegated to the Temple authorities:

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Dt 6:5-9)

And once again, the Jewish community today has no equivalent of the Anglican 'priest' to monopolise ritual observances.

9. It is therefore not surprising to find the organisation of the early Church based on homes:

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. (Ac 5:42)

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. (Ac 12:12)

After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left. (Ac 16:40)

Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. (Ac 18:7-8)

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. (Ac 20:7-8)

You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. (Ac 20:20)

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. [...] Greet also the church that meets at their house. (Ro 16:3,5a)

Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. (Col 4:15)

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home ... (Phm 1-2)

We may notice, incidentally, the occasions when the Church meets in a woman's house (Lydia, Nympha), and also that teaching took place 'from house to house', which may reinforce our suggestion that the limitation one women's rôle in teaching men is based on the need for propriety and good order in the home.

10. There seems little reason to doubt that the early Church would have adopted the model of the Synagogue for its leadership (see Roger Beckwith, *Elders in Every City*, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2003). The elders of the Synagogue exercised a significant rôle of leadership and rule within the local community, though the synagogue-ruler (eg Crispus, above) was, oddly, not usually a such a community ruler or a teacher. Highest in 'rank', however, was the teaching-elder, who would have been trained by other teachers (compare Paul, in Ac 22:3, trained by Gamaliel). These teaching-elders were ordained (apparently by the laying on of hands) and could then take on and train other elders.
11. The chief distinction between these teaching-elders and contemporary Anglican priest/presbyters is thus not the fact or mode of ordination, but the emphasis on teaching. In the 'Pastoral' epistles we see this emphasis maintained:

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Ti 2:1-2)

In the Church, however, the sacramental and liturgical functions of the priest have often overwhelmed the teaching functions. Too often, the emphasis is on a mystical 'inward' call to be a 'priest', rather than on a measurable outward equipping to teach and lead God's people.

12. By contrast, the New Testament clearly takes a pragmatic approach to the qualifications of a leader within the Christian community:

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [bishop], he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, *able to teach*, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of

respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. (1 Ti 3:1-12)

13. We see here also that the ability to manage one's household at home is essential to being able to lead the 'household of God'. There is clearly a presumption of continuity between the two: 'If anyone does not know how to manage his own family [house], how can he take care of God's church?' One reason for this is surely that the Church is not just a congregation of individuals, but a congregation of families and households.
14. The home requires the same skills as the congregation and *vice versa*, and we may therefore presume that what is taught *and exemplified* in the congregation is the skills and attitudes necessary to function effectively in the home. Fathers, who are exhorted not to exasperate their children, but rather to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4), will learn to do so in the congregational community from men who have already demonstrated their own ability in this regard: 'An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient' (Tit 1:6).
15. Crucially, the Church is a community, not a career. We cannot therefore say, 'Women can be bus-drivers or managers, so why not vicars?' A man could indeed tell a woman how to breastfeed, but he could not exemplify motherhood to her. So, similarly, a woman could indeed teach a man Christian doctrine — and might appropriately do so in the lecture room or through a book. But she could not exemplify being a husband who is to be the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the Church, nor a father whose children are to be brought up under his instruction and discipline.
16. As a general rule, then, I would suggest that the following fits with a biblical concept of home and household: 'Nothing should be done in the household of God which undermines the godly household.'
17. Unfortunately, the hierarchical and rigid structures of Anglicanism mean that the appointment of women to particular 'offices' within the Church very seriously undermines the proper understanding and functioning of the godly household. In particular, the subjecting of men to women in these structures is good for neither the men nor the women involved. We may, perforce, have to accept it, but we must not seek to encourage it.