

man who is speaking can perfectly well do so, and need not say that he is carried away by inspiration and cannot stop, because the preacher is able to control his own spirit. There must be liberty but there must be no disorder. The God of peace must be worshipped in peace.

There is no more interesting section in the whole letter than this, for it sheds a flood of light on what an early church service was like. There was obviously great freedom and an informality about it. From this passage two great questions emerge.

(i) Clearly the early Church had no professional ministry. True, the apostles stood out with special authority; but at this stage there was no professional local ministry. It was open to anyone who had a gift to use it. Has the Church been right or wrong in instituting a professional ministry? Clearly it is essential that, in our busy age when men are so preoccupied with material things, one should be set apart to live close to God and to bring to his fellows the truth and the guidance and the comfort which God gives to him. But there is the obvious danger that when a man becomes a professional preacher he may sometimes be in the position of having to say something when he has really nothing to say. However that may be, it must remain true that if a man has a message to give his fellow men no ecclesiastical rules and regulations should be able to stop him giving it. It is a mistake to think that only the professional ministry can ever bring God's truth to men.

(ii) There was obviously a flexibility about the order of service in the early Church. Everything was informal enough to allow any man who felt that he had a message to give to give it. It may well be that we set far too much store on dignity and order nowadays, and have become the slaves of orders of service. The really notable thing about an early Church service must have been that almost everyone came feeling that he had both the privilege and the obligation of contributing something to it. A man did not come with the sole intention of being a passive listener; he came not only to

receive but to give. Obviously this had its dangers, for it is clear that in Corinth there were those who were too fond of the sound of their own voices; but nonetheless the Church must have been in those days much more the real possession of the ordinary Christian. It may well be that the Church lost something when she delegated so much to the professional ministry and left so little to the ordinary Church member; and it may well be that the blame lies not with the ministry for annexing those rights but with the laity for abandoning them, certainly it is all too true that many Church members think far more of what the Church can do for them than of what they can do for the Church, and are very ready to criticize what is done but very unready to take any share in doing the Church's work themselves.

FORBIDDEN INNOVATIONS

1 Corinthians 14: 34-40

Let women keep silent in the congregation, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but let them be in subjection even as the law says. If they wish to learn about anything, let them question their husbands at home. It is a shameful thing for a woman to speak in the congregation. Was it from you that God's word went out? Or, was it to you alone that it came?

If anyone thinks that he is a forthteller of the truth, or that he has a special spiritual gift, let him understand what I write to you because it is the Lord's command. If anyone does not understand it, let him remain in his ignorance.

So then, my brothers, be eager to have the gift of forthtelling the truth and do not forbid speaking with tongues. Let everything be done with propriety and with order.

THERE were innovations threatening in the Church at Corinth which Paul did not like. In effect, he asks what right they had to make them. Were they the originators of the Christian Church? Had they a monopoly of the gospel truth? They had received a tradition and to it they must be obedient.

No man ever rose completely above the background of the age in which he lived and the society in which he grew up; and Paul, in his conception of the place of women within the Church, was unable to rise above the ideas which he had known all his life.

We have already said that in the ancient world the place of women was low. In the Greek world Sophocles had said, "Silence confers grace upon a woman." Women, unless they were very poor or very loose in their morals, led a very secluded life in Greece. The Jews had an even lower idea of women. Amongst the Rabbinic sayings there are many which belittle their place. "As to teaching the law to a woman one might as well teach her impiety." To teach the law to a woman was "to cast pearls before swine." The Talmud lists among the plagues of the world "the talkative and the inquisitive widow and the virgin who wastes her time in prayers." It was even forbidden to speak to a woman on the street. "One must not ask a service from a woman, or salute her."

It was in a society like that that Paul wrote this passage. In all likelihood what was uppermost in his mind was the lax moral state of Corinth and the feeling that absolutely nothing, must be done which would bring upon the infant Church the faintest suspicion of immodesty. It would certainly be very wrong to take these words out of their context and make them a universal rule for the Church.

Paul goes on to speak with a certain sternness. He is quite certain that, even if a man has spiritual gifts, that gives him no right to be a rebel against authority. He is conscious that the advice he has given and the rules he has laid down have come to him from Jesus Christ and his Spirit, and if a man refuses to understand them he must be left in his wilful ignorance.

So Paul draws to an end. He makes it clear that he has no wish to quench anyone's gift; the one thing he strives for is the good order of the Church. The great rule which he in effect lays down is that a man has received from God whatever gift he may possess, not for his own sake, but for

the sake of the Church. When a man can say, "To God be the glory," then and only then will he use his gifts aright within the Church and outside it.

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