

Is there a Woman's Problem?

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Is there a woman's problem? Many will say: "Certainly not, no more than there is a man's problem. Why should we in a world of depression, unemployment and gas masks increase the number of urgent problems by the rather artificial isolation of one part of humanity from the whole world situation? Are not the destinies of men and women so closely interwoven that it becomes impossible to talk of those of the first without automatically dragging in those of the second and vice versa?"

Of course, I fully agree with this statement, at least theoretically and I only wish that we might see more of it in practice. I wish that this "automatic" participation of one half of humanity in the affairs of the other half were more fully acknowledged as an *inevitable* necessity, and I cannot help thinking that many of our urgent problems would be nearer a solution, if the implications of that necessity were duly examined and estimated for what they are worth. But at the same time it is precisely because of this inevitable necessity that we have a "woman's problem" on our hands. For the failure to recognise in practice what is conceded in theory creates a problem of the first magnitude.

The hot discussions, the books and articles, which appear in ever increasing number all bearing on this subject, make it impossible to close our minds to the fact that something is stirring in womanhood today. Women in different countries, with different backgrounds, unite in the conviction that there is something essentially false about their position and they look for readjustment without further delay. They are not necessarily affiliated to women's movements; they may never have been interested in feminism, they talk from the limited basis of personal experience and often in very inadequate or contradictory phraseology which gives quite a wrong interpretation of their troubles. But they have

education, the bringing up of children — are still among the greatest they can fulfil. But they approach them now in a different spirit, a spirit not of subordination but of cooperation, and whether in this domain or in wider spheres, their aim is not only freedom but freedom to serve.

something to say which needs to be heard. This article is a modest attempt at formulating this growing conviction.

Feminism, it seems to me, has failed because it confined its attention far too much to the social aspect of the woman's position in the world. In reality the problem is not so much a social as a spiritual and religious one. In desperate times, such as our own, the basic problems stand out more clearly than in periods when hectic reforms can yet save the situation — for some time at least. Really critical days bring the ultimate questions to the surface and test our ultimate securities.

Pushed by material need and by her sense of responsibility, woman has attempted to become assimilated into this man-made world. And she has succeeded so thoroughly that, instead of changing it, she has become submerged in it. She has adopted man's methods, man's ideologies, man's whole approach to life. She fell in love with her own gift of adaptation. "Is not", she asked herself, "this inborn femininity a weakness which ought to be overcome, something which you can leave behind as a chrysalid?" She quite overlooked the fact that by doing so, she only strengthened man's belief in the legitimate character of his monopoly of human norms and values and his deep-rooted conviction, that he alone, without the woman, represents the true *homo sapiens*. She quite forgot that, even if men and women have many points in common, there is no earthly reason why the diverging points on *both* sides should not be reckoned with as seriously as the common ones. How could man take this into account if she apologised for being different? Why did she not make an effort to enrich his imagination, instead of accepting compliments on her "virile" achievements?

"The noble qualities of womanhood" are, of course, glorified in speeches at great banquets. A very real part in history and culture is ascribed to it as well as a more hidden influence. But how far does that influence go?

Pilate's wife, when she heard that voice in her dreams commanding her to protest against the crucifixion, did all that could be expected of any woman in those days: she sent a messenger to warn her husband. But Pilate was more impressed by the loud shouting of the mob, whipped up by

fanatic priests, than by a simple word from her who had been brought so infinitely nearer to Truth. Today Pilate's wives have studied at universities and learnt to tone down their sacred convictions in stylish petitions, more readable, but as negligible in the eyes of the modern Pilates. Motherhood today is more than ever glorified by leaders and statesmen. In Japan they forbid birth-control because they consider it as an equivalent for disarmament. In the West women can address diplomats and military experts and plead with their hearts and minds on behalf of millions of wives and mothers against war — but the result is that press and audience conclude : " Pretty good speech " !

When will the masculine part of humanity start to be responsible to the feminine part, as the latter is to the former since ages ? When will man's knowledge of woman be more than a projection of his prejudices on the real " object " and grow out of a genuine interest in the real " *subject* " ? Does woman exist for the sake of man ? Here lies the real centre of the problem. It cannot be phrased more clearly than in the words of St. Paul : " Man represents the likeness and supremacy of God ; but woman represents the supremacy of man. Man was not made from woman, but woman was made from man ; and man was not created for woman but woman for man ". (I. Corinth. 11 : 5-9). And then later : " In the Lord woman does not exist apart from man anymore than man exists apart from woman ". Now, which St. Paul must we believe ; the one who speaks of woman as created for man (and not vice versa), or the one who sees a mutual responsibility and relationship ? What does he mean by the words " created for " ? They cannot mean " accept as a master ", for in that case woman would have to obey two masters with opposing wills : God and man. " No one can serve two masters : either he will hate one and love the other... ". Furthermore, St. Paul must have over-estimated the resistance of woman's nerves, if he thought that she could stand the infernal isolation, which must result from " not being created for God " and " man not being created for her " ! The only explanation of the expression : " created for ", that seems to have any meaning, is " to serve as an

opposing power", as a counter-weight, a function which might be illustrated by the words of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, once spoken to the Executive Council at Simla: "Gentlemen, a Government of Archangels could not help going wrong and making dreadful mistakes without an opposition ". Indeed, that explanation would be quite in keeping with the words in Genesis 2, where it is said that God created woman as an aid *over against* man.

Whether St. Paul is right or wrong, we cannot deny woman's claim for *mutual interest, mutual trust and mutual responsibility*. Without these no human life is worthy of that name. Far too long have these attitudes been self-evident grants from woman to man which man accepted as a matter of course. Woman has walked almost the entire road in order to meet man. He must then be chivalrous and come to her encounter for at least the last few miles. Woman cannot simply exist for the sake of man. For she is conscious of a deep need, the need for an abiding, responsible authority, for one who takes her seriously, in fact for a Creator who made her consciously a woman and who in doing so had a definite and profound purpose for this world.

Perhaps the people referred to in the beginning of this article have made the discovery that the very arguments, which they used for denying the existence of a woman's problem, constitute on the contrary a strong case for it. They spoke of the disastrous effects of isolating the issues of one part of humanity from the other part and of the necessity of a right collaboration between them. But do they really believe that, in the present practice of relations between men and women, their conditions have been fulfilled? There will be a woman's problem until women and men together have discovered that it takes two sexes to build the world which God means us to build.

It would, therefore, be better to call this very far-reaching issue, "*the problem of the human being*", for man and woman are equally involved in it. Indeed, as woman has got to cultivate the potentialities of her original heritage and revise her relation to man, so has man to do very earnestly with regard to woman. It must be remembered that theirs is never a twofold relation: man-woman, but a triangular relation of faith: God—man—woman.

Man and Woman in Nation and State¹

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Until quite recently, the position of men in the nation and the state was commonly accepted as obvious and needing no further examination, while that of women has always been considered as a problem from every point of view and for all kinds of reasons. The first is that by the Act of 1919, women were granted active and passive voting rights in the state, and later in the Church too. The exercise of the new political right, collaboration in the political parties and work in Parliament itself, all of which was new to women, challenged them to consider seriously their position with regard to nation and state. In addition, the legal equality of status between men and women in the German nation was definitely and indisputably established by the Act of 1919. According to this Act, on the one hand, marriage should be based on this equality, and on the other, the two sexes should have equal official and state rights. In the same article referring to legal equality of status, a special women's right of fundamental character was established. It reads as follows : — " Motherhood may claim the protection and care of the state ". According to this, special necessary rights naturally remained in force, and the laws for the protection of women in pregnancy were further extended. Similarly, the question of married women officials led to a special regulation for women. Thus, against the intention of the code of law, the legal inequality of men and women was expressed, and the assumption of the code, that in all realms men and women had been granted full equality of rights, continued to be disputed.

To this was added a fact which at first sight may seem very striking. The increased activity of women in every

¹ As Frau von Tiling was unable to write a special article for this number, as she had hoped to do, we are glad to print with her permission a translated résumé of her article " Mann und Frau in Volk und Staat ", originally published in *Schule und Evangelium*, 8. Jahrgang, No 1, April, 1933.