

# THE FREE-WOMAN

SOME INFERENCES FROM THE THOUGHT  
OF JESUS CHRIST IN RELATION TO  
PROBLEMS OF PERSONALITY  
AND WOMANHOOD

BY

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*First published October 1929*

*Made and Printed in Great Britain  
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh*

## PREFACE

ONE is loath to write on what must seem to many a threadbare subject. During the last twenty-five years every magazine, every debating society, has dealt with all the superficial aspect of woman's position in the world of to-day. Yet in many ways we have not begun to think seriously about this question.

If the woman, for whom her place and her destiny in life is a real personal problem, seeks help and guidance in her quest, her experience is that the Church and the religious leaders have so far given us very little light on the application of Christian truth to the questions which puzzle the women of this generation. I see about me many young married women who are restless, and who find it hard to accept the life of household routine, monotonous tasks, and the complete sacrifice of their professional work. It is obvious that there is a lack of harmony between the temperament and tastes of many modern girls and the life which many women lead who have several children and a few hundred pounds a year.

Here are a few typical cases which have impelled me to write on this question in spite of all that has already been written on its various aspects, but which did not seem to meet the spiritual need of many people with whom I have come

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into contact: A social worker married to a pastor with a very small income and a not very convenient house. She has been married for less than a year, and although in love with her husband, is hankering all the time after her old work and the old freedom from petty domestic cares. I spoke of the fundamental unity in the work of the Kingdom, of the mistake of letting oneself be fascinated by numbers, or of opposing material to spiritual work—I cannot quite remember what I said—but the pathos of the answer has remained: “Yes, I have said all that to myself a hundred times; I believe all this, and yet . . . I cannot break myself in to the new life. . . . Something so strong calls me to the work outside. . . . But do write something for people like me, and try to help us. . . .”

There is also the girl who, engaged to a fellow student, declared that whatever happened she would have to have “her own job” or “some joint job,” for she could not imagine how she would ever “stick housework.” “It doesn’t seem fair that I should have to give up my job and not he. . . . Help us to think it out.”

Of course selfishness, ambition, love of pleasure always bring lack of harmony, but I am thinking now of women who are neither essentially selfish nor ambitious, but just the product of a normally good home and good school. The Christianity they have known has not met the difficulty; often the girl who has responded most eagerly to the call of Christianity has been most baffled by the spiritual problem. Chris-

tianity, with its great call to social and missionary service, "World" needs, "World" problems, seems to have turned her thoughts in another direction and associated itself with large dreams, great reforms. . . . Theologically Christianity has had no message for the intellectual problems of woman's destiny, no theology of womanhood or feminism. Though all the message of Christianity is one of selflessness and humility, and though there is power in the message of the Gospel to give us light and strength to meet any kind of life with joy and make any adjustments to life, it remains that many souls find it hard to make those adjustments unaided.

The aim of this book is to help these to think and pray their way through, to harmonize that inward urge to personal work with immediate duties, to see what Christianity has to say in view of what seems the "unfairness" of the sacrifice.

We have to deal with a relatively new factor in women's consciousness—this love of independent work which appears in quite feminine women. For the most part, the modern student is quite feminine: her keen love of little children does not prevent her love of work from being the most living, active, and awakened part of her personality, something about which she is passionate and sensitive.

The creative instinct, under the influence of certain ideas, has been harnessed to the love of a profession. What is the value of this new development? How shall we meet it?

We want an independent doctrine of woman-

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hood based neither on a verbalist Christianity, nor on French revolutionary ethics, nor on mere reaction from mid-Victorian prejudices, nor even on modern psychology; not a doctrine which simply expresses the tendencies of the age, but a doctrine of womanhood which shall grow up in the light of the teaching and the life and death of Christ, and of those principles which we deduce from them.

Obviously religious life is so much more like an art than an exact science, that arguments and theories can only be of relative value, but perhaps we are tempted to-day to minimize the influence of thought over our own reactions. We all need both thought and some source of inspiration which will enable us to fulfil our function in society. Some interpretation of our destiny is necessary even to the least theologically minded.

All I have attempted to do here is to offer a few suggestions as to lines of thought which may be useful to those for whom this problem is a personal one, and to attempt to show how the conclusions reached in the earlier part of the book can be applied to education and to practical questions.

It is perhaps suitable that any book on the subject should be written in the midst of the interruptions of domestic claims, but it needs to be written with more leisure, more perspective, and more strength. Its defects may incite someone else to give us a real *Theology of Woman's Vocation*.

## *Preface*

We have studied the question of women's destiny from a definite point of view. From the first, certain assumptions are made. The starting-point is the belief that in Jesus Christ we see the highest revelation of moral strength and spiritual truth, that what Jesus thought and did is supremely significant for us. As often, we build on what to many is not susceptible of intellectual proof, but is a matter of intuition, or if you prefer it, a matter of taste.

If Cæsar appeals to you more than Christ, or Napoleon more than St Francis of Assisi, then none of the arguments in this essay will appeal to you. It can only have any interest if Christ's words and life stir in you some answering echo; if what He experienced and thought is, for you, some guide, or at least some data in your search for truth. That is why we begin by trying to see what Christ teaches, or what His outlook implies with regard to the subject in hand, and to follow this up by noting some points relating to women's experiences as members of professedly Christian societies. It leads us over very familiar ground—perhaps so familiar that one could have taken it for granted; but it seemed better to reconsider again what the Christian outlook really does imply, and see what other conceptions of womanhood, family life, or personality are in contradiction to it.

TO THE  
LEEDS UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN UNION  
1919-1926



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