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wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:25). In Christ, men and women see both what God is like, and what they themselves should be and can become: they see true God and true man.

The earliest creeds were brief and simple: 'Jesus is Christ' (cf. Mk 8:29 and //, Jn 7:25–31; Acts 2:36; Rom 1:33); 'Jesus is Lord' (Acts 2:36; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3); 'Jesus is Son of God'. The great theologians of the early Church — Paul and John — used imagery to explain what God had done in Christ. But for all his attempts to spell out the mystery of the gospel, Paul knew his limitations, exclaiming: 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!' (Rom 11:33). Was it not a mistake, then, when later theologians substituted definitions for metaphors, and attempted to express the infinite and incomprehensible in finite and comprehensible terms? Their definitions were, of course, designed to deal with the problems of the day, and were expressed in contemporary language and thought-forms — very different from those of the first century and those of today — but with them had come a subtle change: 'faith' was now interpreted as faith that certain doctrines were true, rather than as faith in what God had done through Christ. These definitions may have been necessary at the time, but attempts to explain the humanity and divinity of Christ inevitably led to a stress, either on the divine at the expense of the human, or on the human at the expense of the divine: in fact, it was the 'divine' emphasis that triumphed and became dominant in later christology and liturgy. Christians of the twenty-first century may well find it more helpful to turn back to the language of the New Testament itself, and to the conviction of its authors that God had spoken to them and acted for them in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who was indeed 'Immanuel — God with us'.

Salvation Through Childbearing?
The Riddle of 1 Timothy 2:15

BY THE REV'D DR SIMON COUPLAND, 
WORTHING

New Testament scholars have long been bewildered or bemused by the enigmatic remark in 1 Timothy 2:15, translated fairly literally by RV 'But she shall be saved through the childbirth, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety'. This bewilderment is reflected by the marginal notes in some translations, the record being set by the Contemporary English Version, which has no fewer than four possible interpretations: "But women will be saved by having children"; "brought safely through childbirth" or "saved by the birth of a child" (that is, by the birth of Jesus) or "saved by being good mothers".

Having said that, a survey of the various Bible versions makes it clear that the overwhelming majority opt for the first translation: 'women will be saved through childbirth'. This is not only the interpretation which appears in the largest number of Bible versions, it is also the option which appears in the body of the text in those versions which offer alternative translations in the margins.

The theological problem posed by the verse is obvious. How could the author, whether that be the apostle Paul, or, as most modern commentators believe likely, a follower of Paul or member of the Pauline churches, suggest that salvation could come not through faith in Christ alone, but through the 'work' of childbirth? In particular, it seems to be a clear contradiction of the theology expressed in vv. 4–5 of the same chapter, with its stress on the one mediator, Christ Jesus. Commentators have long wrestled with the question, and have come up with five different explanations, which we shall look at briefly in turn.

The first option is the christological interpretation, reading as the CEV and NEB margins. The birth of the 'Child', that is Jesus, has, according to this thesis, ultimately fulfilled the promise of Genesis 3:15 and bruised the serpent's head, thus undoing the curse in the verse which follows. This position was first proposed by Irenaeus and remained popular with allegorists, and to one or two modern commentators it remains the most popular.

22 The Confession in Acts 8:37 is a later addition to the text, but cf. Mk 15:39 // Mt 27:54. The term is central in important key texts, such as Mk 1:11 and 9:7 and //; Jn 3:16–18; Rom 1:3–4; 8:3; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:1–2.


24 GNB hedges its bets: 'A woman will be saved through having children or will be kept safe through childbirth', as does NEB: 'Yet she will be saved through motherhood' with the marginal readings 'Or saved through the Birth of the Child, or brought safely through childbirth'. But cf. now REB: 'Salvation for the woman will be in the bearing of children', with no alternatives (so also the text of AV, JB, NJB, NIV, NRSV and NCV).
satisfactory interpretation,\(^2\) even though to Kelly it is ‘incredible’, to Fee ‘most obscure’, and to Hanson, ‘more romantic than convincing’. Its principal merit lies in the fact that it takes seriously the reference to Adam and Eve in the previous verses; its principal weakness that \textit{tekogonia} is a far from obvious technical term with a special reference to Christ, particularly as \textit{tekodoninein} is used in its ordinary everyday sense in 5:14. If the author had explicitly echoed the language of Genesis 3:15, as for example Paul does in the case of Abraham and ‘his seed’ in Galatians 3:16, the argument would be stronger; the fact is, he does not.

A second interpretation is what we might call the \textit{physiological} translation, that is, ‘woman will be kept safe through childbirth’ (so Moffatt, CEV and GNB margins). According to this view, for Christian women the curse of Genesis 3:16 will be moderated. The problem with this reading is obvious: it is not only ‘intolerably banal’, to quote Kelly, but, as Fee comments, it is demonstrably untrue.\(^4\) Christian women have suffered and indeed died in childbirth.

The other interpretations all adopt the \textit{traditional} reading, as found in the overwhelming majority of Bible versions, that is, ‘woman shall be saved through bearing children’, but explain that phrase in different ways.

The third line, which we might call the \textit{representational}, is that suggested by the CEV margin, namely that \textit{tekogonia} refers here not so much to the act of giving birth as to the bearing and raising of children. This was the view put forward by Chrysostom, who said: ‘By these means women will have no small reward on their account, because they have trained up wrestlers for the service of Christ’.\(^5\) Among modern commentators, it is favoured by, e.g., Kelly, Fee and Hanson, although the latter says wryly, ‘It would be within this writer’s way of thought to see the bringing up of new recruits for the Church as a woman’s primary contribution to the cause’.\(^6\) The major problem with this view is the fact that \textit{dia} is not attested elsewhere in the New Testament in an instrumental sense when it is with a passive verb and a noun in the genitive. To put it simply, \textit{dia} does not mean ‘by virtue of’. It is also hard to see how this interpretation blunts the theological contradiction raised at the outset: is it really plausible that the author would have ascribed the salvation of women not to faith in Christ (or indeed the faithfulness of Christ) but to their faithfulness as mothers?

A number of different theories can be grouped together under a fourth heading as \textit{contextual} interpretations. That is to say, each tries to explain the phrase in terms of the specific local context of the letter. It must be said that none has found support from other scholars.\(^7\) For instance, Jebb’s suggestion was that the verb \textit{sōthesetai} refers back to v. 12, in the sense that through childbearing, women would be saved from the error of trying to dominate over men. In a similar but slightly different vein, Johnson proposes that we should take these words ‘as a concessive corollary of the refusal to women of a public teaching role or rule over their husbands. They do have a role in educating their children in virtue.’ Or again, David Wenham has postulated that some women were renouncing the bearing of children (cf. 4.3; some are also forbidding marriage), leading the author (whether Paul or another in his name) to affirm that salvation and childbirth can go together. All three of these interpretations suffer from a lack of plausibility, the first two because they underplay the significance of the term \textit{sōzo}, which, as several commentators remark, is a theologically loaded word in the New Testament, the latter because it requires a lot to be read into the text which is simply not there as it stands.

The final hypothesis hinges on the interpretation of the preposition of the phrase, \textit{dia}, and it is, I suggest, the only explanation which both makes satisfactory sense of this verse in its context and is in accordance with Pauline (and deuter Pauline) teaching on salvation through faith in Christ. The first step is to recognize that \textit{dia} here refers to difficult circumstances through which women must pass, as for example in 1 Corinthians 3:15: ‘he himself will be saved (sōthesetai), but only as if through (\textit{dia}) fire’, or 1 Peter 3:20: ‘a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through (\textit{dia}) water’. In the present context, following the reference to Eve’s disobedience and thus, by implication, the curse of Genesis 3:16, the author is thus saying that women will be saved \textit{despite} suffering the pain of childbearing, so long as they continue in faith, love, holiness and chastity. It is therefore not the childbearing which saves, but being in Christ; indeed, the childbearing — or more accurately, the pain of childbearing — is something which a woman must endure because of Eve’s sin. This not only makes the passage consistent with the rest of Pauline teaching, but also removes a stumbling-block to many people’s reading of it.

\(^2\) George W. Knight III, \textit{The Pastoral Epistles} (NIGTC, Eerdmans/Paternoster Press, 1992), 146-147; see also Anne Atkins, Split Image ( Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 123.

\(^3\) J. N. D. Kelly, \textit{A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles} (Black, 1963), 69; Gordon Fee, \textit{1 and 2 Timothy, Titus} (NIBC, Hendrickson, 1988), 75; A. T. Hanson, \textit{The Pastoral Epistles} (NCBC, Marshall Pickering, 1982), 74.

\(^4\) Kelly, \textit{op. cit.}, 69; Fee, \textit{op. cit.}, 74.


\(^6\) Hanson, \textit{op. cit.}, 72.


\(^8\) J. Roloff, \textit{Der erste Brief an Timotheus} (EKKNT, 1988), 141; Fee, \textit{op. cit.}, 37-38.