

Good Morning,

With the advances of the nationalist party in Germany, Angela Merkel's success in yesterday's election, is not the victory she was hoping for. She's promised to listen to the electorate's worries and concerns. But it does give her a fourth term and means that, even with her diminished authority, she is still 'the most powerful woman in Europe'.

This protestant woman from East Germany will now preside over months of negotiations to form a new coalition Government, but has already achieved something that would have been beyond the dreams of her father, a Lutheran Pastor.

He grew up on the other side of the Berlin Wall in a tightly controlled society where democracy was snuffed out by Communism and leadership in State and Church was decidedly male. As it was here in this country.

Even though sixty years ago the first editor of the Today Programme was a woman it would have been unthinkable here for the Prime Minister, the President of the Supreme Court, and the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police all to be women as they are now.

The leadership of women has been one of the major cultural shifts of our time.

There was a further undermining this week-end of the theological ground on which male dominance has been built. According to an American academic, Dr Philip Barton Payne, St Paul's order that women should remain silent in church could have been added by someone else later as a way of keeping them out of leadership.

If this is true, it's a knock on the head of the idea that St Paul was some sort of misogynist.

Interestingly, in a later letter to his protégé, Timothy, he wrote about encouraging women who were widowed young to marry again and have children. He then uses an extraordinary word to describe their role - OIKODESPOTEIN – they should become 'despots of the home'. Not exactly the meek and mild submissive types! The New Testament often uses the word 'despot' to describe God in his power and love! So, here is St Paul elevating young women to such heights that it has taken us 2000 years to realise.

Yet achieving and exercising power is never easy, but what's clear to me is that over the next four years whatever Angela Merkel has to battle with her gender will not be one of the issues.

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