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STUDY OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ISRAEL, IN THE
BACKGROUND OF THE CONTEMPORARY NEAR EAST

BY

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In his statement on "The Ordination of Women" at the World Council of Churches Consultation held in Geneva May 10-12, 1963, Dr. Lukas Vischer said: "Modern historical research on the Bible has given us a new awareness of the extent to which the biblical witness is conditioned by and oriented to historical situations. Therefore biblical teaching cannot be abstracted from the historical context in which the books have been written. The Bible is not a collection of proof texts, and questions cannot be answered by quoting single passages. . . ." (P. 6.)

"The Bible views the persons of the Trinity as beyond the sphere of sex, which is fundamental only to human kind. This affirmation is specially clear for the person of Yahweh in the OT who was carefully distinguished from the pagan background of gods and goddesses. But it is also true for the person of Jesus Christ, who is image of the new man (including men and women), and for the person of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, as the ministry is the announcement to the world of the trinitarian reality and work, we must renounce the argument in favour of the masculinity of ecclesiastical ministry on the basis of the fact that God is called Father or that Jesus Christ is incarnated as male. . . . The image of God is presented in the Bible as the coexistence of man and woman. They are called together to dominate the world of creation (Gen. 1, 2). Their relationship is to be understood as complementarity rather than as subordination. The more we are aware that the meaning of creation is disclosed by God's redemptive work in Christ, the more we realize that God created man and woman in partnership. . . . reading the NT as a whole it becomes clear that the first emphasis is laid on complementarity. . . ." (P. 8.)

"Yahvism represents a complete break-away from this background [the eroticism of the gods]. Sexuality disappears completely from the divine sphere. Yahweh is the Creator; but He is never the procreator, as Baal was, in the form of a bull . . . The Person of God is completely severed from the web of myths and rites which worshipped sexuality. . . . these two relations--paternal and conjugal--do not mean that sexuality is attributed to God [in Hos. 1:3; Jer. 2:31; Eze. 16:22; Isa. 54], in this case masculinity, which we have seen as a sign of reversion to paganism. [Note: The practice of wearing priestly robes is theological, derived from this de-sexualisation of the wearer, in the image of Yahweh who was de-sexualised from the gods and goddesses of paganism.]" (P. 22.) (This might indicate that if our church adopted clerical robes in the pulpit, this would facilitate acceptance of women ministers.)

"Genesis de-sexualised God the Creator, by correcting the sacred myths and rites of the Middle East. On the other hand it strongly insisted on the importance of the sex-differentiation among mankind. It is the only differentiation between human beings which is described as inherent, preceding the fall; it is also the only differentiation which is directly related to the likeness of God. . . ." (P. 23.) ". . . it consists of a 'joint authority' entrusted by God to man and woman over the whole creation (Gen. 1). . . ." (P. 25.) ". . . Redemption re-opened the possibility of advancing from the order of Gen. 2, to that of Gen. 1. . . ." (P. 27.)

On the same comparison with pagan religious cults as Dr. Vischer mentioned, [Blackwell, 1949] Canon R. W. Howard's book Should Women be Priests? is cited on page 27 of the WCC publication of 1964. Canon Howard supports the view that "the insistence on men-priests in the OT was a reaction against the feminism of the pagan religions before the time of Israel. Jesus stopped the pendulum from swinging back and forth in this way; he indicated a priesthood which would include both

feminine and masculine characteristics in its nature." (P. 27, WCC 1964.) (Luke 13:34, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! . . ." is cited among other texts suggesting feminine characteristics.)

Phyllis Tribble published an excellent article in the March 1973 issue of the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, entitled "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation." Among other things she said: "Feminine imagery for God is more prevalent in the Old Testament than we usually acknowledge. It occurs repeatedly in traditions of the Exodus and Wanderings. . . . [Num. 11:12 is quoted: "Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that thou (Moses) shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child, to the land which thou didst swear to give their fathers'?"] This extraordinary language indicates that Yahweh was indeed mother and nurse of the wandering children. . . . The role of dressmaker is not unique to the God of the Wilderness [Neh. 9:21: "Forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell."] This same Deity made garments of skin to clothe the naked and disobedient couple in the Garden (Genesis 3:21). . . .

"To summarize: Although the Old Testament often pictures Yahweh as a man, it also uses gynomorphic language for the Deity. At the same time, Israel repudiated the idea of sexuality in God. . . . As Creator and Lord, Yahweh embraces and transcends both sexes. To translate for our immediate concern: the nature of the God of Israel defies sexism."

Miss Tribble continues: "In calling the animals by name, 'adham' establishes supremacy over them and fails to find a fit helper. In calling woman, 'adham' does not name her and does find in her a counterpart. Female and male are equal sexes. Neither has authority over the other. [Cf. Westermann, Genesis, in Biblischer Kommentar 1/4, 1970, pp. 316 ff.]

"A further observation secures the argument: Woman itself is not a name. It is a common noun; it is not a proper noun. It designates gender; it does not specify person. 'Adham recognizes sexuality by the words 'ishshah and 'ish. This recognition is not an act of naming to assert the power of male over female.

"Quite the contrary. . . .

"It is at this place of sin and judgment that 'the man calls his wife's name Eve' (3:20), thereby asserting his rule over her. The naming itself faults the man for corrupting a relationship of mutuality and equality. And so Yahweh evicts the primeval couple from the Garden, yet with signals of grace. . . ." (Pp. 32-42.)

Dr. Vischer mentions that "in the Talmud Sarah, Hannah, Abigail and Esther are also called 'prophetesses.' It is the only ministerial function explicitly recognised for women in the OT." His note at this point states: "It must be noted that neither Deborah nor Huldah were prevented from full exercise of their prophetic gifts, because they were married. This might indicate that there is no opposition in principle to married women in the ministry, if the ordination of women were recognized by the Church." A second note says: "The Septuagint was to restrict still more the scope of women's participation in worship (mentioned only twice in the OT). . . . The same trend towards excluding women from worship was seen in the architecture of the Temple. The Temple built by Solomon had no separate court for women; this was an addition after the Exile." (P. 19.)

Of the 182 laws of the Code of Hammurabi, codified case-laws from the Old Babylonian period, aside from the mention of females in such lists in various laws as "silver or gold or slave or slave-girl or ox or sheep or ass or anything else whatsoever" (as in No. 7 concerning purchasing without

witnesses or contract), and "slave or slave-girl" in different contexts, Laws Nos. 127 to 184 concern relations of various kinds between men and women, usually from the man's viewpoint. They concern accusations of unfaithfulness of a married woman; divorce of a wife, whether priestess or lay person (with return of her dowry if she provided him with sons, or if not, with the money equivalent of her dowry, or, lacking any dowry, with 1 maneh of silver unless he is of the lowest class--then $1/3$ maneh; taking of a slave-girl as consort when the wife does not bear sons; incest with a daughter (banishment of the man was the sentence); fornication with his son's bride (the man was to be bound and cast into the water); incest with his widowed mother (both were to be burned); breaking of a betrothal contract (the girl's father keeps the bridal gift which is forfeited, or if he is the one who makes the refusal, he has to return the bridal gift doubled); exchange of bridal gift and dowry if a deceased wife did not bear sons; inheritance of sons of different mothers, also of mothers of different class status; remarriage and economic status of widows; support by brothers of a priestess unless her father has written a sealed tablet giving her authority over her estate; likewise of an unmarried lay daughter, whose brothers shall bestow a dowry upon her and give her to a husband.

It is obviously a man's world that the Code describes. Other laws tell of the "eye for an eye" punishments (at least an improvement over earlier individual vendettas) that sometimes involved the daughters of men who caused injury or death to other men's daughters, etc.

Since the Biblical patriarchs came from the same period and same region, it is not surprising that the laws of the Pentateuch on the same topics are very similar. The fifth of the Ten Commandments enjoins equal respect for mothers and fathers, for a self-centered reason or outcome; the seventh protects the family by forbidding adultery, without restriction to one side or the other;

but the tenth names the neighbor's wife as a possession along with his house, manservant, maidservant, ox, ass, or any other possession, not to be coveted. In these respects the Deuteronomic version of the Decalogue (Deut. 5) is identical.

In the Covenant Code (Ex. 20:23 to 23:33), a slave's wives and children belonged to the master when the slave's time for emancipation came; when additional wives were taken, all rights of the first wife must be maintained. If a man caused injury to a pregnant woman's child, he himself rather than his daughter suffered punishment, without class distinctions among men as in the Hammurabi Code, where punishment was greater if injury was to, e.g., the son of a free man than it was if done to the son of a slave (Nos. 209-214). However, in the law concerning goring to death by an ox, if the victim was a man's son or daughter, the careless owner was to be put to death, while if the victim was a male or female slave, the careless owner of the ox merely had to pay thirty shekels of silver to the owner of the slave and let the ox be stoned-- a distinction between free man and slave similar to that in the Hammurabi Code in laws Nos. 250-252, concerning the same topic.

In the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), fornication with a slave woman did not result in the death of both, as it would have if she had been free; the man needed only to bring a guilt offering to the tabernacle. In this code are the regulations concerning degrees of kinship not permitted to marry, injunctions against eating of blood (eating of unclean creatures is prohibited in Lev. 11), a noble statement of impartial justice in 19:15 contrasting with the general tone of the Hammurabi Code and with some provisions in this and other Biblical codes, provisions for the poor and strangers, injunctions against all fornication, idolatry, and witchcraft, the precepts concerning the priesthood and religious offerings and feasts, and all the other "statutes and ordinances and laws which the Lord made between him and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai by Moses" (Lev. 26:46).

The Deuteronomic Code (Deut. 12-26) contains all the same types of provisions as the Levitical Holiness Code, except that the proscriptions against eating of unclean creatures are included within it (chapter 14). In addition there are regulations concerning warfare and treatment of captives, also the saving of the enemies' trees in warfare. Parents were to bring a "stubborn and rebellious son" to the elders at the gate, denounce him, and let him be stoned to death by all the men of the city. Men and women were not to wear the garments belonging⁶ to the opposite sex. House roofs had to have parapets to prevent injury from falling. Runaway slaves should not be returned to their owners (contrary to the Hammurabi Code) but allowed to live freely in the land. The "levirate marriage" law is included here but not in Leviticus; it demonstrates that women were mere sexual possessions owned by men and their families in the patriarchal and Israelite periods. In one way its provisions may be considered benevolent, since women had no other place in the male-dominated society at that time, and the relatively free pagan priestesses had no Israelite counterparts.

Georgia Harkness, in Women in Church and Society, sums up these codes thus: "In all these there are provisions for the protection of a woman's chastity and for other aspects of sexual morality." (P. 48.) On the preceding page she quotes J. M. Powis Smith on the early historical narratives of the Bible: "Polygamy was the order of the day. Samuel's mother was one of two wives (I Sam. 1:2); Gideon's father had 'many wives' (Judg. 8:30); David had eight wives who are individually mentioned . . . , and he married yet more wives in Jerusalem (II Sam. 5:13-16), and when he left Jerusalem in haste, fleeing from Absalom, he left ten concubines behind him in the city (II Sam. 15:16). Solomon's uxorious proclivities are notorious. . . . There was rivalry and enmity between the wives of Elkanah (I Sam. 1:5-8). . . . Faithfulness to the marriage bond did not weigh heavily upon husbands, and a general looseness

of sexual relations prevailed. Under the circumstances, women as such seem to have had little consideration. Chivalry was an unknown quantity. . . ." (Pp. 47, 48.)

Some useful background may be gleaned from a five-column article on "Woman" in the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: "Woman's position in the Bible is largely that of subordination to her father or her husband. In several instances the word for 'wife' signifies 'woman belonging to a man' (Gen. 2: 24-25; 3:8, 17; 4:1, 17). This inferior status is doubtless reflected in the false but popular etymology of the Hebrew words for 'man' and 'woman' . . . Her father gave a woman to be the wife of another man; her husband could freely divorce her . . . ; either could decide whether an oath she had taken was valid; her husband ruled over her (3:16), yet she had considerable freedom to act (19:31-35).

". . . Although a woman did not usually choose her own husband, her desires were not always ignored (Num. 36:6) [and Gen. 24:57, 58]. The father received a bride price for his daughter and thus engaged in a contract with the prospective husband to make her sexuality available to him. This transaction, however, was not a transfer of chattel property [?]. Rather it was the surrender of authority over a woman by one man to another. [Is that a great difference?] She remained a person and could also have personal relations with her husband, by whose name she was called. She evidently kept her own name and individuality also, . . . She was sometimes the stronger character. . . .

". . . Respect toward one's mother was demanded in biblical society, and disrespect was severely punished (Lev. 20:9; Deut. 27:16). Her influence was considerable. . . .

"Woman's economic activities receive attention in Prov. 31, where her real-estate ventures (vs. 16), her manufacture and sale of linen garments

(vs. 24), are pointed out with approval. Such business enterprise on the part of biblical women was rare, however, doubtless because of their sexual-social function in Israelite life and also because of the relatively undeveloped economy peculiar to their culture. . . .

". . . The influence of women as related to affairs of state is seen in the biblical accounts of Deborah (Judg. 5); Bathsheba (I Kings 1:11 ff.); Jezebel (19:1 ff.); and perhaps the women who are with one exception only named, but who were mothers of kings . . .

". . . Miriam and other Hebrew women played upon timbrels and danced to celebrate their people's escape from Egypt (Exod. 15:20). The 'singing women' who sang laments over the fate of Josiah are named along with the 'singing men' (II Chr. 35:25). The whole assembly of Israelites, according to another writer, included 245 singers, 'male and female' (Neh. 7:67). . . . Although there are allusions to the art of weaving in the Bible (Exod. 35:35; Ps. 45:13; Prov. 31:19), only the last of these relates it to women as the weavers (cf. Exod. 35:25). There is no indication that this special skill was associated with women.

". . . Women participated fully in the religious activities revolving around the great festivals of the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. They are undoubtedly included in the words 'all the congregation of Israel' (Exod. 12:3). In prescribing the manner of keeping the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) a man's daughter, maidservant, and widows are specifically named (Deut. 16:14). . . . Women attended religious gatherings and shared in sacrificial meals. . . . She could not serve as a priest. Both her ritual uncleanness and her sexual nature as a woman barred her [in the male-dominated patriarchal world of the Bible] from serving in this capacity. [Why "unclean" 80 days after birth of a daughter, compared with 40 days after birth of a son?!—Lev. 12:1-5.] . . .

". . . Disparagement of woman's character and nature is at times forth-

rightly asserted. . . . Disagreeable characteristics are enumerated also. . . .

" . . . A woman's beauty is extravagantly depicted in an anthology of love songs. . . .

" . . . Many Hebrew laws treat men and women as equals: Both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death (Lev. 20:10); both the father and the mother must receive reverence as parents (Lev. 19:3; Deut. 5:16); food taboos are mandatory upon both sexes (Lev. 11); death is demanded for both in cases of incest (20:11, 17-18). Woman's inferior status, however, is reflected in laws which show discrimination: A daughter is less desirable than a son (Lev. 12:1-5); she could not be sold for debt by her father (Exod. 21:7; cf. Neh. 5:5); she could not be freed at the end of six years, as could a man (Lev. 25:40). (She could be made a prostitute by her father (Judg. 19:24; but cf. Lev. 19:29).) The man had the right of divorce. The valuation of a man differs from that of a woman when a special vow is made (Lev. 27:1-7). . . ." (Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, IV, 865-866.)

Sister Vincent Emmanuel Hannon S.U.S.C. in her book The Question of Women and the Priesthood mentions in her section on the status of women in ancient Babylon: "The Code of Hammurabi reveals that a man could dispose of his daughter for debt, but it seems she was given more in the form of a pledge than as a slave. This servitude would exist for only three years, and there is no evidence that the creditor acquired any rights over her, except that she render him service." This is more favorable than the Hebrew law, Ex. 21:7, stating that the daughter sold as a slave "shall not go out as the male slaves do."

Sister Hannon mentions that "we do not find any trace of levirate marriage in the Code of Hammurabi. It seems true that among the Semites in general marriage had a commercial cast. . . . When such conditions prevailed it is not surprising that the woman had no voice in divorce. . . . Among the

Babylonians also a woman could possess property in her own right, but a married woman never became full heir to her husband's estate. Israelite law dictates: 'If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter' (Num. 27:8). In civil and religious life, Babylonian women were permitted to act in the official and public capacities of judge or scribe. . . .

"As in nearly all pagan religions, the Babylonians too exploited the virtue of women in the name of religion. The practice among them of sacred prostitution in the worship of Marduk and Ishtar makes a clear line of demarcation between the otherwise reasonable Code of Hammurabi and the divinely inspired Law of Moses: 'Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot . . .' (Lev. 19:29). While having much in common with the Babylonian code, the Bible transcends it in its elevated morality, and especially in the consideration it shows to slaves and its solicitude for the weak and oppressed," stated Sister Hannon.

Less is known about Assyrian Laws, as the tablets found are more fragmentary, but Sister Hannon sums up that "her status appears less favourable than in Babylonian Law: she is closer to being a chattel, over which a father has almost complete control, but this is in keeping with a law which among ancient peoples of the East was notorious for its inhumanity. The father had the right to choose a husband for his daughter. In a similarly arbitrary manner, the husband could divorce her at his displeasure. Her unfortunate condition was further aggravated by the fact that in the event of divorce the dowry was not returned to her. The Assyrian woman was much more at the mercy of her husband than her Babylonian counterpart. . . ." (Pp. 47-50.)

Perhaps, in addition to the male domination of the patriarchal period background, another reason why women were excluded from the Israelite priesthood is that in the surrounding pagan religions women were priestesses and cult prostitutes. Prof. W. F. Albright described the goddesses of the Canaanite

religion as follows in Archaeology and the Religion of Israel: "The three goddesses, Astarte (Ashtarothe), Anath and Asherah, present the most complex pattern of relations. The goddesses Ashtarothe and Asherah seem to interchange repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible, where both are mentioned with Baal. In contemporary Egypt Anath and Astarte are even fused into one deity Antart, and once they are identified with Asherah, while in Syria they later became Anat-Ashtart, Aramaic Attaratta (Atargatis). Astarte was goddess of the evening star, and originally she must have been identical with a male figure, Ashtar, god of the morning star, known to us from South Arabia, Moab, Ugarit and Roman Syria . . . The original character of Anath is still obscure, and Asherah was originally goddess of the sea, . . . All three goddesses were principally concerned with sex and war. Sex was their primary function. In an Egyptian text of the thirteenth century B.C. Anath and Astarte are called 'the great goddesses who conceive but do not bear,' i.e., the goddesses who are perennially fruitful without ever losing virginity. They are therefore both mother-goddesses and divine courtesans. In the former capacity Asherah is called in Ugaritic literature the 'Creatress of the Gods,' while Anath bears the appellation 'Progenitress of the Peoples.' . . .

"The other aspect of sexual life illustrated by these goddesses was sensuous rather than maternal. Anath is generally called 'the Virgin Anath' in the Ugaritic myths, . . . Sacred prostitution was apparently an almost invariable concomitant of the cult of the Phoenician and Syrian goddess, whatever her personal name, as we know from many allusions in classical literature, especially in Herodotus, Strabo and Lucian. As sacred prostitute the goddess was, strangely enough from our point of view, called 'the Holy One,' literally, 'the holiness (qudshu) of (Asherah, etc.).' The Egyptian representations of Qudshu, 'the Holy One,' show her en face as a naked woman in the prime of life, standing on a lion, with a lily in one hand and a

serpent (or two serpents) in the other. Her hair is particularly characteristic, falling down on her shoulders in two elaborate spiral locks. Posture, nudity, spiral locks and lilies or serpents identify the Egyptian representation, labelled Qudshu, with the clay plaques of the Syrian goddess, which appear so constantly in all Bronze-Age sites of Palestine during the period 1700-1300 B.C. While it is true that these plaques have been influenced artistically by the form of the Hathor wig which was fashionable in Egypt during the Middle Empire (cir. 2000-1800) and which was early transferred to representations of the goddess Hathor, it is now certain that they were originally imitations of the Ishtar plaques of the same type which were popular in Babylonia between 2000 and 1600 B.C. Since the type in question does not appear in Syria or Palestine until the eighteenth century or a little later, whereas it goes back in Babylonia through successive stages into Sumerian times, there can be no doubt that the iconographic form was borrowed from Mesopotamia. However, the Canaanites lost no time in substituting carnality for the grace of the Babylonian originals. Both in these plaques and in later ones the female organs are accentuated in various ways, nearly all of them more direct and less restrained than was true of Babylonia. Moreover, in Mesopotamia the plaques nearly all obviously represent a mother-goddess, whereas in Canaan most of them just as clearly portray a sacred courtesan. The lily and serpent are characteristically Canaanite; the former indicates the charm and grace of the bearer--in a word, her sex appeal--and the latter symbolizes her fecundity. . . . At its best there can be little doubt that there was a certain amount of aesthetic charm about Canaanite literary and artistic portrayal of these goddesses; in the Keret Epic, for instance, the hero's betrothed is poetically described as having 'the charm of Anath' and 'the beauty of Astarte.' At its worst however, the erotic aspect of their cult must have sunk to extremely sordid depths of social degradation.

"Besides being patronesses of sexual life these interesting ladies were also goddesses of war. . . ." (Arch. and the Religion of Israel, pp. 74-77.)

The status of women in ancient Greece was, according to Sister Hannon, "at the same time one of both respect and inferiority. Both by custom and by law woman was under the authority and control of her father or husband. In the seclusion of the gynaikonites she played a respected role, but in almost complete ignorance, with no other occupation than monotonous domestic duties, with the poor compensation of absolute dominion in only a very limited sphere. On marriage she passed from the seclusion of her father's house to similar quarters in her husband's, where she lived as an unequal partner. At best this would be favourable to domestic existence, but the husband's concubinage and intercourse with hetaerae coexisted, apparently without weakening domestic relations. The situation can best be summed up by a quotation from a speech attributed to Demosthenes: 'We keep hetaerae for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily requirements of the body, wives to bear us legitimate children and to be the faithful guardians of our households.' . . .

"It was a strange anomaly that permitted the hetaerae free access to learning and almost all pursuits while the mothers of Athenian citizens were condemned to ignorance and anonymity. Aspasia of Miletus, the learned wife of Pericles, was one of the hetaerae; the funeral oration has been thought to be her composition.

"It is not a foolish belief to hold that many a potentially poetic and gifted feminine spirit was stifled in this civilization where freedom was born. . . .

"The pagan world of Greek influence had its quota of gods and goddesses. Religious cult in Greece often took the form of a dramatic performance and, although a woman could not be a protagonist in buskins, she could finance the celebration of the mysteries. The Greeks too, like other pagan peoples,

surrounded many of their temples with debauchery and prostitution. The oracular responses at Delphi supposedly coming from Apollo were given by a woman. From this office in the service of the gods derived the high title of Pythia.

Corinth was the centre where Aphrodite was worshipped and around her shrine there over a thousand female prostitutes were employed in the name of religion.

. . .

"Summing up, one can say that the women of Greece were for the most part a suppressed sector hemmed in by the principles of usefulness and convenience, forbidden education . . ." (Pp. 51-54.)

Georgia Harkness has an interesting sidelight on the hetaerae: "A second class of Greek women were the hetaerae. These were high-class prostitutes, courtesans who often supplied professional entertainment as well as sexual satisfaction to Greek men who could afford their services. Such liaisons varied as to permanence, but the fact that the same stem is found in the word Hetaerism which refers to concubinage in primitive societies, suggests that the hetaera could advance from being a talented promiscuous prostitute to what might now be called a mistress.

"How do they affect our present society? By a biblical channel. The hetaerae went out in public unveiled; they did not hesitate to speak in public, without husbands to suppress them or do the talking for them. Paul was eager not to have the women of the early Christian churches confused with them. Furthermore, the hetaerae of Corinth were connected with the worship of Aphrodite, the pagan goddess of love. Hence, it is not at all surprising that we find Paul writing to the church at Corinth, 'The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church' (I Cor. 14:34-35). To this day, these words are quoted as barriers to women in the ministry!" (P. 53.)

Mrs. Shirley Stephens, of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote: "First-century prostitutes did not wear veils. Only the immodest woman appeared in public without a veil. When a Christian woman did not wear a veil she looked like the adultress who was required to shave her head because of her sin (1 Cor. 11:5). Prostitutes also gave considerable attention to their hair. Braided hair, gold, and costly attire were the apparel of pagan women. If the Christian woman copied the pagan, she lowered rather than raised her station of life. These instructions to women were given so that they might present a positive witness to the world" -- of their time, it might be added. Mrs. Stephens continued, "Few would argue that the specifics of dress mentioned in 1 Cor. 11, 1 Tim. 2, and 1 Peter 3 apply today, but the abiding principles of good taste and a good witness still apply.

"Yes, women's liberation is biblical. . . . 'There is no way a woman can come out on top according to the Bible.' I'll have to agree with that. But I do think a woman can come out an equal. That is the most any sensible woman demands or expects to achieve." (Mrs. Shirley Stephens has a B.D. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is a wife and mother of four, and wrote in a ~~undated but~~ recent issue of that seminary's small paper.)

Sister Hannon says that "The status of woman in the Roman republic was in general similar to that of Greece. However, under the Roman Empire an improvement in her position took place. . . . A speech in the Senate by Cato reveals the masculine mood at the time [shortly after the Punic wars, when restrictive legislation was repealed]: 'As soon as they begin to be equal with us they will have the advantage over us.' There are many instances of marital despotism, of murder with impunity for infidelity, of beating to death for disobeying the prohibition imposed on women not to taste wine, of divorce for appearing in the street without a veil, for speaking secretly to a freedwoman,

and for venturing to the public games without telling the husband. This suppression was bitterly resented and occasionally led to desperate measures.

. . .

"Although Roman history records deeds of brutality in its domestic society and reveals vices of unutterable licentiousness and infidelity on the part of both sexes, yet the history of the Roman Republic and Empire preserves stories of devotedness and fidelity in family life. . . .

"Woman are mentioned as presiding over public games or great religious ceremonies and are often represented as financing such occasions. Baths, gymnasias, temples and statues were erected by them, in Asia Minor in particular, and they are consequently said to have played a vital role in the religious and political life of that part of the Empire.

"Not all professions were open to women, for the simple reason that some, such as medicine and teaching, were practised by slaves only. [Women were lawyers, etc.] . . . there is evidence of women being devoted to philosophy and literature yet none are recorded as having achieved noteworthy distinction in either branch of learning. . . .

"This brief outline of the impact of four cultures on the life of woman," Sister Hannon concludes, "shows that that of the Roman Empire was the most tolerable. ~~There she was not~~ relegated to seclusion like the Greek woman: although legally she was regarded as a mere piece of property in her husband's possession, in practice she enjoyed considerable freedom and importance. Learning was open to her and the fact that she could attach herself to any of the various schools of philosophy proves the comparative independence that was hers. It cannot be said that the status of Roman women was ideal, but it was in many ways superior to that of women in earlier cultures. It was, in fact, a providential preparation, instrumental in enabling the earliest of Roman female Christians an unobtrusive freedom of movement which was to be effective in the spread of Christianity. Stoic philosophy was especially

instrumental in this preparation and claimed many women among its adherents. The wives of Cato and Brutus, for example, are said to have been Stoics. Stoicism bound men equally with women to abstain from licentiousness, and perhaps this was one reason for its attraction for the women of that period.

"Despite this increase of prestige, the position of women still lacked the dignity which Christianity was to confer on her. . . ." (Pp. 54-58.)

In discussing women in the Old Testament, besides points which have already been made in this paper, Sister Hannon mentions that "women were permitted to 'minister' at the door of the sanctuary [Ex. 38:8 is quoted]. They, as well as men, were permitted to dedicate themselves to Yahweh by taking the vow of a Nazarite [Num. 6:2 is quoted]. Theophanies were accorded also to women, as in the case of Hagar (Gen. 16:7), Sarah (Gen. 18:9 ff.) and Samson's mother (Judges 13:3-9). The gift of prophecy was communicated to Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Noadiah, while Deborah as judge played an important part as leader of the chosen People. . . .

"From all this it is evident that the life of Jewish women in early biblical times was anything but passive. On the other hand, from the legal point of view the rights of women were practically non-existent. . . .

"Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter emphasizes the absolute power of a father over his daughter (Judges 11:39). The inferiority of woman was axiomatic for the Israelites even when, for example, she pledged herself in vow to Yahweh. . . .

"This brief outline of the place of woman in the OT suggests," concludes Sister Hannon, "that the ancient Israelites never entirely lost their original revelation concerning the equality and high destiny of man and woman. This becomes more apparent when the status of woman in early Israel is compared with the status of woman among contemporary peoples and in later cultures. The most striking difference between the OT and early oriental codes of law

is the absolute prohibition and condemnation of prostitution in the former and the toleration of foul practices organized around religious shrines in the latter, where womanly virtue and dignity were exploited in the name of cult.

"Yet there is evidence in the OT of woman's inferiority. She is accorded a paradoxical role—at one time placed on a pedestal, at another used as a footstool—which has been her lot ever since. It is too facile to fall back on revelation as the final justification for the discreditable elements in this situation. This hardly does justice to the written word of God. In considering OT rules of conduct which appear petty and inhuman to us, we excuse them on the grounds that these were laws established for a people as yet untrained in the ways of a higher culture. Yet the restrictions imposed on woman in the OT are quoted today as proofs of her incapacity to participate in the official cult. . . .

". . . In these days the newly-acquired status of woman has led interpreters of scripture to reexamine the traditional theory of female inferiority. Nowadays they are at pains to prove from scripture the equality of the sexes. . . .

". . . Of course there was divine inspiration: how this operated is not of concern here, except to recall that the human author with all his personal characteristics and environmental conditioning was allowed to play his part in the process. . . ." (Pp. 60-68.)

Toward the end of her book Sister Hannon states: "The reservation of the Levitical and Aaronic priesthoods to men is yet another argument used for the disqualification of woman from the sacerdotal office. It is relevant here, however, to recall that the Hebrews formed a strictly patriarchal, masculine society. Furthermore, they reacted strongly to the paganism of their neighbours, with whom (and especially the Egyptians [and Canaanites]) women had a preponderant role in worship. Taking these factors into consideration it

would have been unthinkable for a Hebrew woman to be allowed to exercise the office of priesthood. Firstly, because of what was regarded as peculiarly hers, her inferiority, and secondly, because such a thing would be too much like an imitation of contemporary pagan practice. . . . The exclusively male priesthood has often been pointed to as a preserve of the chosen people and a sign of Israel's superior religion, as well as a fact of revelation. But is it part of revelation? It is worth noting that though only men de facto acted as priests in the Hebrew society, the OT contains no prohibition forbidding women to act as such. . . .

" . . . It has been maintained that this [ordaining women] was an easy step for the Reformed Churches [in the Ecumenical Council of Churches] to take, since they did not have to contend with the problems of theology and tradition that would face the Catholic Church in even studying the question. If the least that can be said in praise of their initiative is that they overcame the accumulated and prevalent prejudices of an anti-feminist tradition, then the admission of women to their ministry is indeed a progression and an irrevocable victory," Sister Hannon concludes, perhaps a bit wistfully or even enviously! (Pp. 102-115.)

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