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THE ROLE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST WOMEN

in the

WOMAN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

by

Texie Henderson

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I believe woman's work or mission was given her of God. In Vol. 2 p. 65-66 Ellen White says, "God has assigned woman her mission and if she in her humble way, yet to the best of her ability, makes a Heaven of her home, faithfully and lovingly performing her duties to her husband and children, continually seeking to let a holy light shine from her useful, pure, and virtuous life to brighten all around her, she is doing the work left her of the Master, and will hear from His divine lips, the words, Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. These women who are doing with ready willingness what their hands find to do, with cheerfulness of spirit aiding their husbands to bear their burdens, and training their children for God, are missionaries of the highest sense."

I believe the Seventh-day Adventists are God's chosen people and that the writings of Ellen G. White or the Spirit of Prophecy was given by God to us to guide us through the last days and prepare us for His kingdom. Her writings are the straight testimony, given to S.D.A.s "because they have great light, and have by their profession taken their position as God's special chosen people, having the law of God written in their hearts. They signify their loyalty to the God of Heaven by yielding obedience to the laws of His government. They are God's representatives upon the earth." Vol. 2 p. 452.

What a challenge: my sisters of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Katherine Oettinger, chief of U. S. Children's Bureau said, "The most difficult task a human being can face is being a working mother."

To lead this double life you need the strength of two.

No woman who is true to herself will deny the truth of the above. Being a homemaker and a career girl is two jobs. To which will you give priority?

I have been both. As a single woman, a career girl - as a married woman, a wife and mother (homemaker) for 20 years, and now I am attempting both. I must admit as an S.D.A. I have many many questions. Now I have to divide my loyalties and feel many many times a guilt complex. Why? Because I cannot do real honest justice to two jobs. No one can. We women of today only divide ourselves. We need to re-evaluate life and be willing to change our life style. We may have to be content with less of this world's goods.

There are two reasons why most women work today. One, they are bored at home, or two, they are in need of more money. If you are in either of these catagories and are not really content, then you need to re-evaluate your life and thinking. From Vol. 5 p. 596-597 I quote, "If women would only elevate their lives, and become workers with Christ, there would be less danger through their influence; but with their present feelings of unconcern in regard to home responsibilities, and in regard to the claims that God has upon them, their influence is often strong in the wrong direction, their powers are dwarfed, and their work does not bear divine impress. They are not home missionaries, niether are they missionaries away from home; and frequently, home, precious home, is left to desolation."

May I ask who among us wants a desolate home? What child will love to come there? Our children need us in the home.

I used to think that after the children were in school (By the way,

I have six,) then I could work, but I have discovered from experience that children all the way through high school and even into college still need parents. A teen-ager needs you to stand behind him with a firm "No", or to share a thrilling exciting adventure, or to help with a math problem, a hundred and one things; but what mother after working all day and preparing three meals for her family is ready or has the time to hear her teen-agers talk? We've created our own communication or generation gap. We don't have time to listen.

I firmly believe the Seventh-day Adventist woman belongs back in the home. She is to be peculiar, different, seperate, God's chosen.

We may have to learn lessons in economy and learn lessons in better judgment in buying; but I feel if we are willing to, God will help us and the reward will be worth it all. In Vol. 1 p. 455, "Those who believe the truth should practice economy, live upon plain, wholesome food, always making it a rule to live within their means."

I wonder if any of us would come into this catagory: "Often through lack of carefulness and right judgment there is wasted that which would maintain their families in decency and comfort if it were carefully and economically used. 'Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.' Proverbs 13:23." Ministry of Healing, p. 195.

I think we have as S.D.A. women gotten carried away with Women's Rights and what they advocate. The women's liberation movement has been around a long time. When Sister White was burdened with the problems of dress reform, which, by the way, was advocated by women's lib, she wrote, "Those who feel called out to join the movement in favor of woman's rights, and the so called dress reform, might as well sever all connections with

the third angel's message. The spirit which attends the one cannot be in harmony with the other. The Scriptures are plain upon the relations and rights of men and women." Vol. 1 p. 457.

I plead with our Adventist women to read the Testimonies. They are beautiful. God has always been so practical and wonderful in His advice and dealings with His people. We need only to read and study and follow.

God's church is in a terrible condition and the S.D.A. women are greatly to blame. We have raised the youth who are now going into our work as leaders. Are they consistent? Were you? Are they honest? Were you? Are they loyal to the established principles of God? Were you? I believe our work is in great peril today because S.D.A. women have failed in the home.

If we believe our God has assigned woman her mission and that mission is the home (Vol. 2 p. 465), how can we do a successful job when we leave our sphere of influence and go away from home to work?

We simply cannot do justice to both jobs. One or the other suffers and "they are not home missionaries niether are they missionaries away from home." Vol. 5 p. 597. Today's rebellious youth are the results. I am an assistant Dean of Women in one of our S.D.A. colleges and I know the youth of today. I see the fruit of your labors. We need to arouse to our great responsibility and return back to the home. God help us. Many youth today do not know what leadership really is and I feel sure their lack of training comes from the home. Is there a head in your home? Any organization must have a head. "The husband is the head of the family, as Christ is the head of the church; and any course which the wife may pursue to lessen his influence and lead him to come

down from that dignified, responsible position is displeasing to God. It is the duty of the wife to yield her wishes and will to her husband. Both should be yielding, but the word of God gives preference to the judgment of the husband, and it will not detract from the dignity of the wife to yield to him whom she has chosen to be her counselor, advisor, and protector. Vol. 1 p. 307. On page 309 of the same volume, I find, "The requirements of the husband may seem unreasonable to the wife, when if she should calmly, candidly take the second view of the matter, in as favorable a light for him as possible, she would see that to yield her own way, and submit to his judgment, even if it conflicted with her feelings, would save them both from unhappiness and would give them great victory over the temptations of Satan."

If our S.D.A. women would re-evaluate their position as women in God's remnant church, as his special chosen people (Vol. 2 p. 465) and realize their great responsibility before God I feel sure this striving for equality would cease.

I believe the admonition given is specific. It's for women who are married and have children. The other women, the single, the widowed with no children, and those who are childless or whose children are grown and out on their own are under a different category. I do not feel it is wrong for them to work if their husbands approve. "Our sisters, the youth, the middle aged, and those of advanced years, may act a part in the closing work for this time; and in doing this as they have opportunity they will obtain an experience of the highest value to themselves. In forgetfulness of self, they will grow in grace." Evangelism p. 468.

There is one phase that women's lib is advocating that I feel I could agree with and substantiate with the Spirit of Prophecy. That is

equal pay for men and women doing equal jobs. In Evangelism page 491-495, she tells the part women can play in the work of saving souls. In teaching, Bible work, and assisting their husbands in missionary work, she says "they should be paid as verily as their husbands." p. 491, paragraph 2. Webster defines "verily" as "truly; in a truth; really; (see very)." "Very" is defined as "especial; either or absolute; identical." Here I feel our church has failed. "If a woman is appointed by the Lord to do a certain work, her work is to be estimated according to its value. Every laborer is to receive his or her just due." Evangelism.p. 491.

"When self denial is required because of a dearth of means, do not let a few hard-working women do all the sacrificing. Let all share in making the sacrifice. God declares, 'I hate robbery for burnt offering.'" Evangelism p. 492.

I cannot find anywhere in my reading that God requires women to be underpaid to help finance our work. If there is a dearth of means both should sacrifice.

"S.D.A.s are not in any way to belittle woman's work. If a woman puts her housework in the hands of a faithful and prudent helper and leaves her children in good care, while she engages in the work, the conference should have wisdom to understand the justice of her receiving wages." Gospel Workers p. 452-453. This was written around the turn of the century. If you can in 1972, find a prudent helper [Webster defines "prudent" as "cautious and wise in conduct, discreet, provident (which means careful for the future, and as far as S.D.A.s are concerned, it should mean eternal future)], then God would consent to your working if you have children. In 1972 it's next to impossible to find domestic

help.

Sister White says the question of hire for the laborer is not for men to settle. Evangelism p. 493. "The Lord has settled it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel, whose work testifies that they are essential to carrying the truth into families. Their work is just the work that must be done, and should be encouraged. In many respects a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot. The cause would suffer great loss without this kind of labor by women. Again and again the Lord has shown me that women teachers are just as greatly needed to do the work to which He has appointed them as are men."

On the subject of ordination of women I believe if a woman is qualified and if her children are grown or she has none, then the words in Evangelism page 472 would apply. "The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth."

I firmly believe that if each Christian woman would study for herself the Spirit of Prophecy God would reveal His will to her. She would know her womanly rights. Notice how many times "right" is mentioned in the following statement. "Many ladies, accounted well educated having graduated with honors at some institution of learning, are shamefully ignorant of the practical duties of life. They are destitute of the qualifications necessary for the proper regulations of the family, and hence essential to its happiness. They may talk of women's elevated sphere, and of her rights, yet they themselves fall far below the true sphere of woman. It is the right of every daughter of Eve to have a thorough knowledge of household duties, to receive training in every department of domestic labor....It is her right to understand the

mechanism of the human body and the principles of hygiene, the matters of diet and dress, labor and recreation and countless others that intimately concern the well being of her household. It is her right to obtain such a knowledge of the best methods of treatment of disease that she can care for her children in sickness, instead of leaving her precious treasures in the hands of strange nurses and physicians."

Seventh-day Adventists should be the leaders. Their women should be following God's word and His will for them. If you are a mother with children in the home, your place is in the home. That's your God appointed work.

If you are not a mother or your children are grown then, and only then, are you free to work outside of your home. If you desire to do Bible work or help win souls and you are a mother you must obtain really competent prudent help, then you would be free to leave your home. God is specific.

The trouble with most of us S.D.A. women is that we want to keep up with the world's living standards. There are many things we think are necessities that we could do without. Our life styles may have to be changed in order for us to follow God's plan for his people, but I am convinced there are many S.D.A. families who will be willing to do this. The young people of today see us as materialistic and I believe they will swing the other way. How much better if we could lead. If you mothers could hear your daughters begging to learn to bake bread or to learn the basic principles of sewing, you'd understand my feeling. One girl who graduated from college this year hired a lady to sew buttons on her dress. She didn't know how.

The value of human relations is missing in our Seventh-day Adventist

homes today. It's compassion, love, and attention that our children want in our homes today, not things. And the reason most of us work is to buy "things", be they clothes, cars, homes, furniture, or whatever.

The other argument I hear is that I have to work to pay for a Christian education for my children. I know that aspect well. We have six. Before the birth of the first, we promised God if He would give us children they would not spend one day in public school. We have kept that promise with His help. One son graduates from college in August- debt free. One daughter finishes next year. We have had three in college and three in grade school at the same time. God has always helped us. A few less college hours per semester and a few more working hours and a student can make it. Even an extra year in college isn't too bad.

As a Dean of Women I wish to pay homage to the mothers who have stayed home with their children. The rewards for your efforts I see in the conduct and behavior of your children. They are a minority group but they have a deeper understanding of the principles of the Bible and they have a better understanding of the value of human relations in the home and society.

In closing I would like to bring a couple of quotes from the Spirit of Prophecy that have helped me to understand and accept why women are not equal with men. I am by nature an extrovert and by nature would be a fighter in the cause of women's lib, but I have chosen to follow God's way and, besides keeping the ten commandments, I desire to follow the straight testimony as given to this church through Ellen G. White by God.

Originally at creation woman was made equal with man but when sin entered then the Lord said, "'Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.'" In the creation, God had made her the equal of

Adam. Had they remained obedient to God--in harmony with his great law of love--they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of one or the other. Eve had been first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned and she was now placed in subjection to her husband. Had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him, has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter, and made her life a burden.

Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband's side in her Eden home; but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position she fell far below it. A similiar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God's plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity, and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them."

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I for one want a man as the head of my home. I am glad God designed it that way. My prayer for our church is that God will help our S.D.A. women to see the great responsibility that is ours in the home--training lives for Christ and His service.

SUMMARY OF THE PAPER:

"THE ROLE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST WOMEN IN THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT"
by Texie Henderson

1. The primary responsibility of the woman is to provide a home for her husband and children.
2. The primary right of the woman is to have the privilege of bringing up her children in godly ways.
3. The husband is the head of the household.
4. In cases where women do work, the principle of equal pay for equal work must be upheld, as specifically stated by God.
5. There is a place in the winning of souls that only a woman can fulfill, where a woman can impart knowledge to her sisters that a man cannot.
6. "It is the right of every daughter of Eve to have a thorough knowledge of household duties, to receive training in every department of domestic labor. . . . It is her right to understand the mechanism of the human body and the principles of hygiene, the matters of diet and dress, labor and recreation, and countless others that intimately concern the well-being of her household. It is her right to obtain such a knowledge of the best methods of treatment of disease that she can care for her children in sickness, instead of leaving her precious treasures in the hands of strange nurses and physicians."