

**Book Manuscript**

**THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND THE NATURE OF GOD:  
A SOCIO-BIBLICAL STUDY**

**Caleb Rosado**

**(Revised March, 1987)**

Dedicated to the women in my life:

my wife, Ronnie,

and my two daughters,

Charis and Elissa,

who gently encourage me

to be sensitive to their needs.

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## PREFACE

Human beings are creatures of habit, including habits of belief and thought. Once we get into a set pattern of behaving, believing and thinking, change comes with great difficulty.

The ideas for this book did not come overnight, nor were they the product of a few months of quick research. Rather they are the result of ten long years of struggling with a new understanding of God relevant to the needs of our world society, and the role this God desires for the members of the Church--both men and women--in fulfillment of their mission. The first struggle came in a graduate class on Church and Society I took at the Seminary at Andrews University in 1977. For the class project I decided to do an investigation into the whole issue of the ordination of women. Prior to my research I had no position on the matter. In fact, the leaning of my beliefs and thoughts were somewhat negative to the question. After considering the matter from a Biblical and historical perspective, and in terms of church polity, my views changed.

Later, as I got into graduate work in sociology at Northwestern, I realized how inequality is structured into the very fabric of our society and its institutions--the church not exempt. During this same time period I also began to understand why many today are rejecting God, because God is perceived as a stern, harsh being who sanctions oppression in various forms. Slowly and painfully my ideas about God began to change, and with them the role humans are to play in the divine/human drama. With the establishment of All Nations Church, I came to the realization that due to the nature of the congregation--a microcosm of the world in

terms of ethnic diversity--it would have a short-lived history, if a new understanding of God was not presented on which the church would base its mission and purpose for existence. Thus began my own, and with me my congregation's, understanding of God as a Compassionate Being who ministers to us at all levels of human need. We were introduced to this God by His son, Jesus of Nazareth, our Elder Brother, whose way is *the way of compassion--love to God manifested in genuine concern for humankind*.

All the chapters of this book were originally given as sermons over the past eight years to my All Nations congregation.

This book would not be possible without the fine assistance of several able people who gave critical comments and made editorial changes. I want to thank Daniel Augsburg, Kit Watts, Sara and Abraham Terian for their recommended changes. Kit especially gave me many helpful editorial ideas all of which were utilized. A warm thanks also goes to Kenneth Strand and Faye Chamberlain for not only reading the manuscript, but encouraging its publication. Leona Running, however, deserves my most heartfelt appreciation for painstakingly editing the entire manuscript twice, and for her kind words in the Foreword.

I trust the book will not only give you a new understanding of the role women ought to play in the Church, but of the God who has already given us an example as to how to go about it, by His own treatment of women and the role He has given them.

Caleb Rosado  
Berrien Springs, MI  
March, 1987

## FOREWORD

Caleb Rosado has produced a book that is much needed at this time, when the role of women in the church is viewed from polarized positions, with each side claiming Biblical support for its views. Unless made aware by some educational process or other, most people are oblivious to how much their attitudes and opinions are conditioned by their entire background and experience--which are very different from other people's--and how much effect this conditioning has on even the way they understand the Bible!

This is where sociology can be helpful, explaining deeper reasons (which may turn out not to be the correct reasons) for holding certain views, and even interpreting the Bible in certain ways. Bringing his cross-disciplinary training to focus on this important question, Dr. Rosado produces valuable illumination of the whole problem. He goes to basic principles rooted in the very nature of God as progressively revealed to human understanding. His treatment of many, many Old and New Testament texts is thoughtful and genuine exegesis, and his basic premise--that Jesus Christ revealed the character of His Father much more perfectly than was done by men writing under inspiration but hampered by their position among the distortions caused by the Fall--is surely correct. God was sending His light through faulty prisms that bent its rays and darkened it. Jesus simply ignored the man-made barriers He encountered and revealed the compassionate Heavenly Parent.

A delightfully and satisfying journey is ahead for each thoughtful reader of this excellent book.

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of women in the church, and especially the question of their ordination to ministry, is a highly contested one in lay and scholarly circles within Adventism. The lines of opposing views are pretty well drawn, and each side claims that God is on their side, for their position is regarded as a faithful interpretation of the Bible on the matter. Yet, while making such claims, the conclusions of both groups are often in conflicting opposition to each other.

At the heart of this question of the role of women in the church lies a more basic question, the question of the nature of God. Donald G. Bloesch in his book *Is the Bible Sexist?*, states: "The debate over sexist language [and I would add, the role of women in the church] is ultimately a debate concerning the nature of God."<sup>1</sup> I believe he is right in this statement, though wrong in the basic argument of his book. We must understand the character of God before we can understand the place this God has for women . . . and men . . . in the divine plan for humankind.

Essential to this understanding of God, however, is the observation that people using the same sources can arrive at different conclusions. There are reasons for this. And the discipline of sociology--the science which studies human behavior in social settings--can be most helpful in understanding the why of these differences.

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<sup>1</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, *Is the Bible Sexist?* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982).

### **Why a Sociological Approach?**

I realize that the bringing of sociology together with theology to explain the relationship between the divine and the human raises serious questions in the minds of some, reminiscent of the act of Nadab and Abihu offering "strange fire" before the Lord in Numbers 26. There are justifying reasons for such a view, since theology and sociology have not always seen eye-to-eye on issues. And some have used sociology to deride religion.

However, part of the problem for this uneasiness in the minds of some is a failure to distinguish the limitations of both fields. Theology, as the study of God and God's relationship with humankind, focuses on matters of faith, which are beyond the reach of what can be measured objectively by science. Sociology, on the other hand, deals with what can be measured by empirical observation. Matters of faith are beyond the scope of objective social science. Thus the two delve into separate realms, and are not necessarily contradictory in their findings, since the means by which each arrives at its conclusions differ. The results though are often complementary.

This is especially true when the church is the object of analysis. The church is not only a divine institution--the Body of Christ--but also a human institution with social, political and economic dimensions, and can be safely studied by both disciplines. Some however fail to make this distinction. And because the focus of believers is already a religiously-oriented one, a theological orientation dominates their worldview, and they define the church only from a biblical perspective. Thus their understanding of the church is confined to a theological dimension only. James M. Gustafson declares: "Many make the explicit or tacit assumption that the Church is so absolutely unique in character that it can be understood only in its

own private language."<sup>2</sup> All the while, however, the church, as a social institution functioning in society and within history, continues to affect people's lives politically, economically and socially.

This book approaches the question of the nature of God and the role of women from a sociological framework because one of the basic premises of the sociology of knowledge with regard to religion is that a people's understanding of God is shaped by those social factors that give formation to them as a people. It is out of this experience, unique to their social situation, that a people begin to articulate questions about God. By looking at our subject matter from a sociological as well as a theological perspective, we avoid a one-sided view.

This book is addressed to the general Christian reader, and thus the point of view expressed takes a rather broad approach to the question. Though much of the material will be helpful to scholars and those already acquainted with the subject, my purpose is to give the non-specialist another perspective by which to view God, as the Liberator of people, especially women.

### **The Content of This Book:**

The fundamental premise of the book is expressed in chapter 1, and it is this: That Jesus is the only One through whom we gain a correct understanding of the character and nature of God. However, our understanding of Christ and Scripture is already conditioned by our culture, and by the social position we occupy in society. Chapter 2 gives us a fuller understanding of Jesus' view of God in light of His action and attitude towards the patriarchal structures of His day. Chapter 3 focuses on the manner by which Jesus acted towards women in light of the social mores of His

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<sup>2</sup>James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 100.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Role of Women in the New Testament

One of the highly debated questions at present within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America is the question of the ordination of women. Should women be ordained to the Gospel ministry, and function as pastors with full privileges in the local church?

In 1881 at the General Conference session, a formal resolution was proposed, stating, "that females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry."<sup>1</sup> One hundred years later, this resolution still has not been acted on. What's holding it up? It depends on whom you ask. Some give theological reasons, others Spirit of Prophecy reasons, others sociological and cultural reasons, others administrative reasons, others economic and political reasons, others job-market competition reasons, others organizational structural reasons, others biological reasons, others historical reasons, while others list reasons of status quo. Can it be that for many, however, it is *fear* of doing what is different?

When will the day come when God's people will do what is right, not because of political pressures, not because of economic pressures, not even because of pressures of expediency, but simply because it is the right thing to do?

Such was the *modus operandi* of the Early Church. But before we take a look at the action of the Early Church towards women, let us first look at the action of God, and the role He permitted some women to have in the proclamation of the Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> *Review and Herald*, Vol. 58:25, December 20, 1881, p. 392.