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THE ROLE OF WOMEN

IN OUR CHURCH

by

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The great God who inhabits eternity is looking for loving, self-sacrificing women who will give of their time, means and selves to hasten the ushering in of His kingdom of glory. Such women will not be wasting precious time in useless, seemingly endless, discussion on woman's elevated sphere and her rights. (Cf. FE 75) Instead they will investigate what is the true "right of every daughter of Eve to have." (Ibid.)

"... Women who might develop good intellects, and have true moral worth, are now mere slaves to fashion. They have not breadth of thought, nor cultivated intellect. They can talk understandingly of the latest fashion, the styles of dress, this or that party or delightful ball. Such women are not prepared to intelligently take a prominent position in political matters. They are mere creatures of fashion and circumstance. Let this order of things be changed. Let woman realize the sacredness of her work, and, in the strength and fear of God, take up her life mission. . . ." 3T 565:3

Any Position of Trust; Qualifications

Truly, "when women are wanted with well-balanced minds, with not a cheap style of education, but with an education fitting them for any position of trust, they are not easily found."* (FE 118.0)

The Lord has a work for the women of our church, but do they realize the high mission that is theirs by the grace of God? "Sisters, we may do a noble work for God if we will. Woman does not know her power." (4T 642.6) By the light reflected from the Saviour's countenance, self-sacrificing women may receive a power from Him "that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. . . ." (WM 145:1)

Now please notice the qualifications of such women as the Lord would like to use in these last days:

"Women of firm principle and decided character are needed, women who believe that we are indeed living in the last days, and that we have the last solemn

* Denotes: emphasis supplied.

message of warning to be given to the world. They should feel that they are engaged in an important work in spreading the rays of light which Heaven has shed upon them. When the love of God and His truth is an abiding principle, they will let nothing deter them from duty or discourage them in their work. They will fear God and will not be diverted from their labors in His cause by the temptation of lucrative situations and attractive prospects. They will preserve their integrity at any cost to themselves. . . ." WM 149:3f

Equality?

There is much on the role of a mother, but this is not our chief concern just now. Of course, every mother has a responsibility to her children that is "paramount to everything else." (WM 158:3) However, all women should feel they can do something in the work of bringing souls to Christ; domestic cares are not to be made an excuse. (Cf. WM 165) Particularly if a woman's mother role has diminished or has not been taken up the following may be true:

"Woman, if she wisely improves her time and her faculties, relying upon God for wisdom and strength, may stand on an equality with her husband as adviser, counselor, companion, and co-worker, and yet lose none of her womanly grace or modesty." Ev. 467.2

On this matter of equality of the wife with her husband, it is not that she should contend for such, for Jesus our example "did not contend for His rights;" (DA 89:4) but that she should aspire to qualify herself so that she can and will naturally fill that position whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. "We have an earnest desire that woman shall fill the position which God originally designed, as her husband's equal. . . . We may safely say that the dignity and importance of woman's mission and distinctive duties, are of a more sacred and holy character than the duties of man."* (3T 565:2)

Counseling

A real need exists for women who, with proper education, could help bear the burden that many ministers are now staggering under,--to advise, counsel, and sympathize with those who have many questions, problems and trials. In particular, these consecrated women, as messengers of mercy, could help their sisters in the faith, chiefly because of this admonition from the Lord:

"If any woman, no matter who, casts herself upon your sympathy, are you to take her up and encourage her and receive letters from her and feel a special responsibility to help her? My brother, you should change your course with regard to such matters, and set a right example before your brother ministers. Keep your sympathy for the members of your own family, who need all that you can give them.

"When a woman is in trouble, let her take her trouble to women. . . ." Ev. 460:3, 4

In the Front Ranks

Should women work more prominently in the forefront of the ranks of the church of God, perhaps in heralding the gospel message? They have in the past.

"In ancient times the Lord worked in a wonderful way through consecrated women who united in His work with men whom He had chosen to stand as His representatives. He used women to gain great and decisive victories. More than once in times of emergency He brought them to the front and worked through them for the salvation of many lives." WM 158:1

"Christ speaks of women who helped Him in presenting the truth before others, and Paul also speaks of women who labored with him in the gospel. . . ." (Ev. 465:1; cf. also Gal. 3:28, by Paul.) What about in our day? If the well-balanced, well-educated women so rare to be found were available to fill the many existing needs the cause of God would prosper richly. The Lord has spoken plainly in this matter:

". . . 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.--Ms. 142, 1903."*
Ev. 493:2

The need for women physicians is also acute and much greater than generally realized. (Cf. MM 140:3, 4) They along with men physicians are to be spiritual leaders in the Lord's work, uniting their interests with that of the ministers. But in the realm of gospel labor, women teachers who can carry the truth into families are just as greatly needed as are men,--as noted in the book, Evangelism, page 493. There is a wealth of instruction in the same volume setting forth needs, qualifications of the workers, and so forth.

Bible Instructors and Remuneration for Women in Ministerial Lines

The minister and his wife who are truly converted are to unite their efforts in opening the Scriptures to souls in darkness. (Cf. MM 140:1)

"The minister is paid for his work, and this is well. And if the Lord gives the wife as well as the husband the burden of labor, and she devotes her time and strength to visiting from family to family and opening the Scriptures to them, although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon her, she is accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry. Then should her labors be counted as naught?

"Injustice has sometimes been done to women who labor just as devotedly as their husbands, and who are recognized by God as being necessary to the work of the ministry. The method of paying men-laborers, and not paying their wives who share their labors with them, is a plan not according to the Lord's order, and if carried out in our conferences, is liable to discourage our sisters from qualifying themselves for the work they should engage in. God is a God of justice, and if the ministers receive a salary for their work, their wives, who devote themselves just as disinterestedly to the work, should be paid in addition to the wages their husbands receive, even though they may not ask for this.

"Seventh-day Adventists are not in any way to belittle woman's work. If a woman puts her housework in the hands of a faithful, 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."* GW 452:2f

"The tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women." (Ev. 492:2) Why then, are there not more funds to hire Bible instructors in the various conferences? This question has been raised by some. Also, it would certainly seem appropriate that more young men studied to be Bible instructors, especially to blend their efforts with those of ministers and colporteurs in the large cities,--and in view of perilous conditions in these places.

Vital Importance of Bible Work

We should be people of the Word, mighty in the Scriptures; and our women should be as earnest in this matter as are consecrated men working along such lines. The following is very pertinent instruction:

"A revival in Bible study is needed throughout the world. Attention is to be called, not to the assertions of men, but to the Word of God. As this is done, a mighty work will be wrought. . . ."* Ev. 456:1

"Our work has been marked out for us by our heavenly Father. We are to take our Bibles, and go forth to warn the world. We are to be God's helping hands in saving souls--channels through which His love is day by day to flow to the perishing." Ibid.:2

Why aren't the people of God doing this saving work in every city and town?

"In every city that is entered, a solid foundation is to be laid for permanent work. The Lord's methods are to be followed. By doing house-to-house work, by giving Bible-readings in families, the worker may gain access to many who are seeking for truth. By opening the Scriptures, by prayer, by exercising faith, he is to teach the people the way of the Lord." 7T 38:1

Here is the Lord's plan for both men and women:

"The plan of holding Bible-readings was a heaven-born idea. There are many, both men and women, who can engage in this branch of missionary labor. Workers may thus be developed who will become mighty men of God. . . ."* GW 192:1

How ever will God's servants become involved in the "great reformatory movement" in connection with giving the last warning message to the world unless Christ's warm, compassionate and zealous love in the heart and life moves them to action now?

"In visions of the night representations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God's people. Many were praising God. The sick were healed, and other miracles were wrought. A spirit of intercession was seen, even as was manifested before the great day of Pentecost. Hundreds and thousands were seen visiting families, and opening before them the word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest. On every side doors were thrown open to the proclamation of the truth. The world seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence. Great blessings were received by the true and humble people of God. I heard voices of thanksgiving and praise, and there seemed to be a reformation such as we witnessed in 1844."* 9T 126:1 (Cf. GC 612)

Preaching the Word

Quite a few women might likely be surprised to learn that the testimonies of God's Spirit recommend that some of our sisters be able to preach the truth. Carefully weigh these statements from the book, Evangelism, pages 471, 472.

"Women can be the instruments of righteousness, rendering holy service. It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus. . . . If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth. The refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth. --RH, Jan. 2, 1879.

"There are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God.--Ms. 43a, 1898.

"There should be selected for the work wise, consecrated men who can do a good work in reaching souls. Women also should be chosen who can present the truth in a clear, intelligent, straightforward manner. . . ."* Ev. 471:5f

Right at the beginning of this twentieth century there were Bible instructors who were active in laboring in the public ministry. "Sister R and Sister W are doing just as efficient work as the ministers; and some meetings when the ministers are all called away, Sister W takes the Bible and addresses the congregation."

(Ibid., 473:1) And God's messenger gave the following counsel to another woman:

"Teach this, my sister. You have many ways opened before you. Address the crowd whenever you can; hold every jot of influence you can by any association that can be made the means of introducing the leaven to the meal. Every man and every woman has a work to do for the Master. Personal consecration and sanctification to God will accomplish, through the most simple methods, more than the most imposing display." Ibid.:4

Laying On of Hands

Not much is said in the Spirit-inspired writings regarding the ordination of women other than the following significant passage printed in a Review of 1895:

". . . Let church-members awake. Let them take hold and help to stay up the hands of the ministers and the workers, pushing forward the interests of the cause. . . . If ministers and men in positions of authority will get out of the way, and let the Holy Spirit move upon the minds of the lay brethren, God will direct them what to do for the honor of His name. . . .

"Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. . . ."* 3RH 271a:1, 2 (7-9-95)

If it was important for women engaged in welfare ministry to "be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands," then surely it would be much more needful and significant to have them ordained to the work of being Bible Instructors and/or preachers of the Word. Would not this attach a solemnity, dignity, urgency and vitality by God's Spirit to the high office which they might fill?--remembering that God wants women of the church to have an "education fitting them for any position of trust." (FE 118.0) The assurance is that the church will be strengthened and built up as a result.

Keep Standards Elevated

The high standards of ordaining men for the ministry should necessarily be observed in the same service for women. The time of ordination should be marked with holy solemnity.

". . . There should be a close investigation of their experience. Do they know the truth, and practice its teachings? Have they a character of good repute? Do they indulge in lightness and trifling, jesting and joking? In prayer do they reveal the Spirit of God? Is their conversation holy, their conduct blameless? All these questions need to be answered before hands are laid upon any [woman to dedicate her to the work of ministering in Word or doctrine.] . . ." 2RH 434b:1 (10-21-90)

By all means, women in positions of leadership must be modest and godly,--surrounded by a "sacred circle of purity."

"Our sisters should encourage true meekness; they should not be forward, talkative, and bold, but modest and unassuming, slow to speak. They may cherish courteousness. To be kind, tender, pitiful, forgiving, and humble would be becoming and well pleasing to God. If they occupy this position, they will not be burdened with undue attention from gentlemen in the church or out. All will feel that there is a sacred circle of purity around these God-fearing women which shields them from any unwarrantable liberties." AH 334:1 (Cf. 5T 602:0; 4T 643:4; AH 330ff.)

Summary

- I. So many of our sisters seem unaware of their high, holy calling and privileges in Christ Jesus, particularly with reference to missionary labors along various lay activity and ministerial lines.
- II. They need more encouragement to step out in this work,--after proper preparation,--perhaps from their pastors or other leaders in the church. Remuneration might be the means of encouraging ministers' wives to work as Bible instructors. More funds should be made available to hire Bible workers in the conferences,--even if this means the hiring of fewer male workers.
- III. The work of conducting Bible studies in the home or larger meeting place is needed and should be made to attract a class of women who want to be deep students of the Word, who have an earnest love for souls, who have other necessary qualifications.

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- IV. Some of the women of our church are called to be counselors or advisers, especially to their sisters. This would bring relief to many church pastors. Others should devote their time and efforts especially to welfare ministry. God calls some to be preachers of the Word--this may be more true in certain portions of the world field other than the United States, because of crying needs.
- V. Certain consecrated and qualified women who work along the various lines of ministry such as mentioned under III and IV, should be set apart to their high and holy mission by prayer and the laying on of hands. (Cf. 3RH 271)
- VI. In time then, would not some of these women workers be thus fitted for higher positions of trust and leadership in God's organized church? (Cf. FE 118)
- VII. The standards of ordination and of relations between men and women workers must ever be kept high, that the truth as it is in Jesus might be preserved, --pure and sacred.

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