

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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by

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## Chapter 1

### THE QUESTION AND OUR AGE

#### INTRODUCTION

In recent years women, North America's largest "silent majority" surprised their male counterparts of the population by publishing manifestos of intended aims for cultural and social reform. Ranging from the radical elimination of the family as a unit to the more conservative equalization of wages. These demands have been vocalized by caucusses that can no longer be safely ignored by the general society.

Whatever the private persuasions or ideals that individual church members may uphold, the question of the total role of women in today's world is bound to affect the Christian denominations. It is bound to change or influence them in some way by force of sheer numbers. The pews of Protestant denominations are filled with female parishoners in the ascendancy of fifty-one to sixty-four percent. A multitude of service organizations in these churches have been traditionally filled with women; women who in their day to day contact meet the crisis of individual family groups being challenged by the turbulent issues of our time. Few of these women however can allow themselves the freedom of whole-hearted service even in the traditional female branches of church welfare, Christian education, and Sabbath or Sunday-school departments. They vividly realize the needs of their fellow beings, yet from the grass-roots realization and desire

to fulfill these needs in Christian ministry, to the administrative quarter where the program for the Christian ministry is established, learned and executed, there is a vast abyss.

## THE PROBLEM

### Statement of the Problem

On the one hand women are encouraged to serve their fellow humans and to participate in the gospel commission, on the other they are excluded from full public ministrations by traditions of male leadership seemingly supported by a formidable bulwark of scriptural indications and established traditions. Even to those women who have been taught and who have outwardly accepted the call to eternal sacrifice in serving humanity through behind-the-scene tasks or domestic virtues, the question of a more active, a more unrestricted and a more responsible ministry comes to their mind sooner or later.

The lay women of our church and other Christian denominations are faced with the burdensome paradox of being called to spread the gospel with equal sincerity on the one hand and having that spirit of devotion and commitment curbed on the other. For a segment of them the special gifts of communication, of clarity of speech, of insight and administrative and leadership capabilities seem to be an even more paradoxical blessing. They face the onward pleading of an inner experience and call against the odds of a church which has been molded in a cultural pattern that cannot find any use for such talents in women. Their calls are denied. Women fully committed to Christ have felt the pressure to bury their talents. Some male church members and ministers insist that their dreams of the gospel ministry are not only unrealistic but thoroughly unscriptural.

There is a great need in response to the social reformations the push toward a more equal sharing of tasks, to answer the inner and the more vocal questions that some of these issues have raised in the minds of female church members. In a world that is moving to the demands and implications of consecrated and educated women, the church can no longer leave unanswered the question of the God-ordained role of women in these latter days. We are on the verge of earth's climax and in the midst of extending a universal invitation to Christ's kingdom. Can we spare a majority of our members in behind-the scenes work when some have obviously been called to a more public ministry? Can the church in good conscience invite all to come to Jesus and share in the joy of working in His vineyard and yet overlook the ready responses of some of the workers? Much more than this however, can the church find itself flexible enough to search the scriptures honestly and prayerfully in order to present to the world an authoritative "thus sayeth the Lord" on this issue? If the church finds that it can do all these things will She respond lovingly to the ongoing secular movement and offer something very much greater in place of the more radical, unrealistic and unChristian demands of the women's liberation movement?

It is the aim of this paper to review the scriptural base for the role of women in the church today in order to answer some of the above soul-searching questions. Christian emancipation is needed in this age more than ever before. The church must not be moved by the sinful desires of society, but the church's response to reform and human emancipation are a part of the everlasting principles of Christian love. They too are included in the gospel commission.

If the church honestly believes that the answer to every phase and challenge of our lives is contained in the Bible its members will search its pages to find the will of God. The individual members and the individual leaders should examine the historical and spiritual principles as they are described and implied in the Word of God. It is then as study and prayer are combined that the Holy Spirit will give the wisdom to incorporate the spiritual principles of ministry and service to answer the questions of society today.

#### Purpose of the Study

This paper will attempt to answer first the question of the Biblical role of women in the church by establishing the hermeneutical principles that have been applied to interpret the texts relevant to the role of women in spreading the gospel and ministering to the Christian church community.

Secondly it will attempt to show how these principles of service were put into operation in the early church by describing the historical setting of the primitive and apostolic church periods. Like our own, these two phases of the early Christian church were dominated by a large missionary zeal that had to transcend the barriers of culture.

Thirdly it will then attempt to combine the meanings of the historical findings and the cultural implications as a background to the words of Peter and Paul concerning the role of women in specific public offices such as teaching, preaching and evangelizing in such a way as to give the concerned reader a clearer conception of the main issues involved. The historical descriptions cannot be taken for normative standards, and to avoid this common error the paper will set the passages against the



historical norms in the secular world of the time, compared to the Christian admonitions as dictated by the Holy Spirit to the apostles. The paper will then follow the references of scripture from the well-established known facts to the implied expressions of Christian duty. It will study the modifications the church had to place on her inward spiritual freedom in order to follow the greater law of being all things to all men, for the sake of spreading the words of Christ. Out of this many sided examination the paper will resolve to give the implied Biblical recommendations that can serve as guides to women in the church today.

#### Importance of the Study

It is probably most self evident that women form a large percentage of our church membership and that they are vitally concerned with the problems of spiritual, moral, social and economic poverty. It is the woman who confronts the practical crisis that is faced by every family in the increasingly unsettled world. It is the individual woman therefore who must be assured and supported as she ministers in a very personal way. It is the individual Christian woman who is challenged in her very human contact with souls in need. She can minister, as can no male member of the church to the sisters of the church and the neighbor in need. She can confront the world in a special way; in the woman to woman contact, the mother to child relationship, the yearly teacher to child or pupil time of exploration and character building. She knows in a way that she can communicate emotionally and mentally the secrets of Christian womanhood better than any of her brethren in the church. She can establish in a new dimension witness to the ordinary, immediate circle of community citizens.

She has access to portions of our society that men may find puzzling, uncomfortable and even beyond their scope of ministry. The church must learn to challenge her army of dedicated Christian women. The practical reasons for a core of well-trained women as Bible workers, Bible teachers, Sabbath-school administrators and gospel ministers are numerous. The women of the church can relate to the problems of fellow women and minority groups in general and can respond to the needs of each with finer perceptions for they too have often faced the walls of an unchallenging environment and crisis on a family scale. They can empathize with the ever mounting victims of divorce, the problems and pressures created by an increasingly mobile society. Women can, if supported and encouraged by the church brethren give of themselves to a wide range of women and children cut off from more intimate contact with men by well established and much needed rules of decorum. They can study with fellow women without the restrictions that a conscientious male minister is required to adhere to.

In short, the issue of the role of women in our church has wide implications for the Christian community and the secular world about us. The question must be answered on a scriptural basis. Women trained and upheld by the church can be used to minister to the many specific calls that would best respond to her touch. At the same time Christian women can enrich the church community as a whole by supplying an added dimension of service to humanity transcending the barriers of race, creed, color or sex.

#### Limitations of the Study

This paper will restrict itself to examining the question of the role of women in the light of scripture from the time of Christ to the outworking of his principles in the early church of the primitive and

apostolic church periods extending to the end of the fourth century after the birth of Christ. The study has been extended to include this latter period of early church history in order to make more valid and clear the outworking of the scriptural statements about the role of women and how these influenced the structure of the early church community. It is a well known fact that early verbal Christian tradition is very accurate. Proof of this is in the fact that the written down Biblical accounts of the ministry of Jesus used as sources these word-of-mouth accounts. Enriched by the Holy Spirit these early Christians were able to recall and expound the words of Jesus with clarity and accuracy. The extra-Biblical accounts also provide much insight into the practical application of Christ's principles in the triumphant early church. It is impossible to prune the apostolic period from the primitive and still arrive at a clear and accurate picture of how the words of Jesus and the apostles manifested themselves in the lives of the church. They must be included to describe accurately how the motivating factor of Christ's soon coming and the urgency of extending the invitation of salvation to the world permeated the entire life-style of the early church.



## Chapter 2

### HERMENEUTIC AND HISTORIC APPROACH TO THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND APOSTOLIC AGE

#### Hermeneutic

Traditionally it has been the function of the exegete to interpret Biblical texts with a view to the historical context in which they were written. He then went beyond this mere academic delve and performed the theological task of pronouncing judgement on how these texts were to be applied to the contemporary problems; those issues or items not envisioned by the early church.

It would be well to expound on the competencies required for such a far-reaching task. An even superficial glance will suffice to convince that the work demands more insight and specialized information than any one man can possibly collect in a lifetime. To pronounce judgement with any claim to accuracy the exegete must have more than full competence in the language, history and thought of the early church. He must first determine what the Bible is. And it is this first determination of what the Bible actually claims or seems to be that gives rise to the differing process of hermenetical application and ultimately to the contradictory opinions of what a specific text actually means when it is applied to our day. It must be established first then, what the Bible actually means to the Seventh-day Adventist congregation.

This church has defined that the Bible is the inspired written word of God; the historical and spiritual record of God's dealing with human beings. For Seventh-day Adventists it contains the omnipotent will

of the Creator expressed in the terms and images as understood by finite human beings. By its very claim in containing the omnipotent will of God for mankind, and by the fact that Adventists pledge themselves to believe that claim, for this church then the Bible carries within its message its own authority. It records for human beings the irrevocable divine plan for the salvation of all who accept these irrevocable provisions. God's purpose and will is recorded in the Bible as fact and witnessed to be perfect in scope by the description of history.

Thus Seventh-day Adventists move to the first conclusion that a true affirmation of the above claims lead to, namely that the Bible must be timeless in authority for it answers the eternal questions of humanity's purpose on earth and the ultimate end to which the whole creation of earth has been appointed. The Bible secondly then encompasses in spirit and scope every age of humanity's being, and answers by the Spirit every urge and desire and goal that God has designed to be expressed in the experiences of human living.

Adventists move on then to the conclusion that the Bible is relevant because it has never failed to interrupt creation's flow in systematic and consistent pronouncements, at the same time speaking with the words and through the relationships that mankind in the specific age of the needed message could understand best. It is consistent in the fact of demonstrating the love and wisdom of God in his dealings with the people of this world, it is systematic in the historical description that witnesses to the ideal of God by relating to humans in terms that they can clearly understand.

It is because we are aware that God speaks to men in terms that they can relate to that we must make use of the hermeneutic principle that

the texts which seem obscure to us by reason of distance in age or gap in culture or even because the surrounding manuscripts are not known to this century, are to be defined through the context of the texts known in the entirety of their meaning.

In short an accurate judgement of what specific texts actually express must take into account professional competence, even brilliance, in the language symbols of the specific Biblical period, the historical setting, the results of the implications of the specific acts of God as described by later history, and empathetic insight into the thought or conception that underspelled the period or periods under study. This exacting process implies that a pooling of historical, linguistic, theological and sociological resources must be agreed upon. It can be verified beyond doubt that the church has not always seen fit to go to such lengths. The sad results have been that ecclesiastical pronouncements have been expounded as authoritative. Coupled with this failure to pool resources and work together on even the human level has often been the sad lack of earnest prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Unless the will is sanctified the Biblical researcher is left to rely on his own resources. Encumbered with the burden of human narrowness of vision, the gulf of centuries of time and culture, and the biases peculiar to our age, the answers arrived at will not reflect the plan of God for His church.

First then the work of defining what specific portions of the Bible mean on issues pertinent to our day demands the combined efforts of a group. As case in point the recommendations and conclusions this paper will arrive at will only give one portion of the answer. The complete understanding of the implications of women in the public ministry and other related fields can only be assessed in relation to the current trends as

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seen by sociologists and other professional students of the world of humanity relating to fellow humanity.

*DANGER OF PUTTING  
Too much emphasis  
on the Secular  
Aspect  
As on The  
Historical*

The community of scholars must take care not to ascribe to one phase of academic discipline more importance than to the others. Stendahl has ably warned against the evils of placing an overemphasis on historical research as opposed to all the other branches of learning. In this climate historical descriptions are hailed as normative Divinely ordained facts. It is this spirit of mastery on the part of historical scholars that has often made the word of God unrealistic and irrelevant to secular society.

A humorous but true illustration is given by Stendahl in which he notes that if we follow the idea of historical description as factual implication we would have to admonish our gospel ministers and Bible workers to walk with staff in hand and sandals on their feet. A very "Biblical" mode of travel would thus be introduced, but it is agreed that the efficiency rate would be highly questionable. (Stendahl 11:9-10)

The pitfalls of going to the other extreme, of pruning the so-called "core" of eternal truths from their seeming cultural and mythological settings are well known to Seventh-day Adventists. Men attempting to engage in this radical surgery of Biblical texts often transform theology into anthropology. (Stendahl 11:10-11) Scholars dedicated to this idea end up referring everything beyond the reason and understanding of human beings to the questioning and obvious limitations of men and women's search for self-understanding. God then takes shape in the image of humanity and becomes but the mirrored image or lofty dream of the finite beings' emotional vacuum.

In relating to the texts concerning the role of women in the church the author must be aware of the influences that culture and social pressures



exerted on the life-styles and outlooks of members in the early Christian church. At the same time however it is unreasonable to conclude that such an awareness is the answer as long as the scholar takes the time to prune the "truth" from the impact of culture. Rather the answer most obviously lies in the knowledge of how the early Christians responded to the demands of the culture in order to function in their God-given vocation as missionaries to the world. The motive beyond and behind their response is the key to the whole question. A sound Biblical answer to the question of women in the modern world will stay as true to the first Christian vocation of witnessing as did the answer of the early Christians to the challenge of their society. A complete examination of these texts relating to the role of women must include an awareness of the initial loyalty of every true believer. If it can be demonstrated that the overriding priority of the original Christians was the desire to share Christ then it can safely be asked how this primary purpose of Christian witness can best be served in world today. If it can be demonstrated that the early church members outwardly modified their freedom in Christ for the sake of the unhampered spread of the gospel, then the modern Christian woman has the opportunity of either modifying or expressing her freedom depending on what mode of outward cultural behavior can serve best to spread the message of Christ.

If on the other hand the study reveals that the church made no accomodation whatever and followed to the letter the implications of the new life in Christ, regardless of the demands of society then we must do likewise. In the process of this finding however, the scriptures must indicate to us some task greater than <sup>the</sup> gospel commission; something that we are not aware of as yet.



Jesus and Women

"Jesus never made any explicit statement about women. Rather he demonstrated his attitude by his treatment of women like Mary Magdalene whose life of prostituting herself to men was transformed to a life of full personhood by her contact with Jesus and His affirmation of her as a person." (Doely, 4: 21) While the gospels differ somewhat in representing aspects of the life of Jesus in other areas there is no evidence of any difference of opinion on the matter of Christ's complete acceptance and appreciation of women in full equality with men. This attitude of acceptance, of understanding that the woman as well as the man is accountable individually before God and thus constitutes the essence of being a free moral agent, is also fully accepted in the early church.

The New Testament shows clearly an understanding of a new principle at work in those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour and walk in the light of the Spirit. Side by side with the fundamental Jewish idea that society is paternal and patriarchal in the areas of leadership and dominion runs the new ideal of equality of men and women in Christ. Palestinian Judaism reflects itself in the marked emphasis given to the role of men. In the extensive genealogys of Christ, covering the span from Adam to Joseph only the names of four women are included. At the same time the Bible scholar finds instances where the new found implications of Christianity are equally well presented. Women as well as men were at the first Christian celebration of Pentecost and it surprised no one in that early circle that the Holy Spirit came with equal power on both. (Culver, 2: 52) The immediate followers of Jesus had been prepared for this significant break-through beyond the restrictions of rabbinical Judaism by three years of close association with the Master and by observing His life.

They were witnesses to the fact that

Jesus' ministry cuts straight across all that has gone before. In no area is this more evident than as we study the history of women in religion. Certainly the old taboos and arguments which had developed out of a long history of rabbinical prejudices in this field had no place in his thinking. Women were people -- friends to be visited, chance acquaintances with whom he could discuss theology, and mothers who wanted their children to be healed. (Culver, 2: 53)

Many of Christ's miracles were performed at the request of some woman. Often Christ's most profound conversations were not with the learned doctors of religion but with, for instance, a woman drawing water at the well or two hospitable women living with their brother in Bethany.

From Christ's attitude toward women as evidenced by His ministry to the women surrounding His life the Bible student can come to some well-grounded conclusions. First, Christ called both men and women to witness to the fact that He is Lord and Saviour, both publicly and privately. The story of the woman who was healed as a result of touching the hem of the garment of Jesus illustrates this fact. It is recorded in Math 5:21-34. The setting comes into true focus when one remembers that Jesus had just received a request from a prominent Jewish leader. He had been asked to heal the dignitary's daughter. Christ however interrupted his mission of seemingly crucial importance to a man, in order to help a woman. When the woman was healed through faith, Christ stopped the entire crowd in order that she might make a public confession of her living faith. He saw to it that she could not leave his presence without such a witness. No doubt that faithful woman would have praised God for the rest of her life in a private manner, but Jesus was not satisfied with such a hidden ministry even from a woman restricted by the regulations of her world. It seems logical to conclude, from looking at the story that Christ was establishing a principle. Men and women equally must witness to the faith

that has been given to them through the grace of God. God includes some of his children to witness in a public way, regardless of sex or social standing.

The second conclusion the Bible student will come to as he or she studies Christ's relationship to women is that He was as fully eager for women to enjoy a very close spiritual bond with Him as He was for men. Luke 8:1-3 reveals that women as well as men traveled in the company of Jesus. Some of them contributed to the financial support of the band, and all of them were intent on learning and listening. There is little reason to think that women were not included in the seventy people that Jesus sent ahead of His travels to announce His coming in the towns He expected to visit. Why should there not have been husband and wife teams in this work? Could it be that the established rule whereby the married apostles traveled with their wives in their later missionary journeys had its beginnings in the mission of the seventy? No neglect of children would have resulted even if the couples engaged in this work were very young. Family structures differed from ours in those days and there were always scores of adult relatives near at hand. Children old enough to travel may even have accompanied their parents. Their love of Christ and desire to be in his presence is especially noted in all the gospels.

Though the immediate above questions cannot be proved one way or the other the fact remains that Jesus had a number of women among his permanent following. This was most definitely not in accord with the customs established by the rabbinical teachers of the law. Christ's toleration and more than that his welcome of women into his spiritual kingdom and immediate presence was a public proclamation of his differing estimate of women. (Faxon, 5:90)

Significant also is the fact that these women were mentioned by name. The little band of women included Mary Magdalene, Joanna wife of Chuza, Susanna, Salome, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary His own mother. A glance at the list shows that several of the women were relatives of disciples. The fact seems to support that witnessing was done in family groups to a much greater extent than we have usually thought.

It can also be noted that these and other women from Galilee not only followed Christ and ministered to Him but were faithful to Him "even unto death". The men fled at the horror of the final scenes of Jesus' crucifixion but the women from Galilee stayed with their Saviour to His end.

The third point the gospels affirm is that Christ talked to them on matters and questions of theology. This is especially noteworthy since it is known that according to rabbinical tradition women were not considered worthy enough to delve into religious matters. The Bible records clearly that the disciples of Christ found his habit of talking to women, even strange women of other races and classes about the kingdom of God very puzzling.

In the solitude of the home of Mary and Martha Jesus felt free to describe the most plain and deep parts of His Messianic mission. To Mary He declared that he had power over death. To the priests and rulers at the temple he was forced by reason of their unbelief to mask these truths in symbolic language.

The gospel of John records His even more interesting and long conversation with the woman at the well. Jesus clearly initiated the conversation. Again the Bible also shows that the disciples were dumb-



founded at his practice of addressing women and speaking to them of spiritual things. Christ however, did not stop here. Not only did He reveal His Divinity to the woman at the well but he sent her back to the city on a public evangelism mission.

The fourth fact of Christ's relationship to women that can be learned from the gospel stories is that Christ made both men and women accountable to God for the acts of their lives. Women did not exist in the sight of Jesus as appendages to men neither did men have the right to excuse their irresponsible behaviour through the myth that the woman is the weaker moral agent, therefore she is always the reason for man's fall when it comes to an immoral act. In Christ's ruling on divorce (Mark 10: 2-12) Jesus turns the Jewish practice concerning divorce founded on the Law of Moses and refers back to the original intent of creation: "...from the beginning of creation He made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother (and be joined to his wife) and the two shall become one flesh." He then seals the controversy with the statement "what therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." This passage not only gives a guideline for the setting up of the family as God intended it be, it presents a concern for the rights of a woman. Jesus even implies that it is not always the man who wishes to seek a way out of marriage, something Jewish society could not bring itself to understand. Jesus sought not only to uphold the sanctity of marriage but to "...deliver women from the fear of unjust and capricious repudiation, and make the marriage an equal responsibility for both." (Faxon, 5: 106) In later passages and stories Jesus again affirmed that both men and women stood on equal ground before God, and both had to face the same moral law. This is in direct contrast to the rabbinical tradition of



His time where only women were often punished as offenders in a case of adultery. Evidence of the prevailing male judgement on the question of morality can be shown by the fact that only the woman was brought to Christ on the charge of adultery. Where was the man?

A fifth principle that can be deduced from Christ's fellowships with women is that he intends the church community to take seriously the ministry and dedication of its women members, and to support them in their call as His witnesses. All four of the gospels make it clear that women were the first witnesses of the resurrection. How many long hours of grief the disciples would have been spared had they learned this lesson of Christ's equal call to minister within the church, if they had believed the voices of the women at once. In the face of tradition the women were sent by the angels and later by Christ himself to tell the good news of His triumph over death. The Jewish world at that time did not consider the testimony of a woman of any value in court, yet Jesus trusted women to bear the message that was to be the cornerstone of joy in the new faith. Swidler has commented on this same idea when he states the significance of Christ's revelation to the women in the light of their social position in that age.

In typical male Palestinian style, the Eleven refused to believe the women since, according to Judaic law, women were not allowed to bear legal witness. As one learned in the Law, Jesus obviously was aware of this stricture. His first appearing and commissioning could not have been anything but deliberate; it was clearly a dramatic linking of a very clear rejection of the second-class status of women with the center of His gospel, His resurrection. The effort of Jesus to centrally connect these two points is so obvious that it is an overwhelming tribute to man's intellectual myopia not to have discerned it effectively in two thousand years. (Faxon, 5: 92)

A sixth and very significant principle we can derive from a study of the gospels is that both men and women were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do a work, and the nature of that work demanded that the seal of heaven signify to the members of the new church and the community at large that the

will of Christ was for them to move forward in the spreading of the gospel. By reason of the fact that the Holy Spirit signified that He was empowering both men and women to do that work, we can imply that all went out to do his bidding.

Pentecost was a Jewish celebration in which for centuries women had taken an active role. It is altogether <sup>probable</sup> that the followers of Jesus as a community were called together for that celebration by the women of the group. The prayer-meeting that was sealed with the outpouring of the Spirit of God and marked the "bithday of the Christian church" was held in the home of Mark's mother. Some interesting historical observations concerning these home church-meetings will be presented later. For the time being it seems probable that Mark's mother and the other women who had followed Jesus closely participated as fully as the men in this first prayer meeting that resulted in the conversion of 3,000 Jews from all over the Roman empire.

The active participation of both sexes in the gospel commission is also implied by Peter in the powerful sermon that resulted in the conversion of the above mentioned 3,000. It was he who explained to the onlookers that the miracle they had beheld was a direct fulfillment of a prophecy that included the participation of both sexes in the Lord's work. He replied that Joel 2:28 was a promise of God that was now a reality.

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Even upon the menservants and maid-servants in those days, will I pour out my spirit.

It is interesting to compare the all inclusive nature of Joel 2:28 with Gal 3:28. In both instances the barriers of class and sex are overcome, indeed obliterated by the power of the Spirit. These verses suggest clearly that in both the old and new Testament times those living in the

new life sustained by the indwelling of the Spirit were emancipated from the restrictions imposed as a direct result of sin. A study of Joel 2:28 compared to Gal 3:28 expresses fully that God's purpose of love is the same yesterday and today. The fact that this outpouring of the Spirit took place at Pentecost is significant. It shows that God uses the symbols and institutions that men and women can understand to confront them with the issue of what they will do with Him. He speaks to them in the context of their culture.

In conclusion then it is evident that Jesus extended to both men and women the invitation to His kingdom. He then commissioned all who accepted Him as their Lord to make His work of saving souls their first work. He last of all sealed His promise and commission with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on both men and women establishing to the world that they had the authority to be witnesses of His life and mission.

#### Christ's Relationship to Individual Women

The active part that women in the time of Christ played in his ministry and His appreciation of their fellowship can best be illustrated by an individual look at some women mentioned in the gospels.

Most speculated about and least understood is the character and personage of Mary. Davida Foy Crabtree notes that in the task of understanding the mother of Jesus,

The theological possibilities inherent in taking Mary from a sentimentally mystic pedestal to which she has been chained, and to view her as a fully human, complex person are manifold. Mary was profound and intelligent. Luke mentions several times that she pondered or took to heart specific events. (Doely, 4: 21)

From the gospel accounts one can gather that Mary was strong yet compassionate; her identity was not entirely wrapped up in her role of

wife and mother. Tradition has it that she also had a career. She was apparently a hairdresser. Besides that implication we know for a fact that she was also a poetess. The sublime passages of the Magnificat are inspired by the Spirit but the words are her own. This song of victory and faith is a good medium of insight into the character of Mary. As Rosemary Ruether has noted, "...the Magnificat is a proud soaring song, having nothing to do with passivity, sweetness, timidity or the feminine mystique." (Doely, 3:41)

Mary is introduced most fully in Luke 1:26-31, 38. She is devout. She receives the word of the angel but not blindly. With her characteristic bent to ponder and understand she attempts to grasp the implications of the angel's greeting. We are told that she "considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be." The angel does not seem to be displeased at her willingness to understand his announcement more fully, unlike Zacharias she does not express doubt in the power of God to do with her life as He sees fit. She only wants to know in a better way His will. Her obedience has often been quoted by the masculine writers as the crown of her feminine virtues. The Bible however does not have it that way. Obedience to the will of God is a gift that is bestowed on both humble men and women. In Math 1:18 Joseph is also enjoined to be obedient.

The greatest fact in the choice of Mary is not that she was chosen because of her social greatness or claim of kinship to David. She was picked from the scores of young maidens who must have had the same claim of relationship to the man after God's own heart. Rather, she was an ordinary woman root and soul one of the common people. In her realization of this oneness to the rest of the humble folk around her lies the source



of her appeal to women throughout the ages. She was as nothing in the world yet because she was willing to be taught by the agencies of heaven she could be used to bring into history the Creator of everything there is.

She is of course seen best as a mother, but even here certain facts have often been overlooked. She was the mother of Jesus and as such influenced Him to an extent that no other human being did. That she was not the height of sentimental docility and passivity can be seen in the character of Jesus. Mary did not raise a passive dependent child. She imparted to Christ the ideals of courage and faithfulness to the will of God regardless of the responses of the world about. Even in the story of Christ's three day disappearance in Jerusalem at the age of twelve, evidences of her ability to let Jesus freely become Himself abound. She trusted Him enough to let Him stray from Her side for a full three days.

Mary displayed courage and vitality. With the band of women from Galilee she often traveled over the vast and rugged distances that Jesus trod. Travel was usually on foot. Raised in the most humble circumstances she shared the hard lot of the underprivileged mother. She traveled on a rocking donkey to the last moments of her delivery and bore her son in the rough surroundings of a manger. At the end of His life she bore the sight of His terrible death on the cross. But she did not give up. She seems to have been there again in the glorious prayer-meeting of Pentecost. It was her love to Jesus that gave her the strength to share the deep sorrows and to express the highest joys.

Another example of how God's call affected women in Christ's time can be shown through the story of Anna the prophetess in the temple. She is connected with Christ only in the fact that she was the first public witness to His Divinity, yet what a witness that must have been.



It is astounding to realize that no writer in our age has discovered fully the dramatic impact of Anna's ministry. She was the daughter of Phanuel and from the tribe of Asher. Women of this tribe were renowned for their beauty and often married kings, princes or priests. (Faxon, 5: 37) After seven years of marriage, her husband, probably a priest, died. From then on she lived in the temple and performed her duties as a prophetess with such faithfulness that the Lord revealed to her that she would live to see the Messiah. Her living quarters are an indication of the range of her fuller call. Only recognized teachers of the people were allowed to reside within the Holy courts. On the day that she picked up Jesus and pronounced over Him the inspired words of prophecy she became the first Christian missionary.

In the accounts of Christ's friendship with Mary and Martha the Bible comes closest to giving expression in a verbal way to His concept of women's role in religion and society. Mary and Martha are prototypes of the different approaches that women take to life, and more specifically to religious life. Both women were equally devoted to Jesus yet each expressed her devotion in her own unique way. Jesus excepted the ministration of both. He did not berate Mary because she did not serve Her Lord through domestic channels. It was her special vocation to listen and to learn that she may better impart to those about her. Neither did he find fault with the fact that Martha liked to bustle around the house. To encourage Mary in the face of criticism even in her own home (for it was generally unheard of for women to take time to grasp religious truths) He stated that she had "chosen the better part." Born of a woman Jesus had no idea that women were unfit to talk to God or about God.

While examining this story is is also interesting to find that it

was Martha and not the men who was most vocal in resenting the role of Mary. It is often the women in the churches who resent one of their own number stepping out of line -- especially when they step behind the pulpit. (Culver, 2: 53)

In conclusion of this examination of the specific characteristics of women who enjoyed direct contact with Jesus several are worthy of emphasis. First the characters of the women surrounding Jesus were varied, and they expressed their devotion to Him in differing ways. Jesus accepted each of the ways. His example stresses the fact that He enjoyed the individual note of their services for Him and by His life enjoined that it is His will that these rights of individuality should be honoured and safeguarded. He demonstrated also in His relationships with these women that He called some of them to public and some to private ministry. He was not afraid of crossing the boundaries of rabbinical tradition in order to affirm that both men and women are called to enjoy individual communion with God and that neither sex can depend on the attitudes or efforts of the other in the daily walk with God. He affirmed in the face of tradition that both men and women are free moral agents and accountable in the final judgement to God alone and not to their relationships with each other. Most of all He demonstrated by the perfection of His life that the love of God knows no racial, social or sexual boundaries. Those who walk in the Spirit receive their commission from the Spirit. Those men and women who accept Christ and work His work are equally free to do His will in the power of His grace.

#### Review of Secular Position of Women in the Time of the Apostles and the Following Apostolic Age

The women of Greece were for the most part a suppressed sector hemmed in by the principles of usefulness and convenience, forbid-

den education but happy enough, it seems, in their dismal lot. With all their poetry and refinement and boasted chivalry they (the Greeks) remained to the last wholly unconscious of the true characteristics and natural susceptibilities of women." (Daly, 3: 54)

Large portions of Asia Minor plus of course Greece itself were under the cultural dominance of Ionic and Dorian civilizations. It was in this decadent form of Greek culture (called by historians the Hellenistic world) that the early church evangelized and grew under the leadership of Peter and Paul and their immediate associates. In fact it can be safely said that the position of women in the Hellenized portions of Asia Minor was about the same if not worse as endured by Hebrew women under rabbinical Judaism. In the Jewish religion there were provisions for family worship in public gatherings such as the feast of Pentecost, but in the Greek world religious participation of women was often limited to pleasing the lusts of strangers in the name of worship. Only women who wished to become hetaerae (professional entertainers in both an academic and physical sense) could participate with men in discussions of philosophy and public life. These did so at great expense for though a few rose to heights and were honored for their wisdom, most were excluded from any hope of becoming wives and mothers in a legitimate sense.

In those portions of the empire more directly under the cultural influence of Rome (the western half of the civilized world of both Africa and Europe) the position of women was somewhat more free.

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 female Christians an unobstrusive freedom of movement which was to be an effective factor in the spread of Christianity. (Daly, 3: 58)

In Rome many women took a prominent part in public activity, usually in religious settings. Often public games in honor of specific gods were

presided over by patrician women. Many are recorded as having attained the highest priesthoods in the western portions of Asia. In the city of Rome itself the wife of the Pontifex Maximus took the lead in the worship of Bona Dea and when she died her husband had to resign his position.

Female priests were also attached to the worship of Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus or Rex Sacrorum. The male priests in these same temples had to be married and also had to resign when their wives died.

In social life women were allowed to accompany their husbands to certain public events. Wealthy women also contributed to civil causes by erecting baths, gymnasia, temples or statues for the use and enjoyment of the population as a whole. Their participation in civic affairs gave them a much deeper sense of civil responsibility than that shared by even the Greek hetaerae.

Even Rome that masculinely disciplined governmental machinery allowed itself the sentimental attachment of awe to the vestal virgins.

In this setting then of the empire's dichotomy of relative freedom and paternal bondage on the part of women, the early church began the work of spreading the gospel. It was a varied task of adaption for though the empire was bound together under the iron grip of Rome in a political sense, it still maintained and perpetuated a host of various cultural and social institutions. This is one of the reasons why the early Christian church possessed no uniformity of liturgy, organized clergy or even a creed, apart from the two pillars of faith which stated that Christ was the Divine Son of God and had given evidence of His Divinity by overcoming death, and that He had lived among men as a real human being.

#### Position and Role of Women in the Early Christian Church

It is a well known fact that the homes of the early believers became



the focal points for the spread of the new belief. Many women in the New Testament are mentioned by name and identified as hostesses of these home churches. Among the first was Mary, the mother of John Mark in Jerusalem. She was perhaps one of the wealthiest women in the city, but at any rate her home was so large that the upper room could hold 120 people for a period of ten days. In later years this same house seems to have served not only as the church in Jerusalem but by virtue of its founding tradition it served as the "headquarter" church of the growing new faith. Later the Biblical record gives the name of other such women who had churches in their homes. Among them was Lydia of Thyatira who hosted the church of Philippi, Priscilla who moved about a great deal and yet seems to have followed the tradition of having the church meet in her home both in Ephesus and Rome, and Euodia who is addressed by Paul as having labored side by side with him in the gospel ministry together with Clement and the rest of his fellow-workers. Eudia and Sintyche seem to have been the hostesses of the church in Philippi. ~~Louis~~ and Eunice, those great women who influenced in such a marked way the development of Timothy were also leaders in the early church. Chloe was a leader in the church at Corinth. In this city the church seems to have met in the synagogue for a much longer time and the problems that this caused in relating to the traditional outlooks of the hosts who were Jewish elders will be discussed more fully later. Be that as it may however, it was Chloe who came to Paul and reported the situation that had arisen at Corinth. In Colossus that church met at the house of Nymphia. Finally Apphia is mentioned in the book of Philemon. She must have been either Philemon's wife or his sister. When the book was written it was intended to be both a personal letter and then to be read to the church that met at Philemon's house. In either case Nymphia probably



acted as hostess to that congregation. Damaris and other "honorable women of Berea" also provided places of worship in their home.

These home churches were used as the places of Sabbath worship, as the social centers of the early church where the congregation gathered for the Sunday morning or evening "love-feasts". The letters of the apostles from Jerusalem or wherever their immediate places of work were at that moment, were read there. The homes were also the places to gather when one of the visiting evangelists such as Paul, Barnabas, Peter or some other missionary came to preach. The sick and the orphaned of the Christian community were cared for in these homes and the new recruits were taught the basic elements of the Christian faith.

In all parts of the empire, the home was the one area where women were allowed freedom of action and expression. Is it not reasonable to conclude that when the churches met in the homes of these wealthy ladies, that they were not excluded from active participation in the meetings? It is also reasonable enough to see why only men were the traveling evangelists in the category of Paul. Considering the traveling conditions and the social customs in those parts of the empire that were under Greek cultural influence only men could have traveled unhampered from church to church. From this setting of home churches tied together through the visits of traveling apostles came the idea that men were to be elected as bishops. In later years the bishop performed the same services of connection and itinerant preaching that the apostles had consecrated themselves to.

In the home churches however, later history shows that the women who acted as hostesses performed many of the functions of a local pastor as distinct from the visiting evangelists.

From the first the Christian community embraced a purpose derived directly from the example of Jesus Himself. His example stressed a life of loving service to men and women. Early Christian women sought to emulate this example. Their main vocation in life was "the care of individuals with the ideal of loving, self-forgetful effort to win them to the Christian life and to help them grow into it." (Culver, 2: 67)

The ideal of Christian service soon manifested itself in the Christian church in the form of relatively organized orders of service. Women seem to have both organized these on the authority of direction from the apostles, and then maintained these services themselves.

One group of women in the early church functioned in the office of "virgins". These were the younger women or girls of the community who had been raised in the church homes. "They do not seem to have been assigned to any specific duties in connection with this title, but were considered as general assistants." (Culver, 2: 68) By the third century they were fully organized into an office. There is evidence for this from numerous statements in the writings of the early Fathers in the Apostolic Age.

A second group of women who were organized almost as an order for service were the widows. In the very beginning these were probably real widows yet by the third century we hear that there was one young woman in Africa, a virgin, who ministered to the needy "as a widow" for over 20 years. (Culver, 2: 68) By that time the order of widows meant that there were certain acts that were performed by this group and women who had never been widowed served with it.

The widows were at first charged only with the vocations of fasting and prayer. Later however their work varied and transcended these

first duties. Even in the beginning however widows took part in the public prayers of the church. The later Didascalia Apostolorum depicts widows as performing the rites of prayer for the church as a whole and for the sick in particular. They were however engaged in a much more active part of Christian ministry. The early Christians looked upon the order of widows as the "alter of God". The prayers of the widows were considered to be one of the heaven appointed links of guidance and instruction. Clement of Alexandria places widows after the bishops, priests and deacons among the persons of distinction in the church ranks. Origen argued that "if the office of widows consisted only of feet washing there would be no reason for ranking them among those having ecclesiastical status."

Unlike deaconesses widows were never ordained to their office. The so called "Egyptian Church" Order explicitly forbade the laying on of hands to consecrate widows to office. Admission was by word of mouth alone. In the Apostolic age the church remembered the words Paul concerning widows and ruled that they should not be admitted to serve until the age of forty. Widows had to live some time above reproach before being admitted to serve in this life of prayer, fasting, caring for the sick, and public prayer.

History records its most surprising insights into the function of women in the early church under the order of deaconesses. The epistles of Paul are the first to mention the office of deaconess. In Rom 16:1 Paul commends Phoebe to the church, and mentions the fact that she is a deaconess. She seems to have performed some kind of service to the church at Cenchreae which we are not fully aware of.

In the first epistle to Tim 3:11 Paul makes reference to deaconesses though not in the actual word. Paul outlines the behavior of bishops, deacons and "women in like manner". They were all to be chaste, not sland-

erers, but sober and faithful in all things. "By this last token women in general could not have been meant since this would be completely out of harmony with the context of the verse." (Hannon, 7: 73-74) Both the scriptures and the early church documents reveal that there was an order of female diaconate.

Extra-Biblical evidence for the existence of deaconesses is given by Pliny the Younger in a letter to the emperor Trajan. Concerning the Christians of Pontus at the beginning of the second century he writes, "I have found it necessary to extort information from two serving women who are said to be deaconesses." The word "ministra" seems to be a translation of "diakonos" since it appears to have a technical sense in this case. Proof of this lies in the qualification "serving women" to denote the women's station in life apart from their special ministration in the Christian church. (Hannon, 7: 77)

Again there is further evidence of their continuence as an order in a mid-third century document called "The Testament of Our Lord". Deaconesses here have the specific duty of assisting at the baptism of women by the bishop. They were a recognized party of the church ministry for they received their communion immediately after the male deacons, and sat at the left of the bishop parallel with the deacons on his right. In this document their other duties are listed. They kept the other women of the church in order, took their station at the church door, and in a period of crisis administered the Lord's Supper to sick women. (Hannon, 7: 77)

It is also interesting to note that not until the third century was there a differentiation between the duties of a deacon and a deaconess.



From the scriptures we have the full story behind the beginnings of the installation of deacons. (If it can be remembered that not until the third century was there any difference in their duties, such a survey of the office of deacon can apply to a history of the duties of both sexes.)

A deacon or deaconess then was at first one of those who were called upon to serve the community meals, to care for the widows and orphans, so that the apostles could devote their full time to preaching. As the church moved from Jerusalem however, they also became responsible for the common supplies, the distribution of food or funds to those in need and to help in any way that they saw fit. Some like Stephen went beyond these specific duties and engaged in actual evangelistic thrusts. All this seems to have been done under the guidance and by the authority of the Holy Spirit. Historically it can be shown that during this period both men and women in the diaconate performed the functions of visiting the sick, consoling the bereaved, making arrangements for funerals and baptisms, caring for the orphans, and securing financial aid for those who had lost their employment as a result of embracing the faith. (Culver, 2: 68)

The "Didascalia Apostolorum" has many additional references to women and spells out more fully the duties of the deaconesses. The bishop usually chose those he saw fit to do the , "numerous things that are required." This manuscript mentions that deaconesses were called also "for the ministry of women".

The "Didascalia Apostolorum" then gives the one overwhelming reason for the use of women to minister to and to evangelize their fellow-women.

"For there are houses where thou canst not send the deacon to the

to the women's quarters, especially among the heathen." The simple statement tells two important things about the customs of the early church. First it implies that in the homes of the Christians (and in Christian circles in general) men and women had free access to meet and speak on a human level, and this was in contrast to the situation in pagan circles. Secondly it shows that the church chose to modify the freedom of relationships that had come about as a result of the gospel in order that no reproach would be brought upon it so that evangelism (apparently the first vocation of every member of the church) could go forward without any added prejudices to overcome.

This same manuscript also shows that in deference to the restrictions of the pagans and in order that no reproach should be cast on any Christian ordinance, deaconesses were always present to assist at the baptism of women. In the words of the manuscript, "when women go down into the water...they should be annointed by a deaconess, but let a man pronounce over them the invocation of the Divine Names in the water." It then goes on to say that women however, should not baptize.

The "Didascalia Apostolorum" then commands that "when she who is being baptized has come up from the water, let the deaconess receive her and teach her and instruct her how the seal of baptism ought to be kept unbroken in purity and holiness." Here for the first time the command to teach is given to women.

By the third century the need for the services of a deaconess were so universally felt that the ordination formula was written down and spread to all the congregations.

Thou shalt lay thy hands upon her in the presence of the presbyters, the deacons and the deaconesses and say...thou who didst fill Deborah,

Hannah and Hulda with the Holy Spirit, thou who in the temple didst appoint women to keep the Holy doors, look thou upon thy servant chosen for the ministry (diakonia) and give to her the Holy Spirit that she may worthily perform the office committed to her. (Hannon, 7: 78)

From this passage it becomes clear that the early church recognized a long standing tradition, namely that from old Testament times onward certain women had been called by God to perform public offices, and these women had been authorized to do so by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The early church felt no tension in setting aside women and ordaining them to an office. At the appointment of a deaconess the ordination prayer asked that the same Spirit that had set aside the prophetesses of old, empower the ministries of the women likewise set aside for a special work.

More than this the early church recognized that God was certainly setting aside certain women to the self-same office of prophetic authority that Hulda and Deborah had been called to. It is agreed that the position of a prophet or prophetess carries with it not only the responsibilities of revealing the future but also that of uplifting members in the church through the spoken word. Counseling and preaching are then, a part of the duties of a prophet or prophetess. The early church recognized this fact and has left behind records of such public speaking on the part of women. And in order again not to cast reproach upon such open conduct "examples of early Christian art show women speaking in mixed assemblies, their head coverings pulled back and fastened in place with the ornament which was the style of their times." (Culver, 2: 55)

When Stephen was stoned to death by the mob, the deacon Philip fled with his family to Caesarea. Paul, Luke and the others who were working together as missionaries were entertained there by Philip on their way back to Jerusalem. This trip freed Luke to interview eyewitnesses in

in Palestine who could tell him about Jesus and the events in the earliest church. It is very possible Luke includes his reference to the four daughters of Philip who were all prophetesses because their inspired words gave him help in the project of writing his gospel.

The early Christian church may even have had an example of some one who was called to a position beyond that of prophetess. The hair-splitting that Bible scholars are faced with can be illustrated by the tradition of Junia. The Junia of the King James version has in more recent times becomes the male Junias of modern translations. Apparently the Greek manuscripts say "Junia" a common name for Roman girls, but it can also be a contraction of a less common man's name. Because no other women apostles are known, male translators in our day have decided that this person belongs to them. However, the church leaders very much closer to the time of the apostles seem to have had no trouble in envisioning a woman in such august company.

Chrysostom, a doctor of the eastern church and patriarch of Constantinople tried to spur the women of his generation to greater service in the church by upholding Junia in his sermons. He clearly sees her not only as a woman but an apostle. Historically she was most probably a disciple of an apostle. Chrysostom reflected the general thinking of church leaders in his day however when he preached, "oh how great is the devotion of this woman that she should be counted worthy of the appellation of apostle."

We cannot know one way or the other about Junias or Junia, but the fact that the early church could accept and preach about such an exalted station of women is important to this century.



### The Roles of Individual Women in the Early Church

A clue to the role of Junia or Junias can perhaps be found in (Acts 9:33-34) where Dorcas or Tabitha that woman noted for her works of charity to the poor is called a disciple. This is the only place in the New Testament where the feminine form of this word is used. (Harkness, 8: 65)

The most misunderstood apostle in the New Testament in this question of the role of women in the church is Paul. Through countless centuries both men and women have looked to him with a great mixture of emotions. A closer examination of his dealings with individual women before delving into the texts that seem to come in contradictory tones may give some insight at what the situation in Corinth actually was.

In 51A.D. in the city of Corinth Paul met two fellow Jewish-Christians, Aquila and Priscilla. (Acts 18:2) Priscilla was a Roman married to a Jew with influential relatives in the captial. (Culver, 2: 57) She and Aquila seem to have been escapees from the persecutions against the Jews in Rome under Claudius (49A.D.-50A.D.) Paul lived with them in Corinth for one and a half years, and all three worked together in the business of tentmaking. In Corinth Paul preached to the mixed congregation of Jews and believing Greeks every Sabbath. From Corinth also his first epistles went out among them first and second Thessalonians.

A good historical case can be built for the idea that Priscilla or Prisca, as Paul affectionately re-named her, acted as his editor. Prisca was with Paul at the time when every genuine Pauline letter is independently dated, with the exception of Romans. Even here the final sending out of the letter from Rome via Priscilla may well have been agreed upon before they parted from Ephesus. Prisca was in Rome at the exact

time that the revision of Philippians took place. During her stay there, copies of Philemon and Colossians were sent out from that city. Is Paul referring to her special help when he states, "To Prisca...not only I (Paul) but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks."? ~~There is no authentic Pauline letter for which we cannot establish definite relations to Priscilla.~~ During Paul's stay at Ephesus, 52A.D.-55A.D. Priscilla worked in close connection with him. In Rome during her stay from 59A.D.-61A.D. the epistles of Paul including Philippians, Philemon and Colossians are sent out in the form of circular letters to the surrounding churches.

Not only may Priscilla have been Paul's editor she was definitely a teacher. When Paul left Ephesus to go on a missionary trip at the end of 52A.D. Priscilla and Aquila were visited by Appolos of Alexandria, a sincere and eloquent speaker, but one who knew little of the life of Christ. Shocked at his lax theology both Priscilla and Aquila invited him into their home and instructed him in fuller Christian doctrine. From this place then, Appolos went out to become a powerful preacher for the cause of Christ.

Finally, it is known that Priscilla was often mentioned by Paul before her husband Aquila. This unusual form of salutation is evidence that Priscilla was the more outgoing and active of the pair in the evangelistic sphere. History does not record too fully her unusual service, but it must have made for her a very special place in the heart of Paul.

This apostle also salutes Euodia and Syntyche as true believers. They are admonished to agree (evidently they had fallen out of harmony with each other. In spite of this Paul does not forget their former service and asks the church to help these women for they "have labored

side by side with me in the gospel."

Paul's epistle to the Galatians was written in Ephesus in the spring of 54A.D. It was at the time when Priscilla and Aquila had established the church in their home. In this free spirit of a home church Paul penned these words of equality, "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith...there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28)

In short, Priscilla seems to have had Paul's complete approval as a teacher and a theologian. (Culver, 2: 55) If we follow Paul's individual relationships with women we find that he was certainly one of the best friends women ever had.

An extra Biblical source the tract "The Acts of Paul" which was considered to be authoratative for the first and second centuries of the early church, records that Thekla was Paul's missionary assistant, and as such probably the first traveling woman missionary. *NOT Accurate*

Paul's relationship to Lydia is also very interesting. Paul and his companions met Lydia when they first arrived at Philippi. Upon asking where the local group of believers met they were sent to the riverside. Here Luke tells us that "the Lord opened (Lydia's) heart to give heed to what he said." She was a wealthy businesswoman with a very large house and slaves. Through her witness they were all baptized and her home became the center of the Christian church in that town. She must have certainly performed many of the duties of the other women who hosted churches in their homes.

She acted as treasurer to the church and as financial patron to Paul. Through her influence the church in Philippi gladly financed some

of Paul's later missionary journeys.

Paul never failed to include in his letters blessings and prayers for his fellow workers in the spreading of the gospel. The epistle of Romans illustrates his beautiful habit in an especially touching way. Warm greetings are sent to Phoebe (the deaconess and official bearer of the letter to Rome) Prisca of course, a woman worker called Mary, Julia whom Paul calls "beloved" Persis, and Rufus' mother Junia (the same woman referred to by Chrysostom as an apostle) Nereus' sister, and Olympas.

Not only Paul but other apostles and teachers regarded women as co-workers in the spreading of the gospel. The best proof for this implication lies in the fact that Paul nowhere sets down in writing justification for his attitude of complete acceptance.

In the closing chapters of Romans Paul also sends greetings to two women workers named Tryphena and Tryphosa. Paul also calls these sisters "workers in the Lord". In this greeting a fitting and humorous answer can be given to those who say that women would lose their God-given feminine charms of meekness and sweetness if they engage in public work for the church. Paul seems to see no tension between feminine qualities and a devotion to evangelistic service. Tryphena's name means "dainty" and Tryphosa's "delicate", yet they are clearly fellow workers for the Lord. It is safe to assume that these two ladies were both feminine, for in that age people were often named after the outstanding characteristics they represented.

There is no doubt that women in later ages of the Christian church lost their active participation. From a survey of the New Testament and the Apostolic age however, it can be said that this was not the will of God.



As the church lost its spiritual nature and its close connection to the plain teachings of Jesus she no longer moved in the light of truth brought about through the death of Christ. When Christianity tended to forget to maintain constant connections with Christ through the diligent study of his word and prayer, and instead turned to the fanciful occupations of speculation, it began to reflect simply the dominant culture. It lost its peculiar air of freedom and became the the preserver of the old tyranny instead of the herald of the new equality found in Jesus. The age old war of the sexes began again, and women were forced into the molds that the culture around the church upheld.

The decline of freedom for women ran parallel to the ever deepening apostasy. The historian will find as Elsie Culver did that,

what we know concerning women's work in the church in the later centuries after Christ comes not from records of what they were permitted or expected to do...but from some theologians' speculations or some council's decision as to things they are no longer permitted to do. (Gibson, 6: 11)

#### Descriptive Scriptures About the Role of Women and Public Speaking

Looking back on the brief survey of women and Paul the first idea that comes to mind is that not the organization of the church but the teaching of Jesus was of supreme importance to Paul, and very often on his missionary journeys it was the women he met who best understood what he was trying to do. They not only engaged in the same type of work as his companions in the Lord but also supported him financially.

A much closer glance reveals that Paul apparently never burdened himself with the prejudices against women common to his age. Even in his pre-Christian days he was impartial to men and women and dragged off both sexes to prison. (Gal 1:13, 23) Apart from being a left-handed complement Paul was aware that women as well as men were

deeply involved in the spreading of the gospel and this constituted their criminal status.

In Jerusalem however, and other communities where support for the new church came directly from the old society and cultural background, the pattern of active rule was retained by the "elders". Included in this pattern of rule was at times the non-participation of women in the public spread of the gospel to areas still under deep Jewish dominance. (Culver, 2: 55)

The Jewish milieu was patriarchal. Jewish tradition was rich in sayings which depicted that men were born to be leaders. All the way from the circumcision to the burial it is only the male who was a true Israelite in the essential sense of the word. The study of the Torah, the core of Jewish traditional existence was the obligation and honor of the male only.

In contrast the traditional ideal of Jewish womanhood is described in the story of Rabbi Akiba's wife. She sacrificed everything for her husband's studies and managed her affairs in subjection to him. It has already been noted that in the face of this one sided sacrifice Christ made his statements concerning the sanctity of marriage. Compared to the rabbinical statement of the liberal school of Hillel His words were revolutionary in the extreme, for He sought to protect the rights of women in the marriage vow. The rabbinical phrase had been, "if thy wife does not obey thee at a signal and glance, separate from her." (Sirach 25:26) In contrast Christ exclaimed "what God has joined together let no man separate."

Even the Messianic cults on the fringe of the Jewish community were strictly masculine in their structures. The community at Qumran is an example. The sacred meals were for men only. Though women were allowed

to join the community in a religious sense they never participated in any way in most of the rites.

In this setting of Jewish patriarchal leadership the church of Corinth met. For some reason this church did not meet in a house-church as many of the others. It was allowed to come to the local synagogue and to hold meetings there. In such a situation the disorderly conduct of the Corinthian Christians takes on added depth. Paul as a Jew was fully aware of the attitudes of the Jewish elders. The unrestricted manner of the women had brought considerable criticism from the Jews who had been brought up in the rabbinical tradition, and as long as the Christians were accepting synagogue hospitality they should have had the courtesy to abide by the rules. But the fact remains that they did not seem to care, and their conduct was bringing the young church into extreme disrepute.

In 1Cor. 11:3-9 Paul admonishes the women for praying and prophesying in public without veils. He then speaks to them in the contexts that they can understand. He evaluates for them the reasons they should wear veils, the reasons they should have known in order not to anger their Jewish hosts.

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head -- it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself then she should cut off her hair; ...if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

In the above passages Paul has pulled together two creation accounts from Gen 1 and 2, and conflated them into an argument for the veiling of

women when they spoke in the church. In 1Cor 11:8-9, Paul focuses on the story recorded in Gen 2 to reinforce his point.

Going back to Gen 2 the meaning of the word helper (ezer) can become a significant help in trying to understand why Paul used these arguments. The word (ezer) carries with it no connotation of inferiority. It is used also in reference to God as a helper in time of great need. (Ps 33:20; Ex 18:4; Ps 146:5) If this word did mean rank as some have argued the conclusion could be reached that David could demand help from God, and that Adam was subordinate to Eve. It cannot in any way be used as evidence for woman's inferiority or superiority. Rather the main point of Paul's note as to why women should wear veils is hidden in his effort to paint a picture of a relationship that existed and still exists in the world today apart from Christ. In Christ however, a new concept of relationships exists. Paul explains this new concept more fully just a few verses below his original reason why women should wear a veil. Thus in his mind 1Cor 11:11-12 can exist side by side with the injunction he had just made. One depicts the station of woman in the natural world, even to a point before her fall, and the other stresses her new relationship to her fellow human beings including men through the agency of Christ's power in her life.

Nevertheless IN THE LORD woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

In 1 Cor 14:34 Paul invokes Gen 3:13 to show that women have a subordinate position to men due to the consequences of the fall. (He states his authority..."the law".) In the text the natural position of women is defined. Paul vests his authority for that definition in the scriptures, and it should be recognized as a statement of fact. No amount of cultural



delving will obliterate this fact. Neither can Paul be dismissed as a bigot for he is speaking on the authority of the scriptures. The woman became subordinate to the man as a result of the fall. Again and again this idea is repeated. It is a fact stated clearly in letters to Christians in other parts of the Roman world. We read of this fact in Col 3:18 Eph 5:22; Titus 2:5; and Peter also pronounced this fact in 1Pet 3:7. 1Pet 3:7 speaks of the woman as the weaker vessel. The Bible is firm in its pronouncement that as a result of the fall the woman became subordinate to the man. Though this fact of woman's subordination is clearly stated, and is drawn to the results of the fall, no apostle in the New Testament draws from these verses the argument that women are not called into the public ministry, when they walk in the new life in Jesus. For it is in the new life with Jesus that this natural order of events is turned around and in fact obliterated.

In summary then there are two views of men-women relationships that exist side by side. (Stendahl 11:32) 1Cor 14:34 outlines the relationships that must exist in the natural world for those who live under the condemnation of the law. I Cor 11:11-12 and Gal 3:28 . *understand & imply a new relationship in Christ*

A closer examination of Gal 3:28 will show the completeness of this new equality in Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:28 points to the results of the saving work of Christ. "Gal 3:28 points to the order of things in the kingdom of Christ." (Harkness, 8: 56) History is witness to the fact that the early Christians understood this new order within the confines of their church. "This new order of Christ reverses the effects of the fall. The subordination of

women to men was one of the recorded facts of Gen 3:16, but in Christ's death and resurrection we are freed from bondage to the sinful conditions that exist as a result of the fall." (Hewitt, 8: 56)

The breakthrough obtained by the sacrifice of Christ reaches beyond all boundaries imposed by the fall. In the Greek text of Gal 3:28 "arsen kai thēlu" are the technical terms of Gen 1:27 "male and female created He them". The conjunction "and" also interrupts the "neither/nor" series. (Stendahl, 11: 32) With great precision the clear cut triumph of Christ over the results of sin then goes on to infer that the following barriers have been transended:

1) The boundary line between Jews and Gentiles has been abolished. Christ penetrates the false separation that had made the Jews a by-word in the Roman world and again restores the principle that God is the Father of all.

2) Master and slave are no longer separated by the wall of class. In the Lord they are free. The early church gives great evidence of fully understanding this principle. Love of master to slave and slave to master was common. Many of the most noble Roman Christians are buried side by side with their beloved slaves.

3) Finally the primary division that resulted from sin, the subjection of the woman to the man has been overcome. Human beings, created in the image of God are brought back to the basic concept of creation. The woman is the help-mate of the man, but she is not inferior.

It is agreed Paul recognized and upheld these wonderful issues of emancipation that had resulted from the death of Christ and His new order was established in the church in a spiritual sense. Why then did Paul see fit to silence women when they attempted to ask questions in the Corinthian church; why did Peter speak of the woman as the weaker

vessel, and why did this infer that women were not supposed to ask questions, to teach men and to keep silent?

To formulate an answer another look at the context of 1Cor 11:35 must be taken. The context of the text in this case makes it clear that the silence of women is in reference to asking questions not to preaching, or prophesying. Also the silence cannot refer to any other participation on the part of women because 1Cor 11:5 states clearly that women may prophecy in the church as long as they wear veils. In these passages Paul never considers the fact that because women should wear veils, and because sin resulted in a barrier between men and women that they should not prophecy in the church, with all that the duties of a prophetess implied.

Apart from the fact that Paul considered that women may perform certain of these public duties the social conventions of the time did not allow women to move about with much freedom. "A woman needed to exercise care that she did not give the public appearance of being an adulteress or a prostitute." (Hewitt, 9: 49) Nothing was to be done that would bring shame to the cause of Christianity. "To protect herself and her husband from scandal she exercised discretion in appearance and speech. She neither spoke in public nor appeared outside her home unless covered with a veil." (Hewitt, 9: 49)

The early Christians faced many scandals. They were accused of cannibalism because they taught that in the Lord's supper they partook of His bread and drank His wine. Since a large portion of the early Christians were slaves or belonged to the lowest of working classes, meetings were most often held late at night or very early in the morning before going to work. They faced the charges of incest. The terms "love feasts" of the "brothers" and "sisters" were confounded by their enemies to mean

that the most unnatural things were going on in their late night meetings.

The attitude of the early Christians concerning their relations with the world outside were voiced by Paul when he said, (1Cor 9:19-23)

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law -- though not myself being under the law -- that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law -- not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ -- that I might win those under the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.

Paul stated the same spirit of being all things to all men for the sake of the gospel again in Rom 14:19-21.

Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for any one to make others fall by what he eats; it is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble.

The spirit which prompted these two verses are the spirit which prompted Paul to write the admonition against the women in the church in Corinth, and the other general admonitions against women being teachers of men in those areas where Greek or Jewish ideals prevailed. Paul begins by establishing that the Christian does everything in his relation to his fellowmen to make it easier for the gospel to be introduced to the unbeliever. Though Christians are truly free in the Lord, though the relationship of men to women has been changed, though slaves are the brothers of their masters and handmaidens the sisters of their mistresses, in order that the gospel may be preached, when the time demands for these items to be modified or expressed the Christian will adapt to whatever the culture demands. It is the unwillingness of the women at Corinth to modify their freedom for the sake of spreading the gospel that brings the censure of



Paul on the women of Corinth. This was also the principle that guided the apostles to make their statements about women teaching or having authority over men in the other churches. Only when Paul's actions are viewed in the light of the principle established in 1 Cor 9:19-23, and Rom 14:19-21, do they make any kind of sense.

Paul and the early Christians responded to the world about them by modifying their new-found freedoms in order that the gospel might be preached to all men. Our age demands of the Christian, be it man or woman just the opposite. Our age demands that for the sake of the gospel women may express their freedom in Christ. The church instead of being in the eyes of the world the upholder of outmoded traditions, can again revert to her original position of being herald of the new life found in Christ. If the church can establish that the gospel commission is as binding to her as to the earliest church (and in the light of the word of God she can) then she must move to eradicate all cultural expressions within her that are a barrier to effective witnessing. The stumbling blocks must be torn down for the sake of the men and the women who must be reached with the message of Christ. Like the early church the community of Christ in this day must respond to the cultural impact, and the response must depend on what would best hasten the evangelistic outreach. True commitment to this principle will result in true fluency. Though the outward deportment may not be the same in the differing cultural areas, the response to the commitment will be.

1 TIM. 2:11-15

## Chapter 3

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### Summarizing Passages Concerned with the Role of Women

This paper has demonstrated that Paul used both tradition and scripture to show that the Christian women in Corinth and everywhere else cultural problems would be encountered, must not antagonize those who were still living under the letter of the law. Likewise he referred to the order of creation as the connecting link between the role of women in the churches of such areas, and the subordination of women to men, as a result of sin.

The apostle Peter also reiterates this position describing women as the weaker vessels and admonishing them to be submissive to their husbands in agreement with Jewish tradition. Peter however then breaks off from the Jewish roots and goes far beyond them in extolling the ideal that husbands honor their wives for women as well as men are heirs to the kingdom of Christ.

Coupled with Paul's authoritative declaration of freedom for both men and women through the grace of Christ, the difference of the Christian message and the rabbinical Jewish concepts now come into plain view. In Christ there is no more second-class citizenship for women. His death has bought back both men and women to their original position of equality; the position that Adam and Eve had enjoyed before the fall. Eve had been created as a helper fit for Adam's company, but her position or description as helper in no way indicated an inferior or superior status to Adam.

The early church was motivated in its response to the social

and cultural impacts of the day<sup>by</sup> her primary interest of spreading the gospel. In order not to offend the pagan world needlessly, and to give as little cause for prejudice against the church as conscientiously possible, she found it expedient to conform to the outward social customs. Wherever possible however, the church community practiced full equality. In the home churches this equality was most evident, since it was the one place where women and men could worship together with few outside interferences.

In spite of the restrictions imposed in those parts of the empire where Greek and Jewish influences were strong, history shows that women participated in a wide range of private and public services. They spoke in mixed congregations veiled to show that they were respected members of the community, they aided in the teaching of women and in their homes in the teaching of male converts, they acted as secretaries, messengers, bearers of the good news to the community, ministers to the sick and the orphaned, as widows praying for the common good of the church, as deaconesses with its host of public and private duties, they prophesied in public and some, especially ordained to the office of deaconess administered the Lord's Supper to the sick.

Though they did not perform all the functions of a male evangelist or traveling missionary for the sake of the gospel, they knew and the men within the Christian community knew that these services were also theirs by the grace of Christ. In Christ they were free, not only spiritually but socially. History shows that the women of the early church performed more public services in their restrictive age than women in the churches of this permissive society.

### Conclusions

A study has shown that the Biblical and historical description of the status of women in the first to third centuries after Christ's death cannot be used in any way to formulate a normative and authoritative statement about women in the ministry today. A correct description of the social restrictions imposed upon women by a militaristic and masculine pagan society is not the intended standard for the church through all the ages.

The argument that only men can be ministers comes from the idea that Jesus called only men to be his immediate apostles, hence women cannot be included in the command to preach or to minister to the needs of a congregation. It is impossible however, to move with logical certitude from this to the conclusion that only men should be ordained to the ministry. This was not the point of Christ's choice. "He also chose only Jews as his apostles, but few would venture to interpret that Jesus called only Jews to be ministers." (Daly, 3: 156)

The New Testament offers no arguments against women in the ministry. There is therefore no special limitation on the role of women in the church beyond the standard limitations that the culture around the church may impose. The theological limitations imposed on women after the fall are not maintained in the new life offered in Christ.

Neither Jesus nor the early church perpetuated a totally masculine atmosphere in their descriptions of God. Christ used both feminine and masculine imagery to portray the love of God for his erring children. Furthermore as Christians both men and women are called to be the bride and sons of Christ; both are called to develop creative receptivity and initiative and responsibility. (Bode, 1: 41)



Seventh-day Adventists as a people believe most firmly that the gospel commission is binding in this age, in fact if this truth is lost sight of then the reason for the existence of the church will have been repudiated. The early Christians in word and deed also witnessed to others about the life of Christ and looked upon their missionary work as the core of their existence on earth. These Christians chose to respond to the world about them for the sake of the gospel. To be all things to all cultures enabled them to overcome the barriers that humanity in sin has set up against itself, and to spread the word of Christ's love to the people of the whole world. Men, women, and children were all included in the invitation to come to Christ. The restrictions of bondage and mastery were ignored within the community of the church. All worshipped together in harmony.

If the church perpetuates the outmoded standards of the old pagan cultures she will be out of spirit with the words of the apostles and the commission of Christ. Like the early church, Seventh-day Adventists must choose to respond to the demands of culture with the question of what outward deportment will most speedily overcome barriers to the gospel, uppermost in their minds.

In light of the movement for a more equal society that is found in North America today, the answer to the question of women in the gospel ministry and even that of women in other more public areas of service will have to be that they too have been called by Christ and some of them to the pulpit. The ordination of women is tied up with the emancipation of women in society today. To fail to recognize this fact is to fail to understand the implications of Christianity. If the church persists in following a descriptive historical case and calling this description authoritative, she

will be breaking the spirit of the law of Christ to follow the letter of the law of bondage. She will also find herself in the unique position of protecting the evil that society wants to abolish. She will be the tail and not the head.

If the church however chooses to respond in the spirit of the apostles, though that choice means expressing the freedom of the life of Christ outwardly as well as inwardly for the sake of the gospel, she will stand in company with the men and women of faith, in all ages.

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