

## WOMEN IN MINISTRY

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The role of women in ministry is a controversial issue in evangelical churches today. Books on the subject continue to flow from the presses. On one side are the “traditionalists” who firmly believe that women should not be permitted to teach, preach or hold any position of authority in the church. They are strongly opposed to the ordination of women to the Christian ministry. They would restrict women’s involvement in the church to a helping role - teaching women and children, visiting sick and shut-ins, singing in the choir, and serving food. On the other side are the “biblical feminists” who firmly believe that God calls women as well as men and equips them for ministry, and when he does, they should be allowed to teach, preach, and hold positions of authority in the church. They strongly support the ordination of women to the Christian ministry. They believe that women should not be barred from any office or position in the church simply on the basis of their sex.

There are evangelical, Bible-believing Christians on both sides of this issue. The difference between the two is not the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures. Both would agree that the Bible is “the only perfect, supreme, infallible and sufficient standard of faith and practice.”<sup>1</sup> The difference is in the area of hermeneutics - how to interpret the Bible and apply its message to life today. Another difference is the cultural background and life experience that the interpreter brings with him to the task of interpretation. No interpreter approaches the Scripture totally free of presuppositions. When an issue becomes controversial, people tend to divide between those who are for and those who are against. When this happens, it becomes difficult to approach the Bible with an open mind. We are tempted to look for proof texts to support our views rather than being willing to examine our attitudes and views critically in the light of what the Bible teaches. As J. I. Packer argues in *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God*, we must be willing to subject our judgment to the written Word of God.

Before proceeding, I would like to tell you how I came to my present position. First, I was predisposed to have an open mind on the question of women in ministry by the early influence of Rev. Josephine Moore on my life and the later influence of the able and gifted women with whom I served in India. I was present at the 1954 Convention assembly in Woodstock, N.B., when the vote was taken on Mrs. Moore’s ordination. She was the pastor of my home church in Prince William, N.B., at the time. I had become a Christian through her ministry. Our church had asked for her ordination, and I was thrilled when her ordination was passed. When the vote was announced, there was complete silence. Then Dr. William Elgee of Brunswick Street United Baptist Church of Fredericton, N.B., arose and addressed the assembly, “Ladies and gentlemen, do you realize that this is an historic moment in the life of our convention?” I sincerely hope that the step forward taken in 1954 will not be reversed by a step backward in 1987.

Second, I was challenged to study the Scriptures by the accusation of secular feminists that the teaching of the Christian church has been a major factor in the oppression of women. Even though they could muster an impressive array of quotations from Christian leaders down through the centuries to prove their point, I was not willing to acquiesce in the implications of their accusation. One had to admit that the teaching of many Christian leaders had contributed to the oppression of women, but did their teaching represent true Christianity or a Christianity in

cultural captivity? I had always believed that Jesus Christ had done more to liberate women than anyone else. My study of the Scriptures confirmed my intuition that biblical faith upholds the dignity, personhood, and freedom of women.

Third, as I became sensitized to the issues involved and to the aspirations of Christian women, I became more and more uneasy with the statements of some evangelical scholars. For example, “The whole Scripture witnesses with one accord that to man is confided the heavy task of ruling, to woman the beautiful task of serving.”<sup>3</sup> Or “The idea of women’s subjection is not only ingrained in the conviction of the mass of mankind..., but also appears to be inherent in the divine constitution of the human race.”<sup>4</sup> Or “It was the woman who was deceived by Satan and who disobeyed God. Since she was so easily deceived, she should not be trusted as a teacher.”<sup>5</sup> These statements did not ring true to the Christian gospel. They sounded foreign to the spirit of Christ and to the basic principles of God’s Word.

In speaking to me about women in ministry, a number of people have confessed, “I would like to be in favour of women in ministry, both women deacons and women pastors. My heart wants to believe that it is right, but as an evangelical Christian I feel that I must submit to what the Bible teaches.” What I hope to do in this article is to show that faithfulness to the written Word of God does not force us to treat women as second class members of the body of Christ, banned by birth from certain roles within the church. On the contrary, I hope to show that nothing in Scripture bars women from any area of ministry. In fact, the Word of God teaches us to accept women as full and equal partners in the mission of Christ.

### **Seven Basic Principles Revealed in God’s Word**

There are seven basic principles revealed in God’s Word that apply to the place and role of women in society and in the church. These principles must be kept in mind in interpreting individual passages. Our interpretation of particular passages should not contradict these broad principles.

**1. As human beings, women are created in the image of God.** Although some writers have denied this, Genesis 1:27 states that both men and women are created in the image of God. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”<sup>6</sup> Being created in the image of God has to do with our humanness and our personhood, not our sexuality. The image of God in us is evident in our rationality - our ability to think, to communicate and to make decisions, and in our “relationality” - our ability to enter into deep personal fellowship with God and our fellow human beings. Both men and women share equally in these endowments.

**2. As human beings, women share equally with men in the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28.** God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” This verse provides the biblical basis for all science and for man’s responsibility to care for his environment. We are stewards of the good earth and its resources. Both men and women share in this stewardship. The cultural mandate was given to “them,” that is, to both men and women.

**3. As females, women are equal end complementary partners with men in marriage.** This is the teaching of Genesis 2:18-25. In verse 18, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for Man.” The Hebrew word translated “helper” in this verse has no implications of inferiority or a subordinate position. In 16 of the 21 verses in which the word is used in the Old Testament, it refers to a superordinate helper and in no case does it refer to a subordinate. In most cases, it is used of God as being a helper to man or of the king as being a helper to his people.

God showed Adam that there was no companion corresponding to himself among the animals. There was no one with whom he could share life as an equal partner. So God took a rib and created Eve, and brought her to Adam. When Adam saw Eve, he was ecstatic and exclaimed, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’, for she was taken out of man.” (Genesis 2:23). Woman was a suitable companion and partner for man, and “for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24).

**4. As fallen creatures, women share with men in the consequences of sin.** We do not live in a perfect world. In this fallen world, things are not as God intended them to be. Everything including relations between men and women has been affected by the fall. The curse of Genesis 3:16, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you,” is the result of sin having entered human relations. The result of the fall is “the battle of the sexes” and the first casualty is the open, equal partnership of Genesis 2.

It is popular in some circles to blame the fall on Eve, just as Adam did in the Garden. (Genesis 3:12). But the Bible gives a different picture, stating that sin entered the world through Adam. (Romans 5:12-19). Eve was deceived by Satan, and so fell into sin, but Adam was not deceived. (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam sinned in wilful rebellion against God. He knew what he was doing, and thus his guilt would seem to be greater.<sup>7</sup>

**5. As redeemed persons, Christian women are part of God’s new creation in Christ.** “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17). In the new creation, Christian men and women are being renewed in the image of their Creator. (Colossians 3:10). The image of God in us, which was marred by the fall, is being restored by the new birth and spiritual growth. This restoration makes possible a new order of human relations in which the curse is overcome. In other words, the effects of sin on human relations should be reversed in the Christian community.

However, Christians live in tension. We are part of the new creation yet at the same time we live in a world dominated by the old order of things. As Christians, we realize that in Christ, there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28). Yet we live in a world that does not know the Christ who overcomes the barriers that divide people. This means that at times we may have to settle for less than God’s ideal, but it is a matter for concern when the church lags behind secular society in allowing women to exercise the gifts God has given them.

**6. As disciples of Christ, women are called to be ministers for Christ.** The great commission of Matthew 28:18-20 was given to the whole church, not just to the men of the church. In fact it

has been the evident blessing of God upon the ministries of women missionaries that has caused many people to change their views on women in ministry.

In 1894, Gordon College's first president, Dr. A. J. Gordon, wrote an article for the *Missionary Review of the World* on "The Ministry of Women." In Dr. Gordon's own words, the occasion for writing the article was this: "At a recent summer convention a young lady missionary had been appointed to give an account of her work at one of the public sessions. The scruples of certain of the delegates against a woman's addressing a mixed assembly were found to be so strong, however, that the lady was withdrawn from the programme, and further public participation in, the conference confined to its male constituency."<sup>8</sup> His purpose in writing was to justify and vindicate the propriety and authority for the ministry of women by a critical examination of the relevant Scriptures.

After discussing these passages, Dr. Gordon closes with this significant statement "How slow are we to understand what is written! Simon Peter, who on the Day of Pentecost had rehearsed the great prophecy of the new dispensation, and announced that its fulfilment had begun, was yet so holden of tradition that it took a special vision of the sheet descending from heaven to convince him that in the body of Christ 'there can be neither Jew nor Gentile.' And it has required another vision of a multitude of missionary women, let down by the Holy Spirit among the heathen and publishing the Gospel to every tribe and kindred and people, to convince us that in that same body 'there can be no male nor female.'"<sup>9</sup> And even this vision has not been enough to convince some that women are called to be ministers for Christ.

**7. As members of Christ, women receive the Holy Spirit and from the Holy Spirit gifts for ministry.** We are living in the Age of the Spirit, which was inaugurated by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Apostle Peter cited Joel 2:28-32 to explain what was happening. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." (Acts 2:17-18). The Holy Spirit is given to all believers, both men and women, and all are gifted for ministry.

Dr. A. J. Gordon calls the prophecy of Joel "the Magna Carta of the Christian Church." In Canada, no law is allowed to stand which conflicts with the Charter of Rights. In the same way, we should not expect any additional instruction given in the New Testament to deny the equal status given to women by God in the Age of the Spirit.

The Apostle Paul in his discussion of spiritual gifts in Corinthians 12 states that "we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we are all given the one Spirit" and from the Spirit we all receive gifts for ministry that the body of Christ may be built up. The Holy Spirit gives gifts "to each one, just as he determines ... for the common good." It is my conviction that when the church recognizes that a woman has been called by God and gifted by the Holy Spirit for pastoral ministry, then her call should be confirmed by ordination.

## **The Example of the Lord Jesus Christ**

Jesus lived and ministered in Jewish society as it was in the first century. The social standing of women in that society was not very high.<sup>10</sup> In the light of that fact Jesus' behaviour in regard to women was indeed revolutionary. He always treated women as persons, as human beings. He never made jokes about women or spoke condescendingly to them. He always took women seriously; he did not have a "male ego" to defend by putting women down. In his teaching on divorce, he maintained that women had rights as well as men. He condemned the Pharisees for allowing men to divorce their wives without an adequate reason (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9).

According to Luke 8:1-3, several women travelled with Jesus and his disciples, and helped to support the group out of their own means, Presumably these women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many others, were being taught by Jesus and prepared for ministry like the men disciples. In the incident recorded in Luke 10:38-42, Jesus commended Mary for wanting to learn what he was teaching even if it meant neglecting her traditional womanly role. Jewish tradition stated that women should not be allowed to study the law, yet Mary had assumed the position of a disciple sitting at Jesus' feet. Jesus gently reprimanded Martha for being overly concerned with household chores, stating, "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her."

Martha learned her lesson well because in John 11:17- 27, it was she who went out to meet Jesus, and it was with her that Jesus had a deep theological discussion about the resurrection. It was to Martha, a woman, that Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe?" In reply Martha made a confession as great as Peter's, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Jesus broke both religious and cultural traditions by entering into a spiritual conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. To her he clearly revealed himself as the Messiah. (John 4:25, 26). When they returned, his disciples were surprised to find him talking with a woman, but to Jesus she was a person, not just a woman or a Samaritan. It is in connection with this incident that Jesus was first called the Saviour of the world, because the Samaritans realized that he was the Saviour of Samaritans as well as Jews, of women as well as men. (John 4:42).

All four Gospel writers record that Jesus' women disciples did not desert him in the hour of his death. They were there at the cross. They were also the first witnesses to the resurrection. Jesus appeared to them before he appeared to the men disciples; he appeared to a group of them as they ran to tell his disciples (Matthew 28:8-10) and to Mary Magdalene alone as she lingered at the tomb. (John 20:10-18). He commissioned them to tell his brothers what had happened. The acts of Jesus were always purposeful; his appearance to the women first could be his way of demonstrating that women are meant to be equal partners with men in the mission of Christ and in the ministry of the Church.

Some have objected to these points arguing that if Jesus was really egalitarian, why didn't he choose some women to be apostles? One could as well ask, why didn't he choose some Gentiles to be apostles? If the fact that the twelve apostles were all men means that women today should not be pastors, the fact that they were all Jews could as well mean that Gentiles today should not

be pastors. Given the social situation and the historical plan of God, Jesus chose all men to be apostles. However, this fact does not negate his acceptance of women as equal partners in his mission.

### **The Practice of the Early Church**

Women were among the disciples who waited in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). They also received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). To explain the phenomena of Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 which states that in the last days God will pour out his Spirit on his servants, both men and women, and both will have a prophetic ministry. We are living in the last days, a period of time which began with the first coming of Christ and will continue until he returns.

The Apostle Paul had many women associates, who served shoulder to shoulder with him in the proclamation of the gospel. He pays high tribute to them and their contribution to the Christian mission. He entrusted Phoebe, a woman deacon of the church at Cenchrea (the Greek word is “diakonos”), with the task of delivering his letter to the Romans. He tells the Romans that she has been a great help to many people, including himself. (Romans 16:1,2).

Paul commends Priscilla and Aquila, who are his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” All the churches of the Gentiles are grateful for their ministry. (Romans 16.3). It was this husband and wife team who had explained “the way of God more adequately” to the learned Apollos. (Acts 18:18 28). Note that Paul always names Priscilla first, suggesting that she was the leading member of the team.

Of the twenty-six Christians in Rome to whom Paul sends personal greetings eight are women. Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis are commended for their hard work in the Lord. It is possible that the second apostle named in verse 7 is a woman, Junia. In Philippians 4:2,3, Paul writes about two women, Euodias and Syntyche, who had “contended at his side in the cause of the gospel” along with the rest of his fellow-workers.

Some writers have presented the Apostle Paul as a male chauvinist, or even a misogynist. It is quite clear that Paul’s practice does not support this charge. The evidence shows that he accepted at least some women as fellow workers and partners in the Christian ministry. The interpretation of passages like I Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 must take into account Paul’s practice.

### **The Teaching of the Apostle Paul**

Roberta Hestenes in an article in *Christianity Today* describes two major contrasting paradigms held by evangelical Christians in regard to women.<sup>11</sup> A paradigm is a way of looking at reality, a model for understanding the relevant data. The traditional paradigm affirms the legitimacy and importance of hierarchy in the relationship between men and women. The partnership paradigm affirms that men and women are equal partners in marriage, in the church, and in society. Those who hold the traditional paradigm see the teaching of the Apostle Paul as determinative for their position. However, recent exegetical studies of the relevant texts indicate that Paul was much more affirming of women than has been traditionally thought.

Eugene H. Peterson in his book on Galatians points out, “Receive is a freedom word. Take is not. To receive is to accept what the divine largess provides for us. To take is to plunder whatever is not nailed down. To receive is to do what children do in the family. To take is to do what the pirates do on the high seas.”<sup>12</sup> Galatians 4:5 states that Christian believers, both men and women, have received “the full rights of sons.” These rights are not something we must demand; they have already been given to us by God in Christ.

Peterson maintains that “freedom is what we receive from God, who himself is free and who wills us to be free.”<sup>13</sup> In Galatians 3:26 - 4:7, four freedoms that we Christians have received are highlighted. **First, the freedom of relationship:** “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” (3:26). Because of our relationship to the Son of God, all Christian believers become sons of God and receive the full rights of sonship. In the Old Testament usually only sons had these rights, only sons could inherit. In Christ we are all sons and joint-heirs with him.

**Second, the freedom of equality:** “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (3:28). We are no longer rivals, competing with one another, but participants in a common life, brothers and sisters in one family, God’s family. Within the church of Jesus Christ, differences of race, status and sex lose their significance because of our basic, common relationship to Christ. All should be able to find full acceptance and belonging.

**Third, the freedom of worth:** “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” (4:4,5). The gospel counters our feelings of inferiority and inadequacy with the miracle of redemption. Redemption describes the process of freeing slaves. When the price of redemption was paid, the slave became a free person. Although in the past he had been treated as an inferior, useful only for running someone else’s errands or doing someone else’s work, he was now free, not just to do something, but to be someone. God sent his son to redeem us, to make us persons of worth, that we, both men and women, “might receive the full rights of sons.”

**Fourth, the freedom of intimacy:** “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’” (4:6). All Christians have been given the freedom of addressing God with unprecedented intimacy, the freedom of children coming to a loving father. It is not the freedom of casual familiarity. We are still aware of the awesome majesty and glory of God. But it is the freedom to express ourselves fearlessly and honestly in God’s presence.

Since God has given to all Christians, both men and women, the freedom of relationship as his sons, the freedom of equality in which all differences are overcome, the freedom of worth in which each one is accepted as a person of great value, and the freedom of intimacy in which each one can speak to God directly and without fear, should not the church work out the implications of these freedoms in its life and ministry? Should we not practice the priesthood of all believers? Should we not accept women as full and equal partners in the mission of Christ?

## The “Hard Passages”

In seeking to understand Paul’s teaching in I Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15, one must keep in mind the historical and sociological background against which these passages were written. William Barclay writes, “The place of women in Greek religion was low. The temple of Aphrodite in Corinth had a thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes and who every evening plied their trade on the city streets. The temple of Diana in Ephesus had its hundreds of prostitutes, whose function was the same. The respectable Greek woman led a very confined life. She lived in her own quarters into which no one but her husband came. She did not even appear at meals. She never at any time appeared on the street alone; she never went to any public assembly, still less did she ever speak or take any active part in such an assembly.”<sup>14</sup>

It is no coincidence that the passages under consideration are from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and his letter to Timothy, who was serving in Ephesus at the time. It is not surprising that special precautions needed to be taken in Corinth and Ephesus to prevent the new freedom of women in Christ from being misunderstood and, as a result, becoming a hindrance to the acceptance of the Christian message. Titus 2:1-15 demonstrates that Paul was concerned that nothing in the behaviour of Christians give non-Christians an opportunity to malign the gospel. It is for this reason that I believe if Paul were writing to Atlantic Baptists today, he would say, “Encourage women to participate fully in the life of the church so that non-Christians can see that in Christ all persons are equal and free to exercise their gifts. In doing this you will make the gospel attractive and credible.”

Another aspect of the background is that both the Corinthian church and the Ephesian church were experiencing problems. The church in Corinth was suffering from internal divisions and an overemphasis on certain spiritual gifts. The church in Ephesus was troubled by the teaching of false doctrines and the advocating of ascetic practices. In both situations Paul was also concerned about propriety and order in public worship. We must remember that he was not writing a handbook on church polity and practice. He was writing letters dealing with actual problems and specific situations. Our limited knowledge about these problems and situations should make us cautious in our interpretation and keep us from being dogmatic in our conclusions. In a sense it is like having the answers without knowing the questions.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, the question seems to be whether women should have their heads covered when they pray or prophesy in public worship. It is assumed that they will be leading in worship. Traditionalists see in verse 3, “the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God,” support for their view of hierarchy. However, there are at least two problems with this viewpoint. First, it claims too much. In the biblical understanding of the Trinity, Christ is a full and equal partner in creation and redemption. The Son is not subordinate in being to the Father. His obedience to the Father grows out of perfect love and complete unity of purpose. Second, serious question has been raised as to whether the Greek word *kephale* translated “head” in this verse carries the connotation of authority, giving the meaning “ruler” or “a person of superior rank.” Many scholars maintain that it means “source” as in the English usage where the source of a river can be called its “head”. This understanding of the word certainly makes good sense in this verse.

1 Corinthians 14:33-35 has often been interpreted as forbidding women to speak in the public worship services of the church. This understanding, however, would put this passage in direct contradiction with 11:5, where it is assumed that women will pray and prophesy in public. This makes a different interpretation necessary. Several have been proposed, but the most probable is that what Paul is forbidding is the kind of disruptive talking and questioning which would interfere with the thoughtful worship of others. Questions are to be asked at home, and not during the service. This interpretation fits well with Paul's concern in verse 33 about order and peacefulness in worship.

1 Timothy 2:9-15 is generally recognised as being the key passage quoted in support of the traditionalist position. The claim that the meaning of this passage is perfectly plain and admits of no other interpretation than the barring of women from preaching and the pastoral ministry does not stand up under examination. Roger Nicole has pointed out "eight very puzzling features" in this passage that should cause any interpreter to be cautious and nondogmatic.<sup>16</sup> Numerous evangelical scholars have proposed other possible interpretations that are both reasonable and biblically sound.<sup>17</sup>

My own understanding of this difficult passage is tentative, but certain points seem fairly clear. In verse 11, women are commanded to learn "in quietness and full submission." Paul wanted women in Ephesus to know and understand the truth. In learning, they were to adopt the teachable attitude required of all students in the rabbinic schools. In advocating the education of women, Paul was revolutionary for his time. The purpose of learning is so that after being instructed one may be able to teach others. In verse 12, Paul does not command women not to teach. The verb "learn" in verse 11 is an imperative; the verb "permit" in verse 12 is a present active indicative. It could be translated, "I am not presently allowing a woman to teach." It seems that Paul wanted to restrain women from teaching until they themselves were well instructed. The Greek word translated "have authority" occurs only here in the New Testament and is a fairly rare word outside the New Testament. As a result, there is some question about its exact meaning, but it seems to signify a negative type of leadership, a "domineering" which overpowers others. The word translated "silent" in verse 12 is the same word translated "quietness" in verse 11, 1 Thessalonians 4:11, and 1 Peter 3:4. What Paul is advocating is a quiet, teachable spirit.

I believe that it would be legitimate to paraphrase these two verses as follows: "Women should learn in quietness, submitting to sound teaching. Until they have been adequately instructed in the faith, they should not teach. They should not seek to dominate men in the church, but rather to have a quiet, teachable spirit. They should not teach their own ideas or act on their own authority. They should be under the authority of the Word of God and subject to the discipline of the church lest they fall into the teaching of false doctrine."

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The Baptist theologian, A. H. Strong, in his *Systematic Theology* wrote, "Ordination is the setting apart of a person divinely called to a work of special ministration in the church. It does not involve the communication of power - it is simply a recognition of powers previously conferred by God, and a consequent formal authorization, on the part of the church, to exercise the gift already bestowed."<sup>18</sup> The Baptist professor of church administration, G. S. Dobbins, in

his *Churchbook*, wrote,

Ordination, in the New Testament view, confers no status, no ecclesiastical power, no special rights of office not possessed by any other devout and trusted member of a church by its authorization. Ordination is simply recognition and confirmation by a church of its member's evident call of God to the gospel ministry. It further represents the judgment of competent brethren of the candidate's fitness to undertake the duties of the Christian ministry and a commendation of him to the sisterhood of churches.<sup>19</sup>

When I consider these quotations, I wonder if part of the concern about the ordination of women does not come from a sacramental view of ordination which is very different from the traditional Baptist view. According to the sacramental view, the act of ordination confers grace upon the candidate and gives him the power and authority to perform certain functions within the church which are reserved only for the ordained. According to the traditional Baptist view, the act of ordination is the recognition of gifts for ministry already bestowed by God and the setting apart through prayer of the candidate for ministry within a fellowship of churches. It does not confer power or authority.

I also wonder if another element in the growing concern in our churches about the ordination of women does not stem from an overreaction to the women's liberation movement. All evangelical Christians object to certain aspects of the agenda of some secular feminists, such as the advocacy of lesbianism as an alternate lifestyle and of abortion on demand, and the downplaying of the role of women as mothers and homemakers. Could it be that some among us think that to be in favour of women in ministry somehow implicates us as being in favour of the total agenda of the secular feminists? I hope not. As Christians, we are called to act in obedience to God and his Word, and not in reaction to a secular movement.

I recognize that the ordination of women is a controversial issue; I hope it does not become a divisive one. There are sincere people on both sides, who honestly desire to do the will of God in obedience to his Word. I am convinced that nothing in Scripture bars women from acceptance as full and equal partners in the ministry of the church. As we all seek to exercise our gifts in God's service, let us remember that the greatest gift is love.

#### FOOTNOTES

1 Article One of the *1905 Basis of Union of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches*.

2 For instance consider *Our Struggle to Serve: The Stories of 15 Evangelical Women*, edited by Virginia Hearn, Word Books, 1979

3 I have been unable to trace the source of this quotation.

4 Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale Press, 1957, p. 76.

5 Ralph Earle, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, Zondervan, 1978, p. 362.

6 All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

7 Compare the argument of James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 222-223,

8 Adoniram Judson Gordon, "The Ministry of Women," *Missionary Review of the World*, 1894, vol. 7, No. 12.

9 Ibid

10. For a description of the position of women in Jewish society, see William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Peter and Philemon*, The Saint Andrew Press, 1956, pp.76-77.

11 Roberta Hestenes, "Women in Leadership: Finding Ways to Serve the Church," *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1986, pp.44 - 46.

12 Eugene E. Peterson, *Traveling Light: Reflections on the Free Life*, Inter Varsity Press, 1982, p. 109.

13 Ibid.

14 Barclay, p. 77.

15 For instance, see Berkeley & Alvira Mickelsen, "What Does *Kephale* Mean in the New Testament?" in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, Inter Varsity Press, 1986, p. 97, and "Response" by Philip Burton Payne, pp. 118-132. See also David Neff, "The Battle of the Lexicons", *Christianity Today*, January 16, 1987, pp. 44 - 46.

16 Roger Nicole, "Biblical Authority and Feminist Aspirations," in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, Inter Varsity Press, 1986, pp. 47-48.

17 For a discussion of these, see David M. Schuler, "I Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, pp. 193- 219, or Aida Besancon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, pp. 71-95, or Mary J. Evans, *Woman in the Bible*, InterVarsity Press, 1982, pp. 100-108.

18 A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, The Judson Press, 1907, p. 918.

19 Gaines S. Dobbins, *The Churchbook*, Broadman Press, 1951, p. 51.

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