

1-1-1974

# The Leadership Role of the Laywoman in the Local Church

Eulene Dee Whitman

---

## Recommended Citation

Whitman, Eulene Dee, "The Leadership Role of the Laywoman in the Local Church" (1974). *Western Evangelical Seminary Theses*. 214.  
[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/wes\\_theses/214](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/wes_theses/214)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Western Evangelical Seminary at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Western Evangelical Seminary Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF THE LAYWOMAN  
IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

---

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
Western Evangelical Seminary

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Religious Education

---

by  
Eulene Dee Witham  
May 1974

APPROVED BY

Major Professor: Ernest H. Dillon

Cooperative Reader: Wayne McLean

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM . . . . .	1
LIMITATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATION . . . . .	1
METHOD OF PROCEDURE. . . . .	3
PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION . . . . .	4
2. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING. . . . .	5
THE TEACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. . . . .	5
General Teaching . . . . .	5
The Creation Account . . . . .	6
The Historical Narrative . . . . .	9
Jewish Culture . . . . .	12
Jewish Worship . . . . .	13
THE TEACHING OF JESUS. . . . .	14
Attitude to Women. . . . .	14
Jesus' Ministry to Women . . . . .	15
Ministry of Women to Jesus . . . . .	17
THE TEACHING OF PAUL . . . . .	19
Paul as a Man. . . . .	19
The Ideal Woman. . . . .	21
Cultural Influences. . . . .	22
Paul's Principle of Order in the Church. . . . .	24
Three Major Passages . . . . .	27
SUMMARY. . . . .	32

Chapter	Page
3. WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH . . . . .	34
THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES. . . . .	34
At Pentecost . . . . .	35
Activities of Women. . . . .	36
Women Paul Mentions. . . . .	41
THE MIDDLE PERIOD. . . . .	46
The Monastic Movement. . . . .	47
The Reformation. . . . .	48
Outstanding Women. . . . .	50
THE MODERN ERA IN AMERICA. . . . .	57
Changes in Society . . . . .	57
The Move for Ordination. . . . .	58
Denominational and Interdenominational Movements . . . .	59
The Move for Lay Involvement . . . . .	60
Unanswered Questions . . . . .	61
Henrietta Mears. . . . .	62
SUMMARY. . . . .	63
4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY. . . . .	67
AVAILABILITY OF THE EVIDENCE . . . . .	67
INTERPRETATION OF THE EVIDENCE . . . . .	68
INSIGHTS FROM HISTORY. . . . .	71
APPLICATION OF THE EVIDENCE. . . . .	72
IMPACT OF THE EVIDENCE . . . . .	72
SUMMARY. . . . .	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	74

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The 1970's have seen the emergence of the modern woman in countless areas of society. This is particularly noticeable in positions of leadership in the business world. The contemporary woman has a far greater opportunity for involvement in the church today than at any time in history. Within the church these changes have brought questions concerning the leadership role of the laywoman to the forefront.

In the past there have been individual women who have taken leadership roles in the church. Generally, however, women have not. Because there have been qualifications placed on her activities in the past by scripture and culture it is necessary to re-evaluate the teaching of scripture and the evidence of history to answer these questions. There are individuals and groups within the church which tend to exclude women from leadership roles. There are other individuals and groups who see no relevance in applying the biblical teaching on the subject to today's circumstances. This paper presents the position that there is a role of leadership for laywomen in the local church and that there are principles which can be formulated from the Bible and historical evidence that can be applied in determining this role.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The author has chosen to limit the investigation to the role of

leadership because this is the area in which the questions concerning the involvement of women arise. Leadership is basically leading other people and having the authority to carry out assigned tasks and plans through them. There are countless ways in which the Christian woman can be involved in the work of the church, but it is in the area of leadership that her activities are questioned. Leadership is also the area in which so many young Christian women are being trained in higher education and in the business and professional worlds. These women are also eager to use this training in the church.

The investigation deals with the laywoman, excluding those problems involving women as a part of the clergy. It is true that there is a great deal of common consideration between the two problems, but many of the problems and questions involved in the controversy over women in the clergy do not apply to the question of women taking a leadership role in the local church. The majority of the women in the church are laywomen, and many of these have a desire to serve God in their church, using their leadership ability.

Although there are opportunities for women to work in the church on all levels, it is in the local church that her talents are most needed. The local church is the basic part of the body of the church. It is here, regardless of what the official policy of a given denomination may be, that women are encouraged or discouraged in their efforts to use their abilities and are accepted or rejected as leaders in the church. For these reasons the paper deals with leadership in the local church.

There is a great deal of scripture that could be used to formulate a positive theology of womanhood. The writer does not attempt to

formulate such a theology. Those scriptures which can be applied to the topic of leadership involving women are presented, particularly in forming a picture of the "ideal woman" of the Bible which all Christian women should emulate.

The culture of an area or society always exerts a major influence on the people and determines many of their customs. However, only those cultural aspects that directly influence the leadership role of women are discussed in this paper. The other cultural aspects would add to the picture of women in general, but due to the limitations of the topic of the paper, they are not discussed.

#### METHOD OF PROCEDURE

To find a solution to the problem of determining the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church a close look is taken at several areas. The most important of these is the teaching of the Bible. Scripture portions from the creation account of the Old Testament to the letters of Paul in the New Testament are used by those who advocate the leadership of women in the local church and by those who would limit it. For this reason a thorough study of these scriptures is made. These are covered in chapter two.

Chapter three contains a survey of the history of women in the church as it relates to leadership. Careful attention is given to their activities in the New Testament church as one of the guiding principles in determining the woman's role in leadership. The leadership activities of women in the church from the New Testament times through the present are also studied.

A summary and presentation of the conclusions arrived at is



presented in chapter four. This includes the interpretation, application, and impact of the evidence.

#### PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION

In the author's brief experience in the church she has encountered two types of situations that have given rise to this paper. There are individuals and groups who are fully persuaded that an accurate interpretation of the biblical teaching on the role of women in the church precludes any leadership on the part of women, particularly if it is leadership of men. There are other individuals and groups who are honestly searching for answers to the question of the interpretation of scripture in relation to the role of women in the church. There are women now attending Western Evangelical Seminary who are facing these same questions as they prepare for their careers in the church. Other students, both men and women, will be asked about the role of women in the church in conjunction with their ministries. The antipathetic need a clear, logical and accurate rebuttal, the questioners need an answer, and the questioned need a resource. It is the purpose of this paper to meet these needs.

## Chapter 2

### THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

#### THE TEACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

As the church considers the leadership role of the laywoman it becomes immediately evident that many of the prevailing ideas about a woman's role in the church and society are a part of our cultural heritage. One of the oldest influences on this cultural heritage is the Old Testament and with it the teachings of Judaism and the Jewish culture.

#### General Teaching

The Old Testament teachings on women are a curious mixture of superlatives and condemnations. This can only be because of the fact that every characteristic, both good and bad, of men and women are portrayed there. In Proverbs, for example, we see a harlot who seeks to deceive innocent young men<sup>1</sup> and also an excellent wife who brings pleasure and joy to her husband and he trusts in her.<sup>2</sup> The wives of the patriarchs, Deborah, Esther and Hannah are examples of commendable women, but we can also see examples of dispicable women in Delilah, Jezebel, Athaliah and Haman's wife. To further the paradox, there are some Bible women, such as Miriam, Sarah and Rachel, in whom we see both

---

<sup>1</sup>Proverbs 9:13-18. All scripture references in this paper will be taken from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>2</sup>Proverbs 31:10-31.

good and bad characteristics. It is understandably difficult to pinpoint specific principles concerning women from the mention of them in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament does not say a great deal about women that can be applied to the question of the leadership role of laywomen in the local church. For this reason discussion in this section will be concerned with the account of the creation and fall, examples of the leadership of women from the historical narrative, and general statements regarding Judaism and Jewish culture of the Old Testament period as it relates to the leadership role of laywomen in the local church.

### The Creation Account

The creation account of the Old Testament is often used to establish principles concerning women. No Bible student would deny that God created both men and women. From this point, though, many divergent interpretations are made. There are several basic facts that can be drawn out of the creation account. The first of these comes from the brief account in Genesis 1:27,28. Here we see that both male and female were created in God's image. Georgia Harkness, in her book, Women in Church and Society, says:

The image of God means that God has made Man with qualities akin to his own, and thus has conferred upon all persons, both male and female, a dignity and worth beyond anything else in the created world.<sup>3</sup>

This precludes any spiritual inferiority of women. We also see, from the fact that woman was included in the charge to "Be fruitful and

---

<sup>3</sup>Georgia Harkness, Women in Church and Society (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 148.

multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth,"<sup>4</sup> that as far as the importance in the rule of the earth was concerned, there was a dual responsibility between the male and the female.

A second fact is that a woman is to be submissive to her husband. It is not until after the fall that this concept of a wife's submission becomes a part of the marriage relationship between Adam and the woman. All three parties in the sin are punished and a part of the woman's punishment is that her husband would rule over her.<sup>5</sup> It is from this incident that much of the biblical teaching concerning the submission of women comes, particularly that of Paul in I Corinthians 14:34 and Titus 2:5. It is also at this point that an error in interpretation and application often occurs. The woman is to be in subjection to her own husband. In his book, Woman in the Church, Russell Prohl says:

. . . it is not true, as many believe, that the Bible subordinates woman as a sex to man as a sex. There is no law of creation which makes women in general subordinate to men in general. There is however, a law which makes the husband the head of the wife, or as it is expressed in Titus 2:5, there is a law that demands that wives should be submissive to their own husbands.<sup>6</sup>

A third fact that can be seen from the creation account is that men and women have a sexual equality. As it was quoted earlier in the statement by Russell Prohl, woman was not created as an inferior sex.

---

<sup>4</sup>Genesis 1:28.

<sup>5</sup>Genesis 3:14-19.

<sup>6</sup>Russell C. Prohl, Woman in the Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), p. 47.

Genesis 2:18 and 20 are sometimes used to support the sexual inferiority of women. Many versions use the words, "help meet," or the word, "helper," in reference to the woman. The conclusion reached by many is that this puts the woman in an inferior position to the man. Prohl again offers valuable insight from his research. He says:

The key words, according to Pieper, are 'help' and 'meet', in the Hebrew ezer and neged. The preposition neged is translated as 'before', 'in the presence of', 'in the sight of'. For example, in Psalms 16:8 we read, 'I have set the Lord always before me.' The noun ezer means 'help' or 'helper'. It is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament, and sixteen times it is used for a super-ordinate, not a subordinate, helper. In no case is the one who helps subordinate unless we consider Genesis 2:18,20 as exceptions. The most common use of ezer is in reference to Jehovah as a help. In Psalms 33:20 we read: 'The Lord, He is our help.' Exodus 18:4, 'For the God of my father was my help.' Psalms 146:5, 'Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help.' If this word ezer, 'help', does indicate a grade or rank, we should conclude from its use elsewhere in the Old Testament that Adam was subordinate to Eve. The truth is that the word itself indicates neither a higher nor a lower grade or rank.<sup>7</sup>

In the margin note to Genesis 2:18-20 in the New American Standard Bible the literal meaning of helper is given as "corresponding to."<sup>8</sup> As Adam saw the pairs of animals there was no one for him to be with that was like him. In creating and providing woman, God met this need.

The fourth fact to be deduced from the creation account is that women have an intellectual equality with men. The fault for the fall, other than to Satan himself, is often given to the woman. I Timothy 2:14 says, "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression." The preceding verse says

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>8</sup>New American Standard Bible (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, Inc., 1971), p. 2.

that a woman should not teach or exercise authority over a man, with verse 14 being the apparent reason. Prohl gives an explanation of this when he says:

Too often it is assumed that I Timothy 2:14 indicates that since Eve was the first to sin, she and all her daughters after her are to be deprived of making independent decisions. What does this verse say? . . . In I Timothy 2:14,15, we are told that in marriage there is a union of two beings, a man and a woman, and that one member should not act independently of the other in the things involving the business of the marriage union. Eve should have consulted Adam, but she didn't . . . .<sup>9</sup>

Eve should have acted as a responsible partner instead of responding as an individual. The fact that all three, Adam, Eve, and the serpent, were punished indicates common guilt, not that Eve as the first to be deceived bore more guilt or was responsible for Adam's deception. Adding to this the facts that she was created in the image of God as Adam and given joint authority and responsibility over the earth with him, we can see that there was an intellectual equality between them from the very beginning.

### The Historical Narrative

For the most part women did not emerge as leaders during the Old Testament times. Some of the reasons for this will be covered during the discussion of Jewish worship and culture. There were, however, outstanding women who were exceptions to this in the historical narrative. These were the four prophetesses, Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Noadiah.<sup>10</sup> Miriam appears first in the historical narrative. We see her in the

---

<sup>9</sup>Prohl, pp. 39-40.

<sup>10</sup>Exodus 15:20, Judges 4:4, II Kings 22:14 and Nehemiah 6:14.

height of her career at the crossing of the Red Sea. After the Egyptians perished in the waters Moses and Miriam led the people in a song of praise and victory. Edith Deen, in her classic on Bible women, All the Women of the Bible, says:

Miriam is the first woman in the Bible whose interest was national and whose mission was patriotic. When she led the women of Israel in that oldest of all national anthems, 'Sing Unto the Lord', four centuries of bondage in Egypt had been lifted. It was a turning point in Israel's religious development and a woman led in its recognition.<sup>11</sup>

It is true that Miriam was leading the women and not the men or a mixed group here, but Miriam held a very unusual position as a prophetess in a culture in which women were considered to be inferior. As a prophetess she was one who was inspired to teach the will of God.<sup>12</sup> She is the first biblical example of this kind of woman. From Micah 6:4, "Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.", we can infer that Miriam was part of a triumvirate of leadership with her brothers. One author says:

Here is a woman who stands on a basis of equality with her two gifted brothers. . . . The particular career to which Miriam felt herself called was that of assisting her brothers in the building of a new nation. She was in a sense a politician. She was a stateswoman.<sup>13</sup>

Miriam gives us the first glimpse of what a woman can do in the area of leadership in the kingdom of God.

---

<sup>11</sup>Edith Deen, All the Women of the Bible (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), p. 57.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>13</sup>Clovis G. Chappell, Feminine Faces (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), pp. 49-50.

The second prophetess is Deborah, another woman of unusual character and vocation. She had a dual career of judge or counselor and military leader. In the face of oppression from Jabin, Deborah took command under the leadership of the Lord and directed Barak in the battle. She prophesied the end of Sisera. She revealed the battle strategy to Barak and he followed her commands. The enemy was so badly defeated that the victory brought peace to Israel for forty years.<sup>14</sup> Deborah has often been called the "Joan of Arc" of Israel and is the only woman of the Bible who attained her political power by the consent of the people of the land.<sup>15</sup>

The third prophetess is Huldah, who served King Josiah. The worship of the Lord had been corrupted by the worship of Baal and Asherah. The high priest found a book of the law in the house of the Lord, which he brought to the king. King Josiah was so affected by the reading of it that he commanded the high priest to inquire of the Lord for him and the people about the meaning of the book. He knew the fathers had not listened to the words of the book and he feared the wrath of God. Apparently the high priests were so corrupt from the influence of idolatry that they could not seek the Lord. Instead, they went to the prophetess, Huldah. She told them the message of the Lord and the result was an abrupt turn about of the nation, led by the king, himself. The idols and priests of Baal and other pagan worship were ousted and the worship of the Lord was restored.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Judges 4-5.

<sup>15</sup>Deen, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup>II Kings 22:1-23:25 and II Chronicles 34.



In Huldah we see another type of woman leader, the devout and righteous person who is used by God in a time of deep spiritual need. It is her spiritual qualities that enable her to be used in such a dramatic way.

Little is said about Noadiah, the fourth prophetess. She was one of a group who tried to prevent Nehemiah from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. She may not be looked on as an example of a good prophetess, but she did attain a position of leadership associated with a prophetess.<sup>17</sup>

#### Jewish Culture

The Old Testament also tells a great deal about Jewish culture. The patriarchal period of Jewish history and its culture has a long range effect on the life of Jewish women. Its prevailing characteristics in relation to the status of women--arranged marriages, subordination of women, and near complete male dominance--lasted throughout the Old Testament period.<sup>18</sup> The woman was in complete subjection to her husband or father. The marriages were arranged by the families involved and the new bride lived with her husband's family. She was protected by many rules and regulations to insure her fidelity to her husband. These provisions for protection were the source of many restrictions placed upon her public activity. Her realm was the home and the children. The care of the home and the children and being a wife to her husband took most of her time and often the time of several slaves or servants. It is

---

<sup>17</sup>Nehemiah 6.

<sup>18</sup>Harkness, p. 43.

important to note that Jewish women did have a higher status than women of the culture surrounding them. They were given the dignity they deserved and did to a small degree take part in some public affairs.<sup>19</sup> These customs concerning Jewish women become more important to us as we see their influence in New Testament times and their influence upon the thinking of Paul and the leaders of the early church.

### Jewish Worship

If a Jewish woman did have any public life it was generally in connection with religious worship. Her participation was limited to secondary functions, however. She took part in festive occasions and could offer sacrifices. She was not required to make the annual pilgrimages which would require absence from the home, but many women accompanied their husbands. The attendance of women and children was required at the seventh year assembly. Women could, if their husband or father did not intervene, make religious vows such as the Nazarite vow. There were no women priests.<sup>20</sup>

During the early temple days women took their places with the men, but gradually they were seated separately in the gallery. When their presence continued to be a distraction a screen was placed before them. This remains in many Orthodox synagogues. A quorum of ten was required for public worship. In earlier times a woman could be counted in this number but she gradually lost this privilege.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Role of Women in the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup>Doris Lankin, "Woman," Encyclopedia Judaica XVI (New York: MacMillan Co., 1971), pp. 623-629.

<sup>21</sup>Leo Trepp, Eternal Faith, Eternal People (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 229.

The practices regarding the women in Jewish worship had developed since earliest times. They were deeply ingrained when the New Testament church came into being. To a great degree these restrictions were in reaction to the pagan cults and religions that surrounded them and often led them astray. This must be kept in perspective when considering the precedent followed by the New Testament church.<sup>22</sup>

### THE TEACHING OF JESUS

As a prelude to studying the teachings of Jesus relative to women in the church, consideration must be given to the significance of his physical advent. God in His omnipotence chose to reveal His Son through the Virgin Birth. He chose Mary to be the one to bear the infant Jesus. No greater honor could have been bestowed on an individual woman or on women in general. In choosing a woman to bear His Son, God also chose a woman to provide the early training and upbringing that is so important to the growth and development of human beings. It would have been within the realm of divine power to reveal the Savior in any number of ways, but He chose to use a woman, indicating the confidence He placed in women.

#### Attitude to Women

As the Savior of all men, both male and female, Jesus began a major revolution in the religious life of women. In His redemptive plan man and woman were His children. To the woman of Jesus' time this must have opened an entirely new concept of God and His love for her. It is

---

<sup>22</sup>Margaret Sittler Ermarth, Adam's Fractured Rib (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 14.

not surprising that many women followed Him and came to hear Him teach.

Dr. Conrad Bergendorf says:

Christ nowhere distinguishes between men and women as children of God and objects of his redemptive ministry. . . .one finds nowhere that Jesus ranks man and woman. He treats each as an individual per se. . . . By the regard he shows to women, by the treatment he gives them in word and act, by the purity and universality of his love and ministry, Jesus Christ erased all lines of superiority or inferiority between men and women and placed all on the same level of grace.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus made no direct reference to the question of the place of women in the church or among His followers. We do know that there were women among the group that followed Him and that He had personal interaction with them.<sup>24</sup> This interaction was both public and private, which, considering the culture of the time, was very unusual. Women were definitely considered inferior to men. To have even spoken publicly with a woman was remarkable and in definite contrast to the custom of the day.<sup>25</sup> Jesus also taught women, something that the rabbis did not do. If the average woman received any education at all it was in the bounds of the home.<sup>26</sup> Georgia Harkness summarizes Jesus' attitude toward women as a sex saying:

Jesus talked freely with women; he healed women; he protected the marriage bonds of women; he held individual women in firm friendship and high honor. Much of this was in defiance of prevailing custom. These indications make it clear that for Jesus there was no 'second sex'. He also regarded women as precious to God and open to the message which he felt called to proclaim. Because many responded, women found a vital place among his followers in the early church.<sup>27</sup>

#### Jesus' Ministry to Women

The ministry of Jesus to women can be seen in demonstration if

---

<sup>23</sup>Ermarth, p. 17.    <sup>24</sup>Luke 8:2-3.    <sup>25</sup>Harkness, p. 142.

<sup>26</sup>Ryrie, p. 27.    <sup>27</sup>Harkness, p. 61.

not in His words. As has been mentioned previously, women in Jewish public worship were severely restricted. Jesus did not deal with people in the context of Jewish worship. He met them in the market place, the streets and in the homes. These public encounters served to establish the basis for an entirely new relationship between God and women and thrust them into the life of the New Testament church. The women were very much a part as the church was being born; from the ministry of Jesus, to the cross, to the upper room at Pentecost.

One of the classic examples of Jesus' ministry to women is seen in His encounter with the Samaritan woman, recorded in John 4:7-42. Jesus met the woman at midday when she came to the well outside her city for water. Jesus was already there waiting for the disciples who were with Him to return from buying food. We can infer that this encounter was no accident. There was no reason for Jesus to go through Samaria except to see this woman. In His divine way He knew what was to happen. In the ensuing interchange the woman came to know who the Christ, the Messiah, was and placed her faith in Him. The woman was the first to hear the personal revelation of Jesus that He was the Messiah.<sup>28</sup> By entrusting this revelation to her we see the faith that Jesus had in women. He did not choose a disciple or religious leader. He did not make this confession before His accusers, but chose a woman of poor reputation and of great need. The compassion shown here is great and is indicative of the unbounding love Jesus had for humanity. The result was far-reaching. The woman returned to the village and practically

---

<sup>28</sup>Frances Vander Velde, She Shall be Called Woman (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1957), p. 210.

brought the entire city out to see Jesus, and many who came believed. These believers could very well have formed the core of the church that Phillip found when he went to Samaria after the death of Stephen.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus ministered to other women in various ways. Some were healed physically as were Jairus' daughter<sup>30</sup> and the woman with the issue of blood who touched Jesus in the crowd.<sup>31</sup> The adulterous woman whom the Pharisees brought to Jesus<sup>32</sup> and the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair<sup>33</sup> were healed spiritually. Other women, such as Mary and Martha, were taught individually by Jesus.<sup>34</sup> Among the crowds that thronged to see Jesus and hear Him were women and He taught them along with the men.<sup>35</sup> From examples such as these Charles Ryrie draws the following conclusions.

. . . Our Lord taught women individually and in private. Indeed, some of the most profound revelations concerning Himself and His Father were given in these instances. That He did such a thing indicates His appreciation not only of the intellectual capacity in women but also of their spiritual capabilities.

Of course, one must remember that most of the Lord's teaching was to men and especially to His twelve disciples, but these instances cited are ample proof of His revolutionary recognition of women, His confidence in their capabilities, and His concern for their spiritual education and welfare.<sup>36</sup>

### Ministry of Women to Jesus

A significant, but often overlooked part of Jesus' followers were the women who, on occasion, traveled with Him. Most well known among these was Mary Magdalene. In many ways she was entirely different

---

<sup>29</sup>Acts 8:5-13.    <sup>30</sup>Matthew 9:18, 23-26.    <sup>31</sup>Mark 5:31.

<sup>32</sup>John 8:3-11.    <sup>33</sup>Luke 7:36-50.    <sup>34</sup>Luke 10:38-42.

<sup>35</sup>Ryrie, p. 28.    <sup>36</sup>Ryrie, pp. 28-30.

from the Samaritan woman. There are no inferences of poor character, bad reputation or poverty. Her need was great and Jesus met her need. Little is said of her background except that she was from the city of Magdala. She had suffered from a mysterious malady related to seven demons which had gone out of her. Jesus in His healing power had been responsible for her release. Whatever her condition prior to her initial encounter with Jesus, there was no hint of it in the months that followed. She and several other women joined the band of believers who followed Jesus. Among these women were Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna. These women ministered to Jesus, contributing support from their personal means.<sup>37</sup> We see these women on four additional occasions; at the cross, at Jesus' burial, at the tomb after Jesus had risen, and in the upper room at Pentecost.<sup>38</sup> Their ministry to Jesus is unique. It could be assumed that they merely took care of cooking, washing and other domestic needs, but this does not seem to be in keeping with Jesus' attitude toward women or what is recorded in Scripture. He chose Mary to be the one to whom He first revealed Himself after His resurrection. She was the bearer of the wonderful news to the other followers. Mary and the other women had some kind of unique ministry to the person of Jesus Christ. Ryrie says:

Absolutely unique in the gospels is the place accorded to women as ministers to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Our Lord's relations with the women who attended Him are distinct from His relations with the men disciples in one very remarkable particular. He ministered to men; but the women ministered to Him. In this case Jesus consented to receive gifts and service.'

---

<sup>37</sup>Luke 8:1-3 and Mark 16:9.

<sup>38</sup>John 19:25-20:18, Acts 1:14 and Luke 6:2.

The occurrences of diakoneō, to serve, and its cognates in the four gospels show at once that whenever ministry is spoken of as being rendered directly to Jesus, it is the ministry of either angels or of women. After the temptation angels 'came and ministered unto him.' All of the other instances speak of the ministry of women.<sup>39</sup>

By receiving the ministrations of these women Jesus added to the "new" concept of women. Women were now a valuable asset to the church. Women had a place in the ministry of the church, a place close to the heart of Jesus Himself.

### THE TEACHING OF PAUL

Of all the Scripture related to the role of the woman in the church, that written by the Apostle Paul is used and referred to the most. Much of this is in reference to women in general, but there are several passages that refer to a role of leadership concerning women. It is necessary to consider some related aspects of the subject before studying the specific Pauline passages. These aspects are Paul as a man, Paul's picture of the ideal woman, the culture of Corinth and Ephesus, and the Pauline principle of order in the churches.

#### Paul as a Man

Paul was born early in the first century of the Christian era, perhaps in 2 A.D., in the Graeco-Roman city of Tarsus. Although the city was Greek and Roman in culture, the home was Hebrew and Paul passed into young adulthood under its influence. There is no doubt that the culture in which he lived had an influence on his thinking and gave him considerable advantage in his dealing with the Gentiles during his

---

<sup>39</sup>Ryrie, p. 34.



ministry. It was his Hebrew background that had the most influence on his teaching concerning women.<sup>40</sup> Paul grew up an Israelitish boy and was thoroughly trained in the Scripture in the home and probably in a synagogue school. At a later age he traveled to Jerusalem to further his education under the teaching of Gamaliel, a prominent Jewish rabbi. Paul later became a Pharisee and an ardent persecutor of the first Christians.<sup>41</sup> With Paul's strict Jewish training came the Jewish attitudes toward women that have already been discussed. Paul remained Jewish in his domestic outlook after his conversion, although he did catch the spirit of Jesus' teaching on the oneness and equality of all before God. Georgia Markness explains this dichotomy.

. . .as a Jew in the Greek world he was opposed to any speaking or assumption of leadership by women in the young churches, while as a Christian he has a very warm feeling toward the women who were working and witnessing in these same churches. As a situation-conditioned male he had an outlook quite different from that of Jesus, but as a Christian he has caught the spirit of Jesus to the point where he could say, '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.'<sup>42</sup>

Even with this recognition of Christ's example, Paul did not lay aside all his beliefs concerning women when he gave instructions related to church life. His attitudes were incorporated into his instructions, giving them a rich and balanced nature, but leading to much confusion in interpretation.

---

<sup>40</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 627.

<sup>41</sup>W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, The Life and Epistles of St. Paul (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 34-62.

<sup>42</sup>Harkness, pp. 158-159.

### The Ideal Woman

One cannot interpret Paul meaningfully without an understanding of what he considered the "ideal woman." Paul measures all conduct and bases his instructions to the churches concerning women on this ideal. This ideal is directly related to his Jewish background, but is also shaped by the new concept of the unity of relationship of all persons before God.

It is true that not all women of Paul's time were married, but the majority of them were either married or were widows and he speaks to them more than to unmarried women. There are two main principles that determine an ideal woman or wife. The first of these is that she is to be in subjection to her husband. Colossians 3:18 and Ephesians 5:22 both teach that a woman is to be in subjection to her husband. This principle comes from the teaching of the law, both in Genesis and the Decalogue. Generally, this principle was held by the Greeks and Romans with less regard for women as persons than shown by the Jews. A sign of this subjection was the veil, used by Jews and Greeks alike. She was to wear it in public and others, especially prostitutes, were forbidden to wear one.<sup>43</sup>

The second principle adhered to by Paul concerns the duties of the ideal woman or wife. A composite of these can be drawn from numerous references in the writings of Paul. In her personal life she was to fix her hope on God, maintain a daily prayer life, and be sensible and pure. She was to dress in modest and discreet clothing without excessive ornamentation. She was to be dignified, not a malicious gossip, temperate

---

<sup>43</sup>Prohl, pp. 36-52.

and faithful. In her relation to her husband she was to be loyal and subject to him, love and respect him and receive instruction from him. In her domestic situation she was to love her children and care for her home and family responsibilities. In relation to others she was to be kind, do good works and show hospitality. Above all, she should avoid doing anything that would bring dishonor to the word of God.<sup>44</sup> Paul had good reason to give these guidelines to the Christian wives. He, and they, did not want the word of God to be dishonored or to give the enemies of the church an occasion to bring reproach.

### Cultural Influences

The infant church was very much a part of the culture out of which it was born. The culture was pagan and the church had to apply its new-found faith in making ethical decisions regarding pagan practices. One example of this is the question of eating meat that had been offered to idols in pagan worship. Here Paul maintains that there would be nothing basically wrong with eating the meat except that it might harm another believer's conscience. The spiritual consequences take precedence over the cultural practices regardless of how harmless the practices might be.<sup>45</sup>

This general policy of Paul's applied to several instances regarding women in the New Testament church, particularly in the marriage relationship. The spiritual freedom and oneness among believers had

---

<sup>44</sup>Titus 2:4,5; I Timothy 2:9-11, 3:11 and 5:1-10; Colossians 3:18; Ephesians 5:22,24,33; I Corinthians 14:34,35; I Corinthians 7:2-5, 10,11,12; and I Corinthians 11:3.

<sup>45</sup>David Alexander and Pat Alexander, eds., Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans' Publishing Co., 1973), p. 592.

given the church a poor reputation among non-Christians who could not understand the change that accepting Christ had made in the lives of the Christians. At that time Jewish and Greek customs and Roman law forbade the public appearance of women. Daily life was structured around men and tended to exclude women except for immoral women provided for the pleasure of men. Within the church personal relationships existed between all the believers, both men and women. This brought the accusation that the church was destroying marriage and the family.<sup>46</sup> In order to combat this and similar accusations Paul and other New Testament writers cautioned the believers, reminding them of the need to serve the Lord within the culture in a way that would not bring offense to the church.

Some aspects of the Corinthian and Ephesian culture need to be explored in considering Paul's teaching on women. The major passages that will be discussed later were written to the churches in these Greek cities. As a city, Corinth had a poor reputation, being known as a city of pleasure, wanton sexual activity and immorality. All this was sanctioned by the worship of Aphrodite or Diana and was a part of the religious life. Such an environment could not have helped but bring problems into the infant church which had to be dealt with by Paul. Conditions at Ephesus were much the same, with the goddess being Artemis rather than Aphrodite.<sup>47</sup> There were two main types of Greek women, other than slaves, in these cities. One of these groups were the virtuous and faithful wives who served their husbands in complete

---

<sup>46</sup>Prohl, pp. 55-59.

<sup>47</sup>Ryrie, pp. 59-60.

subjection. The second class of women were the hetaerae or high class prostitutes connected with the temple worship of Aphrodite or Artemis who provided entertainment as well as sexual services to many wealthy Greek men. These women were not restricted in their public behavior as were the Greek wives. They moved about freely unveiled and had interaction with men in public. These women were also connected with the temple prostitution in the worship of the goddesses. There was danger, because of some of the new freedoms, of Christian women being likened to and confused with these women.<sup>48</sup>

#### Paul's Principle of Order in the Church

A Pauline theme that reoccurs in several instances is the call for order in the churches so that the cause of Christ could go forward unhindered. In I Corinthians 12 Paul gives his extensive list of the gifts of the Spirit. He likens them to the different parts of the body. A call for order can be seen here. He makes a similar comparison in Ephesians 4. In order for a physical body to function properly all the parts must be working and doing their job. So it is in the spiritual body, the church. From the list of gifts Paul moves into the "Love Chapter," chapter 13, and in chapter 14 speaks directly to the problem of the gift of tongues. The following verses contain Paul's emphasis on order.

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

If any one speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret;

---

<sup>48</sup>Harkness, p. 53.

but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.

But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent.

For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be exhorted;

and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets;

for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

. . . . .

But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.<sup>49</sup>

Verses 22 to 25 tell us the reason why Paul puts this emphasis on order.

So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe.

If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?

But if all prophesy, and as ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;

the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

A second instance in which Paul calls for order is in relation to the serving and receiving of communion. Henry Halley comments:

Imitating the drunken revels of heathen peoples in their idol temples, Christians were thus making their Love-Feasts occasions for gluttony, losing sight entirely of the true significance of the Lord's Supper.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup>I Corinthians 14:26-33,40.

<sup>50</sup>Henry H. Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 597.

The Corinthians were destroying the sacredness and meaning of the communion by using it as a common meal. Paul gives them strict instructions on what they were to do and not to do. They were being a poor witness and testimony and Paul reminds them of this.

The three directives concerning church conduct that are directly related to the question of the role of the woman in the church contain Paul's theme on order. In each of these situations the reason Paul says what he does is to maintain order and/or to keep the church from being a reproach and to cause people to turn away from God. The first directive, found in I Corinthians 11:1-16, concerns the wearing of a veil in public worship by a woman. For her not to wear a veil would be a disgrace. She would be the same as one who was shaven--a prostitute.<sup>51</sup> The second directive comes from I Corinthians 14:34-35, concerning keeping silent in the church. This immediately follows his commands on speaking in tongues and the same reasons apply. The third directive, I Timothy 2:9-15, contains the injunction against women teaching or exercising authority over a man. Earlier in the chapter Paul tells the people to pray for all men, including those in authority, so that there would be the kind of atmosphere in which people would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus gave His life for this purpose and Paul was appointed a preacher and an apostle for the same reason. He then begins to talk about conduct in the churches, introducing the topic with the word, "therefore," indicating that the preceding statements have a bearing on what is to follow. We could say, "for this reason." Paul wants the atmosphere in the church to be such that men could be saved

---

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 596.

and his work and the work of Jesus be not in vain. This theme of Paul, because of the fact that it occurs so often when he talks about the conduct of Christians within the church, has a great deal to do with understanding and interpreting what Paul says regarding women in the church.

### Three Major Passages

There are three major passages from Paul which can be applied to the question of the leadership role of women in the church. The first of these is I Corinthians 11:1-16. The problem here concerns the wearing of a head covering while leading the church service, and refers to the women being involved in this. The veil was a sign of the woman's acceptance of the fact that she was in submission to her husband's authority and was also a custom of decency, signifying that she was a married woman. The question had arisen because of the differences of custom between the Greek, Hebrew, and Romans. Jewish and Roman men and women prayed with their heads covered while Greek men and women prayed with their heads uncovered. The church asked Paul to make a ruling that all could follow. His ruling was that, because a man is only in subjection to Christ in this case and the veil was a sign of subjection to another person, men should pray bareheaded. On the other hand, the woman is to be in subjection to her husband and the veil is a sign of this subjection. She was to pray or prophesy with her head covered. If she were to give up wearing the veil she would dishonor her husband and his authority as if she were a prostitute.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup>Alexander, p. 593.



In this discussion, although it deals with the subject of the veil or head covering, Paul tells us that the women were involved in prophesying and praying in the church. Prophesying is telling forth divine counsels or teaching and/or foretelling the future.<sup>53</sup> Prophesying and praying were the primary activities in the early church and many forms were used, including doctrine, exhortation, consolation and prediction. In essence, to be involved in praying or prophesying was to be involved in officiating or leading the public worship.<sup>54</sup> Adam Clarke, agreeing that women were involved in the leadership of the church at Corinth, says:

Whatever may be the meaning of praying and prophesying, in respect to the man, they have precisely the same meaning in respect to the woman. So that some women at least, as well as some men, might speak to others in edification, and exhortation, and comfort . . . . The only difference marked by the apostle was, the man had his head uncovered, because he was the representative of Christ; the woman had hers covered, because she was placed by the order of God in a state of subjection to the man, and because it was custom, both among the Greeks and Romans, and among the Jews an express law, that no woman should be seen abroad without a veil.<sup>55</sup>

There were women involved in the leadership of the church at Corinth as is seen by the regulation of their activity.

The second passage, I Corinthians 14:34,35, bluntly tells the women to keep silent in the church. This is related to the subjection

---

<sup>53</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 390, and Thomas Sheldon Green, A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd., n.d.), p. 116.

<sup>54</sup>Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1860), pp. 208-210.

<sup>55</sup>Adam Clarke, The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, II (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 250.

called for by the Law. If she wanted to know anything she was to ask her own husband at home. Paul said it was improper or disgraceful for her to speak in church. Paul is so brief and terse here that he gives no indication as to why he is so abrupt or under what circumstances he applies this. It is important to note that the problem was with the question of subjection of the wife to the husband. Apparently the women being censured were doing something in the church that brought dishonor to their husbands. This was related to speaking or talking in the church. It could have been that they were calling out questions and comments to the men from their separate section and disturbing the service.<sup>56</sup> It could also have been that speaking at all (proper married women were not spoken to in public, nor did they speak to others<sup>57</sup>) would have brought dishonor to their husbands for it would have made them appear to be immoral women in the same way they would have by removing their veils.<sup>58</sup>

The third passage, I Timothy 2:11,12, is located in the Pastoral Epistles. Again Paul is brief and concise in what he says. The women were to quietly receive instruction with a submissive attitude. Paul did not allow women to teach or exercise authority over a man. The verb, teach, is *διδάσκω* *kw* in the Greek, which means to teach or instruct.<sup>59</sup> Some of the other places in the New Testament where the verb is used are

---

<sup>56</sup>Alexander, p. 594.

<sup>57</sup>Harkness, pp. 52-53.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>59</sup>G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), pp. 113-114.

Matthew 4:23--"And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues . . .", Mark 1:21--"And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach.", I Timothy 4:11--"Prescribe and teach these things.", II Timothy 2:2, "And these things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

The phrase, "exercise authority," is important to our discussion. In the Greek the word is *αυθεντεῖν*. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word occurs. It is not found in the Septuagint, or the Apocrypha. From this we can assume that it means something special and it is important to find out the meaning. Abbott-Smith, in his lexicon, defines it, "one who acts on his own authority, to govern, exercise authority, have mastery over, lord it over."<sup>60</sup> Arndt and Gingrich define it, "have authority, domineer over someone."<sup>61</sup> The word is a present active infinitive, which tells us that the activity had been going on in the past and was continuing, and can be translated, "to continue to take authority upon oneself."<sup>62</sup> The verse could read, "But I do not permit a woman to continue to teach, nor to continue to take authority upon herself over a man." The King James Version uses the word, "usurp," instead of exercise. This gives a connotation of taking authority that does not belong to or has not been given to an individual.

---

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>62</sup>H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1955), pp. 181-182.

Two of the other words that use the same stem, **αὐτο**, give this connotation also. The meaning of **αὐθαίρετος** is given as self-pleasing or arrogant. This word is used in Proverbs 21:24--"Proud, Haughty, Scoffer, are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.", Titus 1:7--"For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain.", II Peter 2:10--"and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties." means "self-chosen" or of one's own accord" as is used in II Corinthians 8:3, 17--"For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord. . . . For they not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord."<sup>63</sup>

It is interesting to note that if Paul would have wanted to merely say, "have authority over," he probably would have used **ἐξουσίαν** **εἶχεν**, as is used in Matthew 7:29--"for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.", and Acts 26:10--"And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests . . . ." These women referred to in I Timothy were exercising authority that was not theirs, either because they were not being submissive in doing so, or they had not been authorized to do so by those over them in the church. Either of these would have been in violation of the principles taught by Paul.

---

<sup>63</sup>Abbott-Smith, p. 68.

## SUMMARY

In summarizing the biblical teaching related to the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church we see that the roots lie in the very beginnings of the Old Testament. Much of the New Testament teaching is based on the law, both in the primitive sense in Genesis and in the Decalogue and later Jewish ordinances. The historical narrative of the Old Testament gives examples in the lives of the prophetesses of women who had positions of leadership. On the whole, however, women in Jewish culture and worship were restricted and generally stayed within the home which was their realm.

Although Jesus did not say anything directly about the leadership role of women, many conclusions can be reached from His actions and interactions with women. He held women in high regard, giving them an equal position with men in His redemptive plan. He taught and spoke with women in public and private. Women traveled with the followers and also ministered to Jesus. The presence and participation of these women continued through the birth of the church at Pentecost and into the early church.

The teaching and influence of the apostle, Paul, seems to be a primary source of opinion on the place of women in the church. Paul's teachings are influenced by his personal background and training and by his concept of the "ideal woman." This ideal woman is "queen" in her home and is in subjection to her husband. The Pauline principle of order in the church to avoid bringing reproach or turning non-believers aside plays a major part in his teachings and the interpretation of them. This theme is seen over and over again in the major passages written by

Paul that apply to the question of the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church.

The biblical teaching must be the basis on which the conclusions reached concerning the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church is laid. Both the Old and New Testaments give a rich source on which to draw these conclusions.

## Chapter 3

### WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

#### THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

From the time of Jesus' resurrection to the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, Jesus appeared to the disciples and other believers ten times. The first two appearances were to Mary Magdalene and the other women on the morning of the resurrection. The other appearances were to various ones of the twelve disciples, except for the appearance in Galilee, recorded in Matthew 28:16-20, which is thought to have been the instance Paul refers to in I Corinthians 15:6 where he appeared to more than 500 people.<sup>1</sup> If these are the same incident the women followers were probably among the 500. After forty days and numerous appearances Jesus met with the group on the Mount of Olives where the promise of the Holy Spirit was given and they were told to wait in Jerusalem until the promise was fulfilled. This group included Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the Son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James, the women, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Jesus' brother, a group numbering about 120. After the Ascension the group assembled in the upper room in Jerusalem. Peter led the group in selecting a replacement for Judas.

---

<sup>1</sup>Henry H. Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 526.

The women who had been among the followers were here, and there is no indication that they were excluded from this important first business meeting of the church.<sup>2</sup>

### At Pentecost

The second recorded meeting of the church took place ten days later on the day of Pentecost. The group is again referred to as "they," which can be assumed to mean the same group that gathered immediately after the Ascension, the 120, including the women.<sup>3</sup> As they were gathered together the Lord chose that moment to fulfill the promise of the Comforter given at the Ascension. With the fire and the power that came through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individual believers, the church came into being. The reaction of the crowds and Peter's sermon take precedence in the narrative over the individual believers, which obscures the role of the women on this occasion except for their participation in the event through their presence.

After Pentecost the believers began gathering together in homes. The women from the original group and new women converts took part in these meetings. Acts 2:46,47 says, "And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding

---

<sup>2</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Role of Women in the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>Georgia Harkness, Women in Church and Society (Nashville Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 63.



to their number day by day those who were being saved." These house-churches were the core and strength of the church. Certainly no house or home would be chosen to host a church if the woman of the household was not the epitome of the Christian woman, giving strength and character to the reputation of the church. Georgia Harkness says, "The women were certainly present in these homes; it seems unlikely that they prepared the food and then were relegated to seclusion. The same may be said of the numerous 'house churches' mentioned throughout the record."<sup>4</sup>

#### Activities of Women

For most women the domestic duties kept them fully occupied. Propriety also kept them within their homes. They served the Lord, but within these bounds. There were, however, three separate groups of women who appear to have had a special calling and assignment during the first three centuries of the church. These "orders" were the widows, the virgins and the deaconesses. Widows and virgins are definitely mentioned in scripture, but it is doubtful that the possible references to deaconesses carried the meaning that came to be attached to them later.<sup>5</sup>

The "order" of widows came into being early in the history of the church. Qualification for this "order" were given by Paul to Timothy in I Timothy 5:9-16. They were to be at least 60 years of age, the wife of one man, and have already been involved in good works. Verse five also could be included, emphasizing her faith in God and her ministry of prayer. One of the main functions of the church concerned

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Philip Carrington, The Early Christian Church, I (Cambridge: The University Press, 1957), p. 148.

works of charity, involving the poor and sick. It was a part of the work of the widows to minister to these, particularly to women who were diseased. It is understandable that the men of the church who were working with the sick and poor could not minister to and nurse women. One second century instruction says, "In every congregation at least one widow is to be appointed to take care of sick women; she is to be obliging and sober, she is to report cases of need to the elders . . . ." <sup>6</sup> In other words, these women had no means of support so the church made provision for them and in turn the widows served the church in the distribution of charity to others. <sup>7</sup> They also had a ministry of intercessory prayer. <sup>8</sup> Widows were mentioned by many of the writers and leaders of this period. Among them are Ignatius, Polycarp, Tertullian, Cyprian, Hippolytus and the authors of the Apostolic Church Orders and the Syrian Didascalia. <sup>9</sup>

The second "order," the virgins, also appears in scripture and in the early church. Even less is said about the virgins than the widows. Paul refers to them in I Corinthians 7 but does not give information concerning their duties as he did the widows. Philip's virgin daughters prophesied, but it is not known if there were others who did so. Virgins are mentioned briefly by Hippolytus, Cyprian, and Ignatius. <sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, I (London: Williams and Norgate, 1908), p. 122.

<sup>7</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), p. 189.

<sup>8</sup>Maurice Goguel, The Primitive Church, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1964), p. 546.

<sup>9</sup>Ryrie, pp. 97-137.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 99-128.

Virgins were a minor group and little is known of their function in the church.

The third group of women in the church that can be considered to be similar to an order are the deaconesses. Paul referred to Phoebe as a deaconess in Romans 16:1 and there is a possible reference to deaconesses in I Timothy, but there is a great deal of question as to what these references mean. It is probable that Phoebe was not a deaconess in the same sense as the men deacons. This sense of being an ordained helper or assistant did not come into being until much later.<sup>11</sup> I Timothy could refer to deaconesses or deacons' wives. There is support for both views, but not enough to warrant the belief that this refers to an ecclesiastical order such as the deacons. Conditions in the early church did not make it possible for women to serve in the way that men did. Adolf Harnack says that the female assistants were overshadowed by the men, especially in times of persecution where the job of caring for the sick and poor was very dangerous because of the public exposure and many deacons became martyrs.<sup>12</sup> Deaconesses were not prominent in the Western church, but by the third century they had taken over the duties of the widows in the Eastern church.<sup>13</sup> D. S. Bailey, in his book, Sexual Relation in Christian Thought, offers an explanation for this difference in development between the Eastern and Western church. In the east where women were segregated by customs and confined to their

---

<sup>11</sup>Philip Carrington, The Early Christian Church, II (Cambridge: The University Press, 1957), p. 472 and Vol. I, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup>Harnack I, p. 122.

<sup>13</sup>Harkness, p. 74.

own quarters, called a gynaeceum, it was necessary to have women minister to them, for the intrusion of men into these areas would have been scandalous. Deaconesses served in these situations. In the west, on the other hand, these living arrangements did not exist and the men had a greater freedom to minister among the women. One early function of the deaconesses was to assist the women during baptism. In the west infant baptism began to replace adult baptism and this added to the circumstances that led to the desuetude of the deaconesses in the west.<sup>14</sup> The rise of deaconesses in the east is referred to in the Didascalia. Philip Carrington, in his book, The Early Christian Church, reports:

It is rather curious that the Didascalia, a church order which emanated from Antioch about this time, is our first evidence, apart from the Montanist and other sects, for a female order of ministers in the church, though Pliny mentioned something of the sort; they were known as deaconesses.<sup>15</sup>

Bailey has also compiled a list of duties of the Eastern deaconesses, using several ancient writings as sources. The deaconesses acted as intermediaries between the women and the bishop, assisted the women at baptism, visited the sick women, taught the women and served as door keepers at the church entrances reserved for women. They could not offer the oblations or perform any duties of the males, baptize, teach in the church or assemblies of men, pray aloud in the church, approach the altar or pronounce a blessing.<sup>16</sup> Prior to this time there is a question as to the existence of an ordained order of deaconesses. We

---

<sup>14</sup>Derrick Sherwin Bailey, Sexual Relation in Christian Thought, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 69.

<sup>15</sup>Carrington Vol. II, p. 472.

<sup>16</sup>Bailey, p. 68.

can be sure that there were women workers in the church, but there is not sufficient support from history or scripture to assume there was an order of deaconesses in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>17</sup>

It must be remembered that even though these three groups of women existed in the early church, their role was minor and consisted of service rather than leadership. This does not mean that women were not a part of the spread and growth of the church, for they were. They were prominent as patronesses of individual churches as was Lydia in Philippi.<sup>18</sup> Women were to be found among the students of the great teachers. Some of these, such as Herais, Polaniaena and Marcella, the students of Origen, were martyred for their faith.<sup>19</sup> It was hazardous to be a Christian during the persecutions of this time and this, along with the customs concerning women that have already been discussed, can account for the absence of women in the leadership of the church at this time. The change of living customs also affected the ministry of women. During the very early church time people generally lived in an urban setting. The whole city was a parish and there was a type of team ministry among the workers. The higher and lower positions did not develop until the church began to reflect the civil service system of the Roman Empire. Later on, as the barbarian invasions threatened, the people began to scatter and became more rural. Each small village became a local parish with one priest and a distant bishop overseeing. The team ministry

---

<sup>17</sup>Ryrie, pp. 90-91.

<sup>18</sup>Carrington I, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup>Carrington II, p. 423.

vanished and the ministry of the women with it except in the cloisters. This system did not solidify until the early Middle Ages, but it was beginning to be felt during the Apostolic times.<sup>20</sup>

### Women Paul Mentions

The Apostle, Paul, has often been labeled as one who expressed antipathy toward women. This is an unfair accusation as can be seen from his recorded dealings with women in the early church. It is unfortunate that many of these relationships are mentioned so briefly. Romans 16 gives the most extensive list of these women. The first of these is Phoebe, whom Paul calls his sister and servant or deaconess in the church at Cenchrea. The "title" given Phoebe has caused much discussion as to her role in the church at Cenchrea. The word, diakonos, is used in reference to Phoebe. Although some writers equate this with the official order of deacons, most scholars tend to disagree. Ryrie, in his book, The Place of Women in the Church, devotes a lengthy section to this question. As has been already stated, evidence of an order of deaconesses does not appear until the third century. In the very early church it would appear that the term, diakonos, had a general meaning of many types of ministry and not an ecclesiastical group with special functions. Ryrie says:

It is clear that by the time that Paul wrote to the Philippians there was in that church an order of deacons who were distinguished from the elders. Yet at the same time diakonos continued to be used in its general unofficial sense. By the time of the writing of the Pastorals, the diaconate was a well-established and distinct body, and yet during the same period the word was used in that general sense. Therefore, during the

---

<sup>20</sup>Margaret Sittler Emmerth, Adam's Fractured Rib (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 19-20.

first century, ministry in general was called "deaconing," while during the same period the official diaconate was developing into a distinctly recognized group in the church. . . . That these women (Phoebe and those mentioned in II Timothy) were a female diaconate is an assumption; that these women ministered and actually did the work of a diakonos, used in the general sense, is quite evident. At Ephesus the particular group of women who were active in this manner were the wives of deacons, at Cenchrea it was only one woman, Phoebe. Or at least she was the outstanding one. But that there was any official body of deaconesses, in the sense in which the term has come to stand for an organization in the New Testament is untenable. Women workers, yes; women deacons, no.<sup>21</sup>

It is unquestionable that Phoebe had an important role in the church at Cenchrea. In Romans 16:1,2, Paul calls her a sister, showing his high regard and affection for her; he calls her a servant of the church, noting her relationship to the body of believers there; he calls her a helper of many and himself as well, showing how she served others. Many writers, including Edith Deen in her book, All the Women of the Bible, says that she was a patroness of the unprotected and despised and aided new converts.<sup>22</sup> Ryrie concurs with this, reporting:

. . .the leadership she exercised was largely financial and social. In other words, her wealth and social position in the community enabled her to act as patroness of a small and struggling community. Her activity was important to this small church, . . .<sup>23</sup>

The significant fact about Phoebe is that Paul entrusted her with his letter to the Roman church. She carried it to Rome, bearing greetings to the church there and to others along the way. Paul bestowed a great honor upon her and demonstrated his trust and confidence in her.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Ryrie, pp. 86-91.

<sup>22</sup>Edith Deen, All the Women of the Bible (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), p. 231.

<sup>23</sup>Ryrie, pp. 88-89.

<sup>24</sup>Deen, pp. 230-231.

Paul mentions several other women in his greeting in Romans 16. Mary is a hard worker for the church. There is much question as to the place and sex of Junias, mentioned in verse 7. In the Revised Standard Version the name is Junias, which is masculine; while in the King James Version it is Junia, which is feminine.<sup>25</sup> The New American Standard Bible uses the masculine, Junias, with a marginal reading of the feminine, Junia. Junias is not mentioned in Georgia Harkness' treatment of the chapter although she does cover the other women. Edith Deen, in her extensive work on the women of the Bible, does not mention her either. Ryrie calls Junias a woman, but says that she was not an apostle.<sup>26</sup> From the evidence it does not seem that the person was a woman. Tryphena and Tryphosa are also called workers in the Lord. Paul calls Persis, beloved, and one who has worked hard for the Lord. He considers Rufus' mother as his own, and included Julia and Nereus' sister as saints.

Paul also greets Priscilla and Aquila in Romans 16. These two are mentioned here and in several other places in the New Testament, which gives a picture of their activities. It is interesting to note that in three of the five references where these two are mentioned, Priscilla is mentioned first. She certainly shared an important position with her husband, Aquila. They first appear in Corinth, having come there after being exiled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius. Priscilla and Aquila were apparently converted in Rome and became leaders in the church at Corinth. When Paul came there to minister he lived with

---

<sup>25</sup>F. W. Gringrich, "Junias," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, I (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 1026.

<sup>26</sup>Ryrie, p. 56.



them and worked at their common trade, tent making. After staying in Corinth for approximately eighteen months, Paul traveled to Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him and leaving them at Ephesus. In Ephesus they took up a similar work and the church there met in their home. It was during this time that Apollos came to Ephesus from Alexandria and encountered Priscilla and Aquila in the synagogue. Apollos was eloquently preaching of Jesus, but was lacking in his knowledge of the church and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He may not have known of the plan of redemption through faith, either. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos and taught him concerning these things. After his "education" was completed he went on to Corinth and ministered in the church there. At a later time Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome and here, again, the church met in their home.<sup>27</sup> It seems that Aquila and Priscilla had a ministry of church planting and work under the direction of Paul, moving from city to city establishing churches.

Priscilla is an outstanding example of a Christian woman who was a leader and a teacher. Paul would not have entrusted these responsibilities to this couple if Priscilla's part in them would have in any way violated what he felt was the proper behavior for a woman in the church. It was not wrong for Priscilla to teach Apollos, a man, or to work with Aquila and Paul in the establishment of churches. She was a talented and educated woman whom the Lord was able to use mightily in advancing the kingdom.

The church at Philippi had several women of note among its members. One of these founders and first converts of the church was Lydia.

---

<sup>27</sup>William Sanford LaSor, Great Personalities of the New Testament (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1961), pp. 138-146.

She was a gentile and businesswoman of the city of Philippi who worshipped God. Paul had come to the city in response to his Macedonian vision recorded in Acts 16:9-12. He had expected to find a place of worship, but there was none. He did go outside the city near the river and found a group of women to whom he began speaking. Acts 16:14,15 tells us that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to Paul's message. She and her household were baptized and Paul and his party stayed in her home. A house-church was begun in Philippi which met in Lydia's home. Later, when Paul was released after being imprisoned, he went to Lydia's house and preached to the brethren there.<sup>28</sup> Lydia was a businesswoman in the city of Philippi and doubtlessly exerted a great deal of influence in the community. Her open and ready receptiveness to the gospel was an excellent example to the members of the house-church of which she was the hostess. She was one of many who had a part in spreading the gospel throughout Europe.<sup>29</sup>

When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian believers he mentioned two other women of the church. He called these two, Euodias and Syntyche, his fellow workers who shared in his struggle in the cause of the gospel. These women also worked with Clement and other fellow workers. They could have been involved in evangelism as was Paul.<sup>30</sup> Edith Deen adds that they were probably among the first teachers in the early church. She also notes that the only other person Paul referred to as having labored with him in the gospel was Timothy. Surely these women were key figures in the Philippian church.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Acts 16:40 NASB. <sup>29</sup>Deen, pp. 221-226.

<sup>30</sup>Ryrie, p. 54. <sup>31</sup>Deen, pp. 262, 295-6.

## THE MIDDLE PERIOD

The fifteen hundred years from 300 A.D. through the 1700's saw the decline and redevelopment of all areas of Western society. The church went through similar throes of change, including deterioration and rebirth. This period saw the church grow from a definite minority into one of the stronger forces of society. This period also saw the rise of the Protestant Reformation and such great men of the church as John Wesley, John Calvin, and Martin Luther. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia tells us that the activity of women in the early church reached its zenith during the first part of this period, the fourth century. These women stood with Ignatius and Polycarp as defenders of the faith, facing death and enduring the agonies of persecution. As the darkness of the following centuries closed in, women as mothers, teachers, and abbesses kept the light of Christian faith and intelligence burning in medieval Europe.<sup>32</sup> During this time the general attitude toward women and marriage was not favorable. The church historian, Latourette calls it "crass."<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, by 1350 A.D., some women were coming to the forefront as mystics and saints.<sup>34</sup> It must be remembered that these are exceptions and the condition of women as well as all of society was very poor during this time.

---

<sup>32</sup>Dwight M. Pratt, "Woman," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, V (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1943), p. 3104.

<sup>33</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, The Thousand Years of Uncertainty (New York: Harper & Bros., 1938), p. 360.

<sup>34</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), p. 652.

### The Monastic Movement

One of the outstanding features of these years was the monastic movement. It was through this movement that women had their only real opportunity for involvement in the church. There were two needs which led to the rise of the monastic movement for women. The first was the need for a suitably dignified religious retreat for unmarried women and widows and the second was a place for wealthy women and widows to dispose of their property and other means. A third factor, although not a need, was the aversion to marriage, especially by the 12th century.<sup>35</sup>

The founding of the first monastery is attributed to Marcella, a friend of Jerome, in the late fourth century. About 530 Scholastica, the sister of Benedict, who started the Benedictine order at Monte Cassino, began a related order for women nearby.<sup>36</sup> Another well-known order for women, Poor Ladies or Poor Clares, was begun by Clare, a friend of Francis of Assisi.<sup>37</sup> These double monasteries were common for several centuries. By the twelfth century controversies began to arise over whether the women should rule in their own convents which led to some suppression of their development. Two men, Robert of Arbrissel and St. Norbert, resisted this suppression, attracting many women followers and starting monasteries for them in France and Flanders.<sup>38</sup> The Council of Trent took away the independence of the abbess in jurisdiction over the

---

<sup>35</sup>R. W. Southern, Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 309-312.

<sup>36</sup>Harkness, p. 80.

<sup>37</sup>Latourette, History, p. 431.

<sup>38</sup>Southern, pp. 310-312.

convent and placed her under male superiors.<sup>39</sup> This did not destroy the woman's place in the monastic movement, but did affect its independence. The monasteries had three important effects on the life of women. They provided a means by which women could have a religious vocation, they provided a source of education, and a means of service.<sup>40</sup>

The work of the abbesses gives us a picture of one of the few ways women exercised any role of leadership in the church during the medieval times. Joan Morris has done an extensive investigation of this in her book, The Lady was a Bishop. She has found that women definitely held administrative positions in the churches during this time.<sup>41</sup> Their role was limited, however, and they were not ordained as priests or allowed to serve at the altar. These exclusions are attributed to the taboos on women as being unclean during and after menstruation and pregnancy when they could not enter the church or communicate.<sup>42</sup> After a controversy and struggle of many years these independent abbesses were brought under male dominance and jurisdiction by the Council of Trent in the mid 1500's.

### The Reformation

The Reformation had several effects on the life of women. In a general sense it brought greater religious freedom to all society, women included, but in abolishing the monastic system in many areas and

---

<sup>39</sup>Joan Morris, The Lady Was a Bishop (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1973), p. 150.

<sup>40</sup>Harkness, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup>Morris, p. 138.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

providing no Protestant substitute, it deprived women of the benefits of the convent. Perhaps the greatest benefit to women from the Reformation can only be seen in retrospect. Throughout medieval times women had generally been looked on as the tempting seductress. Although the monastic movement was not formed to shelter men from the temptations of women, it inadvertently did so. With the elimination of the convents the home became the place where women could exemplify the finer virtues of the Christian faith: love, tenderness, sharing of goods, self-effacement, humility, reconciliation, compassion and the bearing of one another's burdens.<sup>43</sup> This served to return the woman to the place of dignity given her by the Bible, and, coupled with the far-reaching benefits of the Reformation and the Renaissance, sparked the beginning of a new day for women.

During the actual time of the Reformation little can be seen that changed the status of women. Georgia Harkness describes her plight saying:

Meanwhile the typical Protestant woman, like the Catholic, went on marrying, submitting to her husband's wishes, bearing many children, losing many of them, and having her own strength sapped and health endangered in the process.<sup>44</sup>

In 1595 it was debated at Wittenberg as to whether women were human beings. The conclusions bore a general tone of disparagement.<sup>45</sup> The description of women during this time must be viewed in the light of society as a whole, for the average person of this time did suffer many

---

<sup>43</sup>Roland Bainton, Women of the Reformation (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), pp. 9-14.

<sup>44</sup>Harkness, p. 83.

<sup>45</sup>Preserved Smith, The Age of the Reformation (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1920), p. 509.

physical wants. Only as civilization in general improved could the plight of women change.

### Outstanding Women

There are several outstanding individual women during the fourteen or fifteen hundred years following 300 A.D. whose lives give us a glimpse of womanhood during that time. The earliest of these, St. Teresa of Avila, was a Spanish mystic of the sixteenth century. Reared in an earnestly religious home, Teresa entered a Carmelite convent in Avila in 1536 as a novice. During her first twenty years in the convent she suffered many physical ailments and much inner conflict. Though she spent many hours in prayer she considered herself to be a great sinner. She began to experience gradual improvement, being helped by the sight of an image of the wounded Christ and the Confessions of Augustine. She spent long periods in prayer and communion with God. She began to feel the need for a stricter way of life within the convent which led to the formation of the Reformed Carmelite nuns. Until her death she travelled extensively starting new houses, forming thirty-two of these on her own. Just forty years after her death she was canonized a saint. She is an excellent example of the quality of leadership and piety that many women of the Monastic movement exhibited.<sup>46</sup>

A second outstanding woman was Anne Hutchinson, a dissident Puritan in colonial New England. She was born in England about 1600 and emigrated to Boston in 1634. She was an educated woman and had gained much respect and influence as a nurse in the community. She became involved in a political and religious controversy with the theocratic

---

<sup>46</sup>Latourette, History, pp. 851-852.

leadership of the colony over the question of grace and works and the approach to God through the Holy Spirit instead of ecclesiastical authorities. She and her followers felt that they were being directed by the Holy Spirit in their preaching. The authorities took this as a strike against the clergy and the theocratic government, and when John Winthrop, an unsympathetic governor was elected, she was tried before the general court. She was convicted of slandering the ministers and banished.<sup>47</sup> Later she was tried by the Boston church, led by the minister, John Cotton, who seemingly betrayed her, for she felt she had derived her teaching from him. One evaluation of the incident says:

His condemning her before the whole congregation must have been for her like turning the knife in a wound. His position at the moment was extremely precarious, and it was only by his opportune bending to the victorious party and his carrying out their sentence against Anne Hutchinson that he retained his influence in the community.<sup>48</sup>

Anne Hutchinson and her followers went to what is now Rhode Island and established a colony. Four years later, after the death of her husband, she moved to Long Island Sound where she and all but one of her family were killed by Indians in 1643. In Massachusetts this was regarded as a manifestation of divine providence.<sup>49</sup>

Anne Hutchinson's theological beliefs may have been dissident and against the grain of what was current theological thought, but she lived a life of steadfast courage and conviction. Her greatest

---

<sup>47</sup>Robert Pierce Beaver, "Anne Hutchinson," Encyclopedia Britannica (1966), II, p. 914.

<sup>48</sup>Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), The Puritans, I (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. xxi.

<sup>49</sup>Beaver, loc. cit.



contribution was the establishment of the colony in Rhode Island based on religious liberty.<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to note that she was opposed on theological grounds, not on the basis of sex.

Susanna Wesley is perhaps one of the most well-known women of Protestant church history. This is due primarily to her two famous sons, John and Charles, and her influence on their lives. She was born Susanna Annesley in London in 1669. Her father, Dr. Samuel Annesley, was a Puritan pastor. She received no formal education but was tutored by her father and acquired considerable academic background from him.<sup>51</sup> She was devout from childhood and carried strong spiritual qualities into her adult life. John Kirk, in his biography, specifically mentions her joy in the Lord, her prayer life, frequent self-examination and meditation as sources of strength.<sup>52</sup>

Prior to her marriage Susanna had placed her allegiance with the Anglican Church<sup>53</sup> and in 1689 she married Samuel Wesley, an Anglican rector of similar background. The new couple boarded in London for a short time where their first child was born. In 1690 they moved to their first parish, South Ormsby where they lived for eight years.<sup>54</sup> Six additional children were born there, three of whom survived infancy. In 1697 they moved to Epworth, a remote and largely inaccessible, but higher paying parish. Here they lived until Samuel's death in 1735.

---

<sup>50</sup>Harkness, p. 85.

<sup>51</sup>Rebecca Lamar Harmon, Susanna (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 13-22.

<sup>52</sup>John Kirk, The Mother of the Wesleys (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, nd), pp. 280-288.

<sup>53</sup>Harmon, p. 20. <sup>54</sup>Kirk, p. 91.

Twelve more children were born, with five surviving infancy.<sup>55</sup> The birth of nineteen children in as many years with the death of ten of them must have deeply affected Susanna. Perhaps this accounts for her deep concern and determination to do her best for the remaining children. When her husband died there was little money left after the remaining debts were paid. She lived with several of her children. In 1740 she moved in with John in the Foundry, the headquarters of his new "Methodist" movement. She died there in 1742.<sup>56</sup>

Susanna Wesley is remembered best as a mother. She taught her children strict self-discipline from infancy as well as provided their early education.<sup>57</sup> One author, Maldwyn Edwards, pays tribute to her as a mother saying:

Her skill and love and patience was repaid by the responsiveness and aptitude of the children. Even more she gained their love and lasting respect. If for a time they felt they were under law they quickly passed to the condition of being under grace. She gave them not only knowledge but a zeal for more; no merely forced obedience could have accomplished that. She survived the acid test of a good teacher that when left to themselves, freed from her control, they still had a great love of sound learning.<sup>58</sup>

She did some writing. Most notable of which was a Manual of religious instruction for the older children. The first one was destroyed by a fire in the rectory, but was rewritten in 1712. She discussed the existence of God, the origin of evil, divine revelation, moral virtues and the Apostle's Creed.<sup>59</sup> She certainly must have had a wealth of self-acquired knowledge from which to draw in her educational efforts in

---

<sup>55</sup>Harmon, pp. 6-7. <sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 156-163. <sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-65.

<sup>58</sup>Maldwyn Edwards, Family Circle (London: The Epworth Press, 1949), p. 67.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 68-69.

behalf of her children.

Mrs. Wesley once ventured into church leadership, at least only one incident is recorded. In 1710 Rev. Wesley spent several weeks away from home at a Convocation. The man he had engaged to take his place during his absence turned out to be a definite hinderance. Regardless of his intended theme he invariably preached on the virtue of paying one's debts, an undisguised slam at the Rector who, because of the low pay and large family, was constantly in debt. The substitute pastor held services only in the morning so Mrs. Wesley began holding family prayers in the kitchen in the evening, reading a sermon and saying prayers. This informal service grew to where it outshone the morning church service and two or three hundred persons attended. Complaints by the malcontents of the congregation soon reached the Rector. Susanna would have discontinued the service had her husband commanded her to, but she defended her motives so strongly that he allowed the meetings to continue until his return. The meetings did prove to ease some strained and bitter relationships between the pastor and the congregation. It began a new ministry of fruit and good spirit for the Rector.<sup>60</sup>

Susanna Wesley serves as an example of the courage, wisdom, and spirituality exhibited by countless unremembered women of this time. These women suffered and served in the face of unbelievable social and physical odds, leaving a definite impact on the lives of others.

Lady Huntingdon, another outstanding woman in the history of the church, was a patroness of the Awakening in England. She was born Selina Shirley in 1707 and became Lady Huntingdon on her marriage to the

---

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 52-56.

Earl of Huntingdon in 1728. She experienced an evangelical conversion through the witness of her sister-in-law, Lady Margaret Hastings. She was particularly associated with George Whitefield and helped him in the formation of the Calvinistic wing of Methodism after their split from Wesley and the Arminians. After the death of her husband in 1746 Lady Huntingdon became completely involved in the Revival. She contributed £ 100,000 and much of her jewelry and valuables. She especially sought and won converts among the royalty. She was also involved in appointing personal chaplains to propagate the gospel. She established chapels in several locations and assisted in seminary education. She eventually formed a work separate from the Anglican Church and superintended it herself. In 1790 she and a number of ministers and laymen formed an Association to oversee her Connexion. Until this time she had exercised full leadership over her chapels and ministers.<sup>61</sup>

A fifth outstanding woman of the period, Elizabeth Fry, actually lived into the nineteenth century. The activities in which she was involved are characteristic of the previous centuries and were largely brought on by conditions of that time. Elizabeth Fry was born in 1780, a part of a well-to-do banking family. Her family was a part of the "gay" Quakers, but by the time of her marriage to Joseph Fry, also a banker, she had become a "plain" Quaker. During her lifetime she became involved in many charitable pursuits. She began as a young girl teaching neglected children in her attic, which led to a ministry in their homes.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup>A. Skevington Wood, The Inextinguishable Blaze (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960), pp. 180-204.

<sup>62</sup>Janet Whitney, Elizabeth Fry (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1937), pp. 67-77.

Other pursuits were establishing a school for girls, feeding and clothing hundreds of persons, helping Irish and gypsy destitutes, giving out tracts and religious counsel, helping poor herdsmen, sailors, servants and those in almshouses and insane asylums, and being influential in the circulation of Bibles and religious books in England and on the Continent.<sup>63</sup> She is most well-known for her crusade for prison reform, particularly for women inmates. Conditions in the prisons were unimaginable. Women of all types and morals were jammed together with no diversion or hope. Some had small children with them. Elizabeth entered the prison alone, facing the women fearlessly. She organized them to better their plight, starting schools for the children and arranging for work for the others to earn money to meet their needs. She organized a Ladies Newgate Committee of outside women to help. She also comforted those who were about to be executed for minor offenses, a result of the harsh penal code. Her efforts at reform came to the attention of the House of Commons and her programs spread into other prisons in England and the Continent.<sup>64</sup>

Elizabeth Fry was also a Quaker preacher. She received this calling at her father's funeral in 1809. During the customary Quaker silence following the address she began to speak. Her biographer, Janet Whitney, describes it:

A sudden uprush of sweetness and love took place in Elizabeth's heart, a certainty of God and of life beyond the grave,

---

<sup>63</sup>J. H. A. Bomberger, The Protestant Theological and Ecclesiastical Encyclopedia, II (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1860), p. 344b.

<sup>64</sup>Walter Russell Bowie, Women of Light (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 65-70.

with all its accompanying joy. Without effort, as spontaneously as a child, she opened her lips to give that feeling an inevitable utterance. Her sweet, clear voice was heard saying a text in the form of a prayer: 'Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are all Thy ways, Thou King of saints be pleased to receive our Thanksgiving!' That was all. But the effect was electric. To her husband, her brothers, her sisters, her friends, and afterwards to herself, it marked an epoch.<sup>65</sup>

She was recognized by the Society of Friends as a divinely gifted witness of the truth.<sup>66</sup> She continually preached through word and deed throughout her life in acts of good will and charity.

### THE MODERN ERA IN AMERICA

The first half of the nineteenth century gave rise to three movements in the United States that have greatly influenced the role of women in American society in general and in the church. These are the abolitionist movement, the women's suffrage movement and the campaign for the higher education of women. All three of these crusades were long and arduous and had many outstanding leaders. These determined women led the way in opening doors of opportunity for women.

#### Changes in Society

Prior to the 1820's education for girls and women was very limited. Emma Hart Willard appealed to the New York legislature for an allocation of funds for a female seminary. One was begun in Troy, New York in 1821 and many others followed. The move for college education of women also began at this time. Among the first was Oberlin College which was Co-educational from its beginning. Many colleges for women

---

<sup>65</sup>Whitney, p. 162.

<sup>66</sup>Bomberger, loc. cit.

that exist today had their beginnings at this time.<sup>67</sup>

The abolitionist and suffrage movements were very closely related, and many women became outspoken in both areas. Some of these women, Lucretia Mott, Angelina and Sara Grimke', and Mary Livermore were directly involved in the church. The suffrage movement has its beginning at the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848, led by Lucretia Mott.<sup>68</sup>

Women also began to enter the professions in the early 1800's. The field of medicine was opened by Elizabeth Blackwell and Harriot Hunt. Ada Kepley, Arabella Mansfield and Mrs. Ezekiel Lockwood pioneered as women lawyers. In the churches the first preachers were Lucretia Mott and Mary Livermore, followed by Antoinette Brown, Olympia Brown and Phebe Hanaford.<sup>69</sup>

By the early 1900's many of the crusades in which women had been involved had become realities. The Susan B. Anthony Amendment, also known as the 19th, was adopted in 1920. College education for women became commonplace and there were few occupations in which there were not at least a few women. There was not, of course, complete equality in status, pay, and opportunity for leadership, and this led to the Women's Liberation movement of the 1960's.<sup>70</sup>

#### The Move for Ordination

One of the first efforts concerning the role of women in the church centered on ordaining women. Although the Quakers and the

---

<sup>67</sup>Harkness, p. 89-91.    <sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-106.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-113.    <sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 115-116.

Christian Church had ordained women from the beginning, most denominations did not as a general practice.<sup>71</sup> The first woman was Antoinette Brown who was trained at Oberlin College and was ordained in the Congregational Church in 1853. Other denominations followed over the next several decades. In the Methodist Church women were granted local preachers licenses in 1914 and ordained in 1924. It was not until 1956 that they were able to be members of the Annual Conferences on the same basis as men. The United Presbyterian Church USA began ordaining women in 1956.<sup>72</sup> In 1964 the Southern Presbyterian Church also began ordaining women. More recently, in 1970, the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church and the Protestant Episcopal Church followed suit. In all there are about eighty Protestant groups in America that give official sanction to women in the ministry.<sup>73</sup>

#### Denominational and Interdenominational Movements

One distinctive feature of the past one hundred or one hundred and twenty-five years has been the denominational and interdenominational movements of women. These two are closely related. Following the Civil War church women began to organize into groups to help those in need. One of the largest and most lasting of these was the YWCA. As the missionary movement spread and prospered overseas, women began to desire to serve abroad. Generally, single women were not accepted and several

---

<sup>71</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, The Great Century (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 401.

<sup>72</sup>Elsie Gibson, When the Minister is a Woman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 18-21.

<sup>73</sup>Harkness, pp. 134-135.



groups organized as "women's boards" to promote women missionaries. Soon nearly every denomination had its own women's missionary group promoting missions.<sup>74</sup>

The first hint of any interdenominational unity between these women came with the organization in the 1880's of special days of prayer for missions and other needs. Another unifying factor was the need for literature and study materials for promoting missions. This led to a third factor, the convening of regional schools of missions. In 1911 these various groups of denominational women celebrated a Jubilee, fifty years of service in missions. Following this the number of united interdenominational women's groups grew rapidly. The next several years saw several efforts at uniting these groups. Among these were the National Commission of Protestant Women and the National Council of Federated Church Women. In 1942 these various groups united to form the United Council of Church Women. In 1950 this group joined seven other agencies and twenty-nine denominations in forming the National Council of Churches.<sup>75</sup>

#### The Move for Lay Involvement

Perhaps the most significant movement within the church today that affects the role of women is the call for lay involvement. This has manifested itself in the increased number of lay delegates to denominational and interdenominational conferences and conventions, the Home Bible Study movement, and the assuming of some pastoral duties by laymen

---

<sup>74</sup>Gladys Gilkey Calkins, Follow Those Women (New York: National Council of Churches, 1961), pp. 5-7.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-88.

and laywomen. Laywomen are deeply concerned and involved in the lay movement. In denominations where they are allowed positions of leadership they are taking an increased role. In denominations where they do not have this freedom they are gaining it. In 1973 the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America began allowing women delegates,<sup>76</sup> and the question of the place of women was a major obstacle in the merger of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.<sup>77</sup> In 1973, a laywoman, Judge Margaret Haywood, was elected moderator of the 1,900,000 member United Church of Christ. The same group that elected her also amended the church constitution so that the language would be inclusive in gender.<sup>78</sup>

#### Unanswered Questions

All questions as to the place of women have definitely not been resolved to the satisfaction of all. At the Conference on Contemporary Issues, held in Denver in 1973, the issue, "Evangelical Perspectives on Women's Role and Status" was discussed. Nancy Hardesty of Christianity Today reports that two trends of thought seemed to appear. One advocated submission of women to men and the theological chain of command rooted in Genesis 2 and I Corinthians 11:13. The other emphasized the oneness of believers in Christ and a broad perspective of the role of women.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup>"The Big Issue: Women on the Move," Christianity Today, XVII (July 20, 1973), 44.

<sup>77</sup>"American Lutherans: No Reason to Kick," Christianity Today, XVII (October 27, 1972), 42-44.

<sup>78</sup>"Big Issue," loc. cit.

<sup>79</sup>Nancy A. Hardesty, "For Men Only," Christianity Today, XVII (July 20, 1973), 46.

These two philosophies seem to reflect corresponding trends of thought in the church today.

### Henrietta Mears

The contemporary woman who stands out as an example of a lay woman involved in the ministry of a local church is Henrietta Mears. Although she was an employee of her church, First Presbyterian of Hollywood, she rose to this position as a laywoman rather than as a professionally trained person. Miss Mears was trained professionally as a public school teacher and she taught high school chemistry in Minnesota for several years before going to California. From the time she was a young girl she had an interest in the work of the church and had been active in Sunday School and study groups during her college and teaching years. In 1927 she was faced with deciding between continuing her teaching career, seeking training for an administrative position, or seeking a position directly related to church work.<sup>80</sup> She was offered a position as Christian Education Director of the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood which she accepted. She served in this position for more than thirty-five years, until her death in 1963.<sup>81</sup> The Sunday School of the church grew in strength as well as numbers, from 400 in 1928 to approximately 6,000 in 1963. In her Sunday School she emphasized quality teaching of the Word of God. When the existing Sunday School curriculum proved totally unsatisfactory she began writing and printing

---

<sup>80</sup>Barbara Hudson Powers, The Henrietta Mears Story (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1957), p. 125.

<sup>81</sup>Ethel May Baldwin and David V. Benson, Henrietta Mears and How She Did It! (Glendale, Calif.: Regal Books, 1966), pp. 47-50.

her own, an enterprise that developed into Gospel Light Publications, one of the leading publishers of Christian Education materials today.<sup>82</sup> When the need arose for a conference and camp center close to the Los Angeles area she led the church in the purchase and development of the Forest Home Bible Conference Center.<sup>83</sup> She was one of the founders of the National Sunday School Association, and founded GLINT, a world-wide missionary organization formed to translate and distribute Christian Education materials around the world.<sup>84</sup> She influenced the lives of countless men, women and children through the Sunday School and church and her trips and engagements around the world. Miss Mears is a singular example of the many kinds of ministry laywomen can have in the church today. Particularly she is an example of how the secular or professional training of a laywoman can be used by God in the church.

#### SUMMARY

From scripture it is evident that women had an active role in the church from its very beginning. They were present at the cross, the tomb and at Pentecost. They played an important role as hostesses of the house-churches where the believers met.

The organized ministry of women was not extensive. There were three groups that functioned at one time or another during the first three centuries of the church. These were the widows, the virgins and the deaconesses. They were generally involved in some type of charitable work among the sick or poor, or a spiritual ministry such as prayer, with other women. The organized ministry among women was more

---

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 280.    <sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 1.    <sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

common among the Eastern churches than in the Western churches.

Although Paul is often considered to be against the active involvement of women in the leadership of the church, it is evident from his interaction with various individual women that he worked with them in the advancement of the gospel. He commended many women for their testimony and work for the Lord.

During the long middle era, from the fourth century through the eighteenth century, the involvement of women continued. Generally, however, this involvement was limited by the social and political conditions of the day. The extremely harsh living conditions severely taxed the lives of most women. One of the most common ways they could experience a religious vocation was in the monastic movement. Many women turned to the convents and served the Lord through them.

After the Reformation a monastic movement did not develop among the Protestants and their women lost these benefits. The Reformation did lift the image of the woman and returned much of the dignity and worth to her that the medieval times had taken away. This opened the way for future improvements in the church and other areas of society.

The outstanding women of this time are examples of the various ways women were able to serve the Lord. St. Theresa of Avila was a Carmelite nun who led the order in the establishment of a deeper spiritual life. Anne Hutchinson was banished from Massachusetts colony for opposing the theocratic government's rigid control over the spiritual life and beliefs of the colonists. She helped found Rhode Island, a settlement based on religious liberty. Susanna Wesley was one of the finest mothers of history. Her spiritual life and love of education was magnified in the lives of her children. Lady Huntingdon was deeply

involved in the revival fostered by the Wesleys and George Whitefield as a patroness and leader. Elizabeth Fry was a reformer, working in the prisons of England to better the conditions there, particularly for women. She was also a Quaker preacher.

The modern era, from the early 1800's to the present, has seen the greatest amount of change for women. This is true in all areas of Western life. The physical circumstances of daily living that had restricted the average woman of previous centuries were being overcome. This freed women to be more active outside the home, especially in the church.

Three movements led the way in changing the status of women. These were the drive for higher education of women, the abolitionist movement and the women's suffrage movement. Many church women were involved in the movements. During the same time women were beginning to enter the professions. Women labored for these causes for nearly one hundred years until they had become reality.

Within the church women began to be more involved. The move for the ordination of women started in the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. Soon after the Civil War women began to meet in women's societies in their local church. One of their main interests was in missions, both at home and abroad. These local groups soon joined to form denominational groups. During the first half of the twentieth century many of these unified for a greater impact on the world. The call for lay involvement in the church is perhaps the greatest force involving women today. They are taking leadership on all levels. There are still questions which remain, particularly those based on the interpretation of the biblical teaching of the role of women in

the church.

Henrietta Mears is an excellent example of how a woman became involved in the work and leadership of a local church. It is significant that her secular training was put to use in her church and around the world. She influenced the lives of men, women, young people and boys and girls as a teacher, a speaker, an author and as an example.

The record of women in the church is long and varied. Cultural practices and the circumstances of history have greatly affected her role and place in the church. One factor that consistently stands out is the fact that women during this time served God and the church within the context of their society and culture.

## Chapter 4

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

#### AVAILABILITY OF THE EVIDENCE

It is surprising to discover the availability of the evidence that can be used in determining the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church. The evidence available is not profuse, but it is sufficient for the task and inclusive of all areas, including the Old and New Testaments and church history. It is of absolute necessity to use a balance of information from these three areas in reaching accurate and valid conclusions. Failure to do so could invalidate the conclusions that are reached. For example, there are many regulations and restrictions on the activities of women recorded in the Old Testament. Conclusions drawn solely from these would be inaccurate, for the reasons for the restrictions can be found in the culture of the times. In addition, such venerations of womanhood as is found in Proverbs 31 are overlooked. We also know that the coming of the Savior did away with much of the Old Testament law, replacing it with a new law of love in Jesus Christ. In the same manner, the revolutionary teaching of Jesus that all are equal before Him can not be used to support the idea that "anything goes" as far as conduct in the church is concerned, for there are other principles to be considered. The whole of the information available must be used in forming the principles that determine the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church.



## INTERPRETATION OF THE EVIDENCE

In interpreting the evidence gathered and recorded in this paper, several principles will be formulated. These will come from the Old Testament, the New Testament, the applicable cultural data, and church history. These principles will in turn be used to apply the evidence to the purpose of the paper and in determining the impact of the evidence.

There are four principles which can be derived from the evidence presented in this paper. The first principle is that the wife is subject unto her husband. The first appearance of this is found in Genesis where part of Eve's punishment for her disobedience to God was that her husband would rule over her. This principle is evident in Jewish law and carries over into the New Testament, particularly in the writings of Paul. When Paul speaks of a woman being subject to her husband he is using the authority of the Law. The "new" religious liberty did not do away with the Law in the sense of nullifying it, but in revitalizing it with love. The Ephesian passage where Paul speaks of the love between the husband and wife summarizes this.

In relation to a woman's public life this would mean that she would do nothing that would bring dishonor to her husband. In the culture in which Paul lived and wrote this would mean that she would not go about publicly or in the church without a veil. To do so would be to act like a disloyal wife and a prostitute. For the same reason she would not speak to other men publicly or in the church. For a Christian woman to bring dishonor on her husband would severely damage his image as a man and as a Christian in the eyes of the non-Christian. These cultural mores would explain Paul's words in I Corinthians 11:1-16,

I Corinthians 14:34,35, and I Timothy 2:11,12. This awareness of the cultural backgrounds to Paul's words is not license to disregard them, however, for the "law" of the wife's subjection to her husband is still valid today.

The second principle is that there is a need for order in the church. This principle has its roots in the Old Testament as is evidenced in the explicit rules for worship that appeared during the time of the patriarchs and continued in the tabernacle and the temple. As the church took form this same need was evident. This is a particular Pauline theme. The reason Paul gives is to avoid bringing dishonor to the church and the Lord, thus turning some away from salvation. This principle further explains Paul's words concerning women in the church. In I Corinthians 14 the women were doing something that was bringing dishonor and disorder to the church. It does not seem that mere speaking was the problem, for from I Corinthians 11 we know that they prayed and prophesied in the church. There was something that is barely alluded to that was the problem. They could have been asking questions of men other than their husbands, causing a stir at such unbecoming acts, or they could have been calling out loudly from the women's section, disturbing the service. There are several possibilities, but these two seem to be the most logical. Such a noisy, disruptive service would not be conducive to worship or the preaching and teaching of the gospel.

A similar situation existed in I Timothy 2. Here the emphasis on maintaining the proper appearance and atmosphere to avoid bringing dishonor and turning people away is even greater. Verses 11 and 12 can not be taken out of the context. The reasons Paul restricted a woman's taking improper authority over a man are the same reasons he had her

wear a veil and not speak out in the public service. To use undelegated authority in teaching men would bring dishonor and Paul feared it would turn people away, thus negating Christ's work on the cross and his own calling. Both men and women had "tasks" to do to support the work of Christ and Paul.

The third principle is that there is a need for the Christian woman to pattern her life after the biblical concept of the ideal woman. A composite description of this woman would include her growing and dynamic relationship with the Lord, her love for and submission to her husband, her care for her home and children, and her "works" in the church or outside the church in the name of Jesus. The order indicates their place and importance in the life of the Christian woman. This concept is based on both the Old and New Testaments, with the Old Testament laying the foundation and establishing the customs and the New Testament adding the dimension of love and liberty in Jesus Christ. This principle remains valid for the Christian woman today and is applicable in determining the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church.

The fourth principle is that there is a need to serve the Lord within the mores of one's culture unless doing so would violate scriptural teaching. Generally this is done unconsciously. Customs and traditions are accepted and followed with little thought being given to them and are incorporated into the church. It is true that some cultural mores do violate scriptural teaching. For example, in the Ephesian and Corinthian cultures prostitution was a part of the pagan worship, but the Christians did not incorporate this into their worship for it violated the teaching of the Bible. They did take a strong stand on the

sacredness of the marriage relationship as Paul urged the Ephesians to do in Ephesians 5:22-37. In instances such as this the biblical teaching would overrule the cultural mores.

### INSIGHTS FROM HISTORY

One of the most obvious insights gained from the study of the history of women in the church is that events follow events in a logical sequence and before progress can be made in one area, steps forward must be taken in other areas that are seemingly unrelated. For example, leadership in the church was out of reach for the average woman who desired a husband and family until other developments in the progress of civilization freed her from the necessity of spending nearly every daylight hour providing care for her family. The Industrial Revolution brought both the inventions to ease her life in the home and the jobs that moved her out of the home and into the factories. Much later the greater ease of transportation, the world-wide missionary movement, and more time-saving devices in the home brought about the great denominational and interdenominational movements among church women. The development of the automobile advanced this tremendously.

History also shows us the types of ministry and service in which women have been involved in the church since its beginning. The lives of individual women are particular evidence of this. Women have served the church through their homes. Millions of women are in this category, with Susanna Wesley being the most outstanding example. Some women chose to serve the church through a religious vocation. St. Theresa of Avila is characteristic of these along with thousands of other nuns. More recently women have sought and gained ordination and are serving

the church as pastors and in other professional capacities. Charitable endeavors have long been a means of service for women. The widows and deaconesses were engaged in this during the first three centuries of the church. Elizabeth Fry and the women of the local women's groups of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries served others in need. From the beginning women have served in the local churches. Priscilla and Lydia helped establish their churches, and wherever men and women have gathered to worship women have given their time and talent to the church. Henrietta Mears is a contemporary example of these women.

#### APPLICATION OF THE EVIDENCE

The evidence selected and presented in this paper is done so with the hope that it will help men and women answer questions concerning the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church. It is not possible to formulate absolute and universal statements as to what the Bible teaches except to state that the Bible does not exclude women from the leadership of the church. The four principles discussed above must be carefully and prayerfully applied to each situation.

#### IMPACT OF THE EVIDENCE

The views on the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church presented in this paper are conservative and take a "middle of the road" position. There are those who are firmly entrenched in extreme positions on either side. It is hoped that the thinking of these persons will be modified by the evidence presented in this paper. For the vast majority of people who are concerned with the issue who are honestly questioning and seeking an answer it is hoped that the evidence will

provide an answer and a basis for personal convictions and actions.

### SUMMARY

In summarizing the evidence presented in this paper we see that the biblical teachings are the primary source. The Old Testament lays the background with laws and ordinances plus a historical narrative that sheds light on the activities of women who had positions of leadership. The high regard in which Jesus held women and his interactions with them set the precedent for the infant church. Many women labored with Paul in spreading the gospel. His involvement with them is shown in their work together and in his concern that their actions be in keeping with Christian conduct.

From Pentecost to the present women have been involved in the church. They have been drawn by the love of Christ, accepted Him as Savior and Lord and found a place of Christian service through the church. The lives of individual women such as Priscilla, St. Theresa, Susanna Wesley and Henrietta Mears bear this out.

In final summation, it is imperative to use the principles formulated from scripture in determining the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church. In general, any role of leadership is available to a qualified woman as long as the principles are not violated. Specifically, these principles should be applied to each situation when a question is raised concerning the leadership role of the laywoman in the local church.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### A. BOOKS

- Abbott-Smith, G. A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.
- Alexander, David and Pat Alexander (eds.). Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1973.
- Arndt, William F. and F. Wilbur Gingrich. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Bailey, Derrick Sherwin. Sexual Relation in Christian Thought. New York: Harper & Bros., 1959.
- Bainton, Roland H. Here I Stand. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971.
- Baldwin, Ethel May and David V. Benson. Henrietta Mears and How She Did It!. Glendale, Calif.: Regal Books, 1966.
- Bowie, Walter Russell. Women of Light. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.
- Bruce, F. F. Commentary on the Book of the Acts. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1954.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Spreading Flame. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1958.
- Calkins, Gladys Gilkey. Follow Those Women. New York: National Council of Churches, 1961.
- Calvin, John. Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians I. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1948.
- Carrington, Philip. The Early Christian Church I & II. Cambridge: The University Press, 1957.
- Chappell, Clovis G. Feminine Faces. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942.



- Clarke, Adam. The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ I & II. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942.
- Clinebell, Charlotte Holt. Meet Me in the Middle. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Conybeare, W. J. and J. S. Howson. The Life and Epistles of St. Paul. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964.
- Dana, H. E. and Julius R. Mantey. A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1955.
- Deen, Edith. All the Women of the Bible. New York: Harper and Row, 1955.
- Edwards, Maldwyn. Family Circle. London: The Epworth Press, 1949.
- Ermarth, Margaret Sittler. Adam's Fractured Rib. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.
- Gibson, Elsie. When the Minister is a Woman. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.
- Goguel, Maurice. The Primitive Church. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964.
- Green, Thomas Sheldon. A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament. London: Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd. n.d.
- Halley, Henry H. Halley's Bible Handbook. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965.
- Harkness, Georgia. Women in Church and Society. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972.
- Harmon, Rebecca Lamar. Susanna. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968.
- Harnack, Adolf. The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, I & II. London: Williams and Norgate, 1908.
- Hewitt, Emily C. and Suzanne R. Hiatt. Women Priests: Yes or No. New York: Seabury Press, 1973.
- Hodge, Charles. An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1860.
- Hoppin, Ruth. Priscilla, Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews and Other Essays. New York: Exposition Press, 1969.
- Hunt, Gladys. M. S. Means Myself. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972.
- Kirk, John. The Mother of the Wesleys. Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe. n.d.

- Kuyper, Abraham. Women of the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1932.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Women of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1934.
- Lasor, William Sanford. Great Personalities of the New Testament. Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1961.
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott. Advance Through Storm. New York: Harper & Bros., 1945.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Great Century. New York: Harper & Bros., 1941.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A History of Christianity. New York: Harper & Row, 1953.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Thousand Years of Uncertainty. Harper & Bros., 1958.
- Lollis, Lorraine. The Shape of Adam's Rib. St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1970.
- Lundholm, A. T. Women of the Bible. Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana Book Concern, 1948.
- Maclear, G. F. A Classbook of Old Testament History. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950.
- Matheson, George. The Representative Women of the Bible. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1907.
- Miller, Perry and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.). The Puritans I & II. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.
- Morris, Joan. The Lady was a Bishop. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1973.
- Novonty, Louise Miller. Women and the Church. Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Co., 1940.
- Oden, Marilyn Brown. Beyond Feminism. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971.
- Powers, Barbara Hudson. The Henrietta Mears Story. Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1957.
- Price, Eugenia. The Unique World of Women. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969.
- Prohl, Russell C. Woman in the Church. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957.
- Ramm, Bernard. Protestant Biblical Interpretation. Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 1956.

- Raven, Charles E. Women and the Ministry. New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929.
- Rice, John R. Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers. Wheaton: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941.
- Robinson, Kenneth L. From Brass to Gold. University Park, Ia.: Vennard College, 1971.
- Ryrie, Charles Caldwell. The Role of Women in the Church. Chicago: Moody Press, 1970.
- Schauss, Hayyim. The Lifetime of a Jew. Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1950.
- Smith, Preserved. The Age of the Reformation. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1920.
- Southern, R. W. Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970.
- Swidler, Arlene. Woman in a Man's Church. New York: Paulist Press, 1972.
- Tenney, Merrill C. The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963.
- Trepp, Leo. Eternal Faith, Eternal People. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.
- Uhlhorn, Gerhard. Christian Charity in the Ancient Church. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883.
- Vander Velde, Frances. She Shall be Called Woman. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1957.
- Vine, W. E. I Corinthians: Local Church Problems. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1951.
- Wharton, Gary. The New Compact Topical Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972.
- Whitney, Janet. Elizabeth Fry. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1937.
- Wight, Fred H. Manners and Customs of Bible Lands. Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1953.
- Willard, Frances E. Women in the Pulpit. Boston: D. Lathrop Co., 1888.

## B. ENCYCLOPEDIAS

- Beaver, Robert Pierce. "Anne Hutchinson," Encyclopedia Britannica, II. Chicago: Wm. Benton, 1966.
- Bomberger, J. H. A. The Protestant Theological and Ecclesiastical Encyclopedia, II. Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1860.
- Briggs, Asa. "Elizabeth Fry," Encyclopedia Britannica, IX. Chicago: Wm. Benton, 1966.
- Dembitz, Lewis N. "Rights of Woman," The Jewish Encyclopedia, XII. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1925.
- Lankin, Doris. "Woman," Encyclopedia Judaica, XVI. New York: Macmillan Co., 1971.
- Pratt, Dwight M. "Woman," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, V. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943.
- Shepherd, M. H. "Deaconess," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, I. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

## C. PERIODICALS

- "American Lutherans: No Reason to Kick," Christianity Today, XVII (October 27, 1972), 42-44.
- "The Big Issue: Women on the Move," Christianity Today, XVII (July 20, 1973), 44.
- "First at the Cradle, Last at the Cross," Christianity Today, XVII (March 10, 1973), 26-27.
- Hardesty, Nancy A. "For Men Only," Christianity Today, XVII (July 20, 1973), 46.
- Miller, Calvin. "St. Paul and the Liberated Women," Christianity Today, XV (August 6, 1971), 13-14.
- Scanzoni, Letha. "The Feminists and the Bible," Christianity Today, XVII (February 2, 1973), 10.
- Schmidt, Ruth A. "Second-Class Citizenship in the Kingdom of God," Christianity Today, XV (January 1, 1971), 13-14.
- "Sex Rights and Wrongs," Christianity Today, XVII (April 13, 1973), 31.
- "What People are Saying," Presbyterian Life, XXIV (February 1, 1971), 8.