

Caleb Rosado

WOMEN

CHURCH

GOD



A Socio-Biblical Study

JANUARY 4, 1991

Dear Ani,

Happy New Year! We stayed pretty close to home during the holidays (except for 3 days up at Fort Bragg over New Year's) and really enjoyed the respite.

This book came out recently and I just had to share it with you. How interesting to see in print (written by an Hispanic male!) many things that you and I already believe. I hope you enjoy it.

Bye for now. Hopefully our paths will cross soon.

Much love,

Arlene



WOMEN • CHURCH • GOD

WOMEN • CHURCH • GOD

A Socio-Biblical Study

For
this
we believe!!
Love
Carolene
1/91

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FOREWORD

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WOMEN • CHURCH • GOD

A Socio-Biblical Study

Caleb Rosado

Foreword by Leona Glidden Running

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FOREWORD

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

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

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

LEONA GLIDDEN RUNNING, PH.D.
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Theological Seminary, Andrews University

PREFACE

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

On November 9, 1989 the Berlin wall was breached, allowing thousands of East Germans to experience a new-found freedom. Since then Eastern Europe has not been the same. That these socio-political changes have taken place with such rapidity was an unforeseen happening that many thought not possible in their lifetime. Yet the fact of a broken Berlin wall stands as evidence that the human spirit is capable of change, even rapid social change. On February 2, 1990 the wall of apartheid in South Africa was also breached, making it possible for millions of black South Africans to begin experiencing full humanization. There is another wall that still stands erect in society and in the church—the wall of gender discrimination—which mars the character of God, violates the principles of God's Kingdom, blurs the mission of the church and continues to be a perennial source of hostility in society. Jesus broke all dividing walls of hostility on the cross with His message and practice of inclusiveness, with the result that "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" (Galatians 3:28). Such divisions, however, has been erected again in the church and are at the basis of male/female conflict in society. How this wall of gender discrimination can be broken is the purpose of this book.

The ideas for this book did not come overnight, nor were they the product of a few months of quick research. Rather they are the result of twelve long years of struggling with a

new understanding of God relevant to the needs of our world society, and the role this God desires for the members of the Church—both men and women—in fulfillment of their mission. The first struggle came in a graduate class on Church and Society I took at the Seminary at Andrews University in 1977. For the class project I decided to do an investigation into the whole issue of the ordination of women. Prior to my research I had no position on the matter. In fact, the leaning of my beliefs and thoughts was somewhat negative to the question. After considering the matter from a Biblical and historical perspective, and in terms of church polity, my views changed.

Later, as I got into graduate work in sociology at Northwestern, I realized how inequality is structured into the very fabric of our society and its institutions, including the church. My professor and friend at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether, taught me a great deal about women, the church and society that has left its imprint on my mind and in this book. During this same time period I also began to understand that many minority persons and women today are rejecting God because God is perceived as a stern, harsh being who sanctions oppression in various forms. Slowly and painfully my ideas about God began to change, and with them the role humans are to play in the divine/human drama. While serving as pastor of a Hispanic congregation in Chicago, I ordained my first woman as elder for local church ministry in 1978. With the establishment of All Nations Church in 1979, I came to the realization that due to the nature of the congregation—a microcosm of the world in terms of ethnic diversity—it would have a short-lived history if a new understanding of God was not presented on which the church would base its mission and purpose for existence. Thus began my own, and with me my congregation's, understanding of God as a Compassionate Being who ministers to us at all levels of human need. We were introduced to this God by God's son, Jesus of Nazareth, our Elder Brother, whose way is the way of com-

passion—love to God manifested in genuine concern for humankind. The result of this new understanding of God was the development of an inclusive model of ministry, which sought to cross all social barriers of race, class, gender and age, and included the ordaining of seven women as elders and some twenty women as deacons¹ during that first year of operation. Ordained women as elders and deacons have continued to be an integral part of the ministry of the All Nations Church since its beginning.

As a Hispanic male, I come from a culture that historically has been most oppressive of women, as embodied in the Latino tradition of *machismo*, an exaggerated sense of virility where the male dominates. I thus write from a dualistic minority/dominant perspective. From the position of a minority person in society, I have sought to understand the experience of women both in society and in the church, since our experience is similar, being one of marginal status, rejection and unappreciation. However, as a male I must confess that my views at times, especially early in my ministry before experiencing a consciousness awakening, have been reflective of a dominance—a *machismo*—not compatible with the gospel. But if the gospel means anything, it means change. This book represents such a change, a change not only in my own understanding of God but in how as males we should live out the gospel. It seeks to reveal a more inclusive understanding of the gospel as an agent of spiritual and social change. May it enable the thoughtful reader to experience the transforming power of the gospel to effect change in the life.

All the chapters of this book were originally given as sermons over the eight-year period I served as founding pastor of the All Nations Church. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the Revised Standard Version.

This book would not be possible without the fine assistance of several able people who gave critical comments and made editorial changes. My long-time friend and brother, Samuel Betances, was the first to help me rethink my

views on sexism in the ministry. Without his influence I would not have become a sociologist. I especially want to thank him for giving me my first understanding of racism, sexism and machismo, which ideas are incorporated in this book. I want to thank Daniel Augsburg, Kit Watts, Sara and Abraham Terian for their recommended changes. Kit especially gave me many helpful editorial ideas, all of which were utilized. A warm thanks also goes to Kenneth Strand and Faye Chamberlain for not only reading the manuscript, but encouraging its publication. Leona Running, however, deserves my most heartfelt appreciation for painstakingly editing the entire manuscript twice, and for her kind words in the Foreword.

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

¹The term "deacon" describes a function and is not a gender-specific term, and like the terms "doctor" and "lawyer" can be applied to women, as can the term "elder." From a biblical perspective there is no such term as "deaconess." This is a biblical translator's designation not included in the original Greek. In New Testament Greek, the term *diákonos* is used both of Christ (Romans 15:8), men (1 Timothy 3:8), and of women (Romans 16:1). Yet Bible translators have used different terms in English for the same Greek word to differentiate between men and women—deacon and deaconess respectively—though there has been no biblical warrant for this other than a sexist bias.

Introduction

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

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

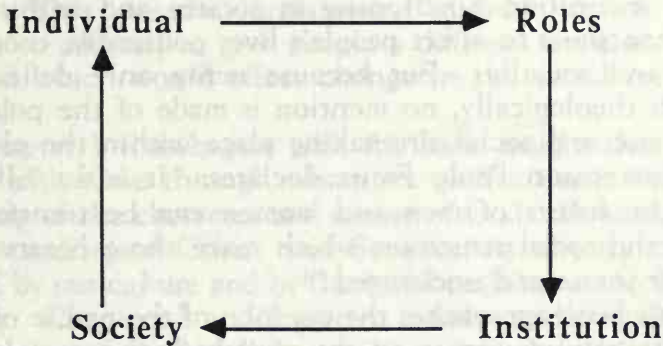
Essential to this understanding of God, however, is the observation that people using the same sources can arrive at different conclusions. There are reasons for this. And the discipline of sociology—the science which studies human behavior in social settings—can be most helpful in understanding the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

Why a Sociological Approach?

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

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

This is especially true when the church is the object of analysis. One of the basic premises of sociology is that no single institution in society can be understood in isolation from the larger society of which it is a part.² This is because institutions do not exist in a social vacuum, but are social-historical entities influencing and at the same time being influenced by their socio-cultural milieu. Individuals and institutions, in many ways, are products of the larger society of which they are a part. And the reciprocal influence of the one upon the other often goes unnoticed to human observation, but it is there nonetheless. Therefore it is helpful to visualize the reciprocal relationship between the individual, roles, institution and society, for each one shapes the other.



Individuals are shaped by the roles they play, which are formed by the institutions in which the roles are played out. Institutions in turn are shaped by the needs of society, which is in turn shaped by the individuals which comprise that society. This reciprocal process of social influence is true of any society. The church as one of the many institutions in society is not exempt from the influence of its environment. Though the church is also influenced by the divine, which lies outside the realm of the social, often the latter has the greater influence on the behavior of the church.

For this reason the church must not only be studied from a theological perspective, but also from a sociological one. This is because the church is not only a divine institution—the Body of Christ—but also a human entity with social, political and economic dimensions, and can be safely studied by both disciplines. Some, however, fail to make this distinction. Because the focus of believers is already a religiously-oriented one, a theological orientation tends to dominate their worldview, and many define the church only from a biblical perspective. Thus their understanding of the church is confined to a theological dimension only. James M. Gustafson declares: “Many make the explicit or tacit assumption that the Church is so absolutely unique in character that it can be understood only in its own private language.”³ All the while, however, the church, as a

social institution functioning in society and within history, continues to affect people's lives politically, economically and socially. But because many only define the church theologically, no mention is made of the political, economic and social sins taking place within the church. For this reason Paulo Freire declares: It is an "illusion that the hearts of men and women can be transformed while the social structures which make those hearts 'sick' are left intact and unchanged."⁴

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

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

Content

The basic thesis of this book is that patriarchalism—that form of social structure organized around male dominance—is at the heart of all forms of human oppression and sin in its social dimensions. This patriarchalism is believed by many to be God-ordained and therefore a legitimate expression of human behavior. The elimination of injustice in society cannot effectively take place without first addressing the basic question of the nature of God, upon which people, organizations and nations base their ac-

tions. This was the fundamental question which Jesus sought to address, to give people a different understanding of God which would effect change in the social order of things.

Chapter 1 thus begins with the basic insight that Jesus is the only One through whom we gain a correct understanding of the character and nature of God. However, our understanding of Christ and Scripture is already conditioned by our culture and by the social position we occupy in society. Chapters 2 and 3 give us a fuller understanding of Jesus' view of God in light of His action and attitude towards the patriarchal structures of His day, and His concern for a return to servanthood. Chapter 4 focuses on the manner by which Jesus acted towards women in light of the social mores of His time. It also includes an explanation of sexism, and proposes that sexism is a moral issue. In Chapter 5 the situation of women in the New Testament and in the Early Church is examined. The question of God being male is discussed in chapter 6, while chapters 7 and 8 consider the feminine side of the character of God. Chapter 9 looks at the issue of "headship." The final chapter concludes the discussion of the book with a careful look at Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the significance of the role God allowed her to play and its implications for the role of women in the church today. The book closes with three appendices: the first one deals with the family in a multicultural society and how societal changes have impacted the family, the second one contrasts two models for bringing about change at the local church level, while the other deals with concerns for inclusive language. I trust the content of this book will, if not change your way of viewing god and the role of women, at least "nudge" you into considering an alternate view.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

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

²See Appendix A for an elaboration of this premise as it relates to the impact of society on the family.

³James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 100.

⁴Paulo Freire, "Education, Liberation and the Church," *Risk*, 9:3 (1973): 34.

1

Jesus—the Exegete of God

The Bible clearly states that there is only one way to know God—through the person of God’s Son, Jesus Christ:

No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (John 1:18).

In the preceding verse (vs. 17) Jesus is contrasted with Moses. For the Jews in Christ’s day there was no one closer to God than Moses. Moses was the highest ranking spiritual figure in Israel’s religious heritage; Moses was the Deliverer; Moses was the Lawgiver; Moses was *the* Prophet; and above all, Moses had seen God, and lived!

But even though Moses was privileged to see God, Moses was *not* God. The best of human tradition was not sufficient to reveal God. Only God can do that. That is why the best Greek manuscripts have in the text above not “the only Son,” but “the only God.” This is where Jesus comes in, as One greater than Moses; One who stands in the most intimate relationship with God; One who *is* God! And it is He who has revealed God.

The text says, “He has made him known.” This verbal expression, translated in the King James Version as “declared,” comes from the word from which we derive our English word “exegesis”—to interpret, to bring out the meaning, to explain. Jesus is the *exegesis* of God—He is the One who explains, who interprets to human understanding the character of God, and manifests the full reve-

lation of what God is like, for only He has made God known. This is the meaning of the expression in the Gospel of John that Jesus is the "word" of God. As Albert Nolan says, "God does not reveal Jesus to us. God is not the Word of Jesus, that is to say, our ideas about God cannot throw any light upon the life of Jesus. To argue from God to Jesus instead of arguing from Jesus to God is to put the cart before the horse."¹ Thus everything we know about God derives from Jesus. All of our knowledge of God must pass through the spectrum of Jesus Christ, who is the Exegete of God.

This is why the text says, "No one has ever seen God, only the Son who has made Him known." In other words, Jesus is the only one who can explain what God is really like. Ideas about God that do not go through Jesus Christ are merely *eisegesis*—"reading into the text," reading into the character of God human ideas of God. The one who has been the greatest *eisegete* of all times is Satan himself. For Satan has been one of those *eisegetes* to read into God's character his own biases.

It is Satan's constant effort to misrepresent the character of God He causes [people] to cherish false conceptions of God so that they regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love. The cruelty inherent in his own character is attributed to the Creator; it is embodied in systems of religion and expressed in modes of worship. Thus the minds of [people] are blinded, and Satan secures them as his agents to war against God.²

Think of all the distorted concepts of God you hear from many a pulpit; think of all the distorted concepts of God used to instill fear in children in order to get them to obey; think of all the distorted concepts of God which lie behind much political decision-making, claiming America is right and other nations are wrong, and that God is on our side; think of all the distorted concepts of God which form the

theological basis for the actions of the white South African government towards Blacks; think of all the distorted concepts of God behind the rise of such white supremacy groups as the Aryan Nation, the Order, and the Klu Klux Klan. All of these groups use the Bible and some semblance of religion to justify their actions. Based on their ensuing understanding of God, they are ready to make war, kill people, and drop bombs on others who do not agree with their religio-political ideologies! And what is so tragic is that in the process all of these groups claim to be believers and followers of Jesus! No wonder Albert Nolan declares:

Many millions throughout the ages have venerated the name of Jesus, but few have understood him and fewer still have tried to put into practice what he wanted to see done. His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing. His name has been used and abused to justify crimes, to frighten children and to inspire men and women to heroic foolishness. Jesus has been more frequently honoured and worshipped for what he did not mean than for what he did mean. The supreme irony is that some of the things he opposed most strongly in the world of his time were resurrected, preached and spread more widely throughout the world—in his name.³

Often the situation is not any better in the church, among God's professed children. Think of all the distorted concepts of God behind much of the decision-making in the church which benefits one group at the expense of others, or which keeps women from having an equal share in the work of God. All are based on misconceptions of God, behind which is the eisegete of eisegetes—Satan himself. Ellen White again declares:

When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that

our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels.⁴

Many a sincere seeker of justice has turned away from a true understanding of God, because of oppressive actions perpetrated by religious leaders, all in the name of God. Jesus illustrated such a situation in an incident recorded by Luke (13:10-17), in the account of the woman who was physically bent for 18 years and could not straighten herself. Jesus desired to heal her and did bring liberation to her, in spite of the fact that the religious leader, the ruler of the synagogue, was opposed to such action. This behavior of the ruler of the synagogue was based on an understanding of God, which excluded redemptive action on the Sabbath.

Jesus came to remove this caricature of God, and as the true Exegete of God, He "brought out" the true understanding of what God's character is actually like. Since He is the "Word" of God, He is the only true Expositor of God. This exegesis of God, this divine interpretation and explanation of what God is like, took place during His earthly ministry.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, gives deeper insights into the character of God than people before had known. Six times Jesus declared, "You have heard that it was said, . . . But I say to you, . . ." Jesus took the old, narrow interpretations and gave them a fresh and broader meaning consonant with His understanding of God. In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus tackles the Jews' misinterpretation of the Old Testament principle of inclusive love for others. The Old Testament simply stated, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). But the Jews eventually changed that to include hatred for anyone who was not a Jew, though that was not part of the OT principle. In their mind, "neighbor" equaled Jew, while

“enemy” equaled everyone who was not a Jew. Jesus however broadened the meaning by giving people a new conception of God, consonant with the Old Testament. “If you want to be children of your Father who is in heaven,” Jesus declares, “you must love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44,45, free translation). Then He adds, “That’s how my Father is; He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. If you just love those who love you, then you are no better than the Gentiles—the very people you hate! But my Father is not that way, and you must be like Him” (vss. 45-48, free translation).

In Luke 15 Jesus gives us perhaps the clearest revelation in all the Gospels of what God is really like, as He portrays God as a shepherd, a woman and a compassionate father. He did it out of sensitivity to His audience comprised of outcasts, women and distraught parents. By so doing, however, He incurred the wrath of the religious leaders and theologians, who out of anger declared: “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1).⁵

In order to grasp this broader understanding of God—the subject matter of the next chapter—we have to go through Jesus Christ. A problem we often have is that like the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, we often interpret Scripture divorced from Christ, resulting in misunderstandings or in distorted concepts, such as the God of the Old Testament being a cruel and harsh God when compared with the New Testament God. We too need to follow the Christological principle of interpretation that, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, the Scriptures must be interpreted through the prism of Christ (Luke 24:27), for only Jesus is The Truth (John 14:6).

The various Christian doctrines are only “truth” when they are integrally connected with the person of Jesus Christ. Without Christ all the teachings of Christianity are merely pious platitudes and ethical declarations. Scriptural interpretation is not simply going through the Bible and determining what it says. No! Everything must

pass through the prism of Jesus Christ, who refracts divine light, giving us the full spectrum and true interpretation of God's revealed will. Otherwise we end up with conflicting perspectives.

Herein lies the problem when people say that the Old Testament order of creation demands a prescribed role for women, and that this is why they cannot be brought into leadership positions in the church, because the order of creation with its emphasis on order makes clear the subordination and submission of women to men.⁶ But from the very beginning man and woman stood in a relationship of equality. The creation of Eve from the side of Adam meant neither subordination nor domination, but mutuality. It is only with the Fall that the question of submission comes in.⁷ Thus what people call the "order of creation" is really "the order of the Fall," which was a by-product of sin, as the true order of creation was one of equality. However, with the coming of Christ there is a new order that supersedes the order of the Fall, and that is *the order of redemption*, as exemplified in Galatians 3:28, where freedom, mutuality and equality take preeminence.⁸ F. F. Bruce, the renowned New Testament scholar, in commenting on this verse, declares: "Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, . . . they are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not *vice versa*."⁹ Jesus and His redemptive action become the prism through which the light of interpretation is brought to bear on the text, in both Old and New Testaments. This is why Jesus declared, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

We often have conflicts in the church, and occasional false interpretations of Scripture because of an erroneous conception of God. And there are many who have turned their back on God, because the God of the Old Testament is perceived to be different from the God Jesus portrays in the New Testament. Yet the only God that exists is the one Jesus revealed. All others are false gods, for all Scripture is

revealed to us through Jesus Christ, the final revelation of God. This is the message of Hebrews 1: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature.” When the disciples asked Jesus to show them the Father, He told them, “You’re looking at Him.” “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). In Jesus we have the full revelation of God and what God is like.

Here lies the greatest challenge before the church—to reveal in its actions and beliefs the knowledge of the real God which Jesus restored to humankind. To be successful the church must give to the world a revelation of God’s character of love. Confronted by this challenge, Satan is putting forth his very best effort to anticipate that message with a distorted display of what God is like, designed at worst to get people to deny God’s existence, or at best to worship a false conception of God. It is the purpose of this book to give portrayal to a fuller revelation of God’s character of love.

Therefore if we really want to know what God is actually like, we must first of all know Jesus, the Exegete of God. For only He has seen God, and only He has made God known.

But if this position is correct—that Jesus is the *only* True Interpreter of God—than how do we account for all the different understandings of God, even when people, using the Bible, preach Christ? Part of the problem lies in that we see and hear, and yet are blind and deaf. Jesus said there are many people who have eyes to see but do not see, and ears to hear but do not hear, nor do they understand what He is seeking to teach them (Matthew 13:13). How is this possible? Here is where sociology can be of help, in enabling us to understand how people viewing the same reality can come up with different explanations.

Socially Conditioned Knowledge

All of us view the world differently, due to the cognitive process of "selective perception"—"the tendency of individuals to perceive those elements of a situation which support previous expectations."¹⁰ I remember when I bought my first Volkswagen. All of a sudden Volkswagens started appearing out of nowhere; everywhere I turned I saw Volkswagens. I never realized that so many people owned Volkswagens. Where did all these Volkswagens come from? Nowhere; they were there all the time; I just hadn't noticed them. Prior to buying a Volkswagen, these small German cars were not part of my selectively perceived world; they were just another car on the road which I occasionally noticed. But when I finally bought one, they entered my immediate perceived reality, and suddenly they were everywhere.

This is due to the fact that human knowledge tends to be socially conditioned. "The only knowledge that we have is a knowledge which is limited by the position which we occupy" in society.¹¹ In other words, "Judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his [or her] own enculturation."¹² Thus, how one looks at Scripture and how one constructs an understanding of God from the facts given in the Bible "depends on the position one occupies within society. In every historical, [religious], and political contribution it is possible to determine from what vantage point the objects were observed." Why? Because "our thinking is determined by our social position," and all spiritual and "political thought is integrally bound up with social life."¹³

This is why liberals in the church tend to see things differently from conservatives. "Even in the formulation of concepts, the angle of vision is guided by the observer's interests."¹⁴ Thus the reason why administrators and theologians, teachers and students, pastors and laity, Blacks and Whites, First World people and Third World ones, the rich and the poor, men and women, don't always see eye-to-

eye in viewing the same reality. This is because “thought is directed in accordance with what a particular social group expects. Thus, out of the possible data of experience, every concept combines within itself only that which, in the light of the investigators’ interests, it is essential to grasp and to incorporate.”¹⁵ For this reason, “people in different social positions think differently.”¹⁶ In other words, *where you stand determines what you see!*

Now just as there are differences in “styles of living” between the rich, the middle income and the poor, so also there are different “styles of thought”¹⁷ which differentiate people. We tend to think in “habitual patterns of thought,” which simply means “that people automatically use established patterns not merely in their overt behaviour but in their thought too. In most of our intellectual responses we are not creative but repeat certain statements the content and form of which we have taken over from our cultural surroundings either in early childhood or in later stages of our development, and which we apply automatically in appropriate situations. Thus [our thoughts] are the products of conditioning just as are our other habits.”¹⁸

Now this is not a mechanical, morally non-responsible development, however, for “if thought developed simply through a process of habit-making, the same pattern would be perpetuated for ever, and changes and new habits would necessarily be rare.”¹⁹ Karl Mannheim says, “A more careful observation . . . makes it clear . . . that in a differentiated, and especially in a dynamic, society the patterns of human thought are continually changing.”²⁰

Members of the various Christian denominations have been socialized within religious systems that have their own unique “styles of thought,” which results in a corresponding habitual pattern of thinking. Let me give an illustration. When the All Nations Church was founded, I established the All Nations Lectures on Church and Society, a semi-annual lecture series delivered by renowned Christian scholars from various denominations. Our

speakers for the 1983 Fall lectures were asked to speak on the subject of "Simpler Living"—the concern which the rich in the First World ought to have for the poor in the Third World. When I submitted the newspaper release, advertising the weekend, to the *Student Movement* [the campus paper of Andrews University, near where the church is located], I gave it as a title: "Lectureship to Challenge Our Lifestyles." What the *Student Movement* printed, however, was, "Health Seminar Slated for All Nations Church."

Now nowhere in the article did I mention a "health seminar." However, Adventism, with its concern for healthful living had already conditioned the editors of the *Student Movement* to "see" in the expression "simpler living" matters of health and a simpler diet. The real focus of the lectures—the social, economic and political implications of our affluent lifestyle in a world of want—was replaced with a focus on personal health. Thus, brought up within a religious environment that develops more of a personal consciousness than a social one, the editors could not help but misread an article on the Christian's responsibility towards the poor as an article on healthful living.

This unique Adventist style of thought, with its pattern of thinking, is a worldwide phenomenon due to the similarity of the message, the literature, the organizational structure, the preaching, and the Adventist educational system throughout the world. The result is a similarity in style of thought. This is not to imply that it is all negative, for it isn't. Uniformity can be advantageous to the advancement of the cause of God. But it may also be a hindrance by failing to encourage diversity in a world of multiple options.

Because knowledge tends to be socially conditioned, it is often difficult for people to change their habitual way of thinking. This is due in large part to the problem of "intellectual inertia."

The Problem of Intellectual Inertia

Inertia is the Newtonian law which declares that an object tends to continue in the same state of existence, direction and velocity, until acted on by a stronger force. Or to put it another way, it is the property of a matter which causes it to resist any change of its motion, either in direction or velocity. Though usually applied to a body of mass, the concept of inertia can also be applied to a “body of thought.” Because of “styles of thought” and “habits of thinking,” people tend to continue in the same “patterns of thought,” not changing direction or velocity, until acted on by a greater force of thought. Even then there will be resistance to change. In order for change to take place, the arguments for change must be stronger than the arguments for remaining the same. Because of intellectual inertia, it is much easier to convince persons of the correctness of their present mode of thought, than to change that mode. This is the reason why many new ideas fail to find a favorable hearing among people, because of intellectual inertia—the process whereby a mode of thought tends to continue in the same state of existence, direction and velocity in a person’s mind, unless acted on by a greater force of thought.

If a person is strongly leaning in a given direction—in other words, the velocity is high—it won’t take much to convince that person of the correctness of their position, but it will take a great deal more to convince them otherwise. Thus the old adage, “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” And I used the masculine terminology deliberately.

Having said this, I do not imply that intellectual inertia is necessarily a negative process. It depends on what is challenging our thinking. Some things should never change! The three Hebrew worthies in the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lions’ den, Peter and John before the Sanhedrin—there are times when it is imperative to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). But there are other times

when we need to do a mental check to make sure that intellectual inertia is not holding us hostage to erroneous human traditions instead of to the revealed will of God. Or as Jorge Lara-Braud says, "We must not allow the *accidents* of history to become the *articles* of faith."

Someone may be thinking: "If what you say is true, then what we are left with is a wide open field of interpretation." Yes, that is possible. But in actuality it will not be all that broad, just a healthy diversity, for people in the same social setting tend to think alike. Thus the Adventist way of thinking is much different from the Baptist way of thinking, which is different from the Methodist, which is different from the Pentecostal, the Catholic, the Reformed, etc. Each denomination has its own unique mindset. This is because in the same setting—the same historical, socio-economic-theological setting—members of the same group tend to think alike. But even within this similar mindset some diversity of thought will occur due to our socio-cultural differences.

Societal Impact and God-understanding

What does this understanding of socio-cultural differences have to do with the subject of this book, the role of women and the nature of God? Much, for our view of life, our values and our interhuman relations are based on our understanding of God. But while it is true that God is immutable and one who changes not (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17), our *understanding* of God does change in light of the fact that we live in an ever-changing society.²¹

Thus each generation must answer the question of God anew in view of their given social reality, so as to maintain a faith relevant to the needs of that society. In other words, while the Gospel is universal the pulpit is contextual—relative to time and place. *Though the social context does not determine truth, since truth is above culture,* it does shape the form truth takes and the manner in which it is presented. Thus while Jesus ever remained as God, His endeavor to

reach lost humanity determined the form He took, the time-period into which He entered history and the manner by which He communicated with humankind (Philippians 2:5-11; Gal. 4:4,5).

Let me illustrate this further. Every week millions of people throughout the world gather together to worship God in diverse settings. If we were to visit these different places of worship, we would walk away with different understandings and images of God, even within the same denomination.

Christians in Cuba, for example, have a different understanding of God from Cuban Christians in the United States. The same could be said of Jamaicans or Africans in the United States as opposed to those in their homeland. In fact, even in your own town, if you were to move from the church where you worship to other churches of your same denomination, you would discover subtle differences in the understanding of God being presented in these churches. And this does not take into consideration the way Methodists, Baptists, Christian Reform, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Adventists, Catholics or other religious groups in town view God.

To what do we attribute these differences? In part to what was presented earlier, to the fact that human knowledge tends to be socially conditioned. As was stated previously, a basic premise of the sociology of knowledge is that a people's understanding of God is shaped by those social factors that give formation to them as a people. It is out of this experience, unique to their culture (culture here understood as "shared understanding"²²), that a people begins to articulate questions about God. Herein lies the basic principle of theological and moral development: "*Judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual [or group] in terms of [their] own enculturation.*"²³ Because human experience differs from group to group, each must re-address the question of God out of the context within which each is found. In other words, we are a product of the society in which we are socialized.

In view of this, how are we to gain a proper understanding of the God whom we claim to worship? The answer lies in the Scriptures. But here again we have the same problem, if there is any truth to the influence of society on our knowledge. For "what we see in the text, especially its implications, is what our experience, our gender, our social position, and our political affiliations have prepared us to see."²⁴ In other words, when we open the Bible we are not just opening it *tabula rasa*—with a clean slate, a blank state of mind devoid of any outside influences. We already come to Scripture with certain preconceptions. And when we look at the text it may tell us something today which we might not see tomorrow. Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever marked your Bible because the text spoke to you at the moment, only to discover six months later a different message from the same text? This is why I have stopped marking my Bible; it was throwing me off. In one setting my experience was such that the text spoke to me in a certain way, but in another setting it spoke to me in another manner. I finally realized that if I leave the Bible unmarked, then every time I go to the Scriptures, I come to it fresh. As Jeremiah declares: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are *new* every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23). Yesterday's God will not do tomorrow; we need God afresh each day.

Thus, depending on our culture and socio-economic, political reality, we can all see different things in the Bible that speak to our unique experiences. It is thus possible for "Nicaraguan Sandinistas . . . to discover social implications in the Scriptures which we middle-class North Americans never would have dreamed of seeing."²⁵ And African Americans and Hispanics can come to the Bible and see things in the text that those who are not African American or Hispanic may not immediately see. The same can be said of the experience of women, Asians, and the poor in the Two-Thirds World in their approach to Scripture, in

contrast to the traditional view of the same by white, Euro-American males.

Let me give an example. In 1963 there was a bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. Four young African American girls were killed while in church in their Sunday School class. A study was made to determine what the preachers in Birmingham preached the very next Sunday. Now if you were a pastor in Birmingham what would you preach? The newspaper headlines read: FOUR INNOCENT BLACK GIRLS DEAD, DUE TO RACIAL UNREST. The study found that invariably all the white preachers preached from the New Testament—"Love your neighbor as yourself"—while all the Black preachers preached from the Old Testament—Justice!²⁶ Why the difference? The one group wanted to appease the crowds in order to avert a riot; the other group wanted justice and hurled a challenge at the Pharaoh-minded white establishment—"Let my people go!" Different positions, therefore different perceptions, resulting in different proclamations.

The important point I am seeking to get across in this whole discussion about socially conditioned knowledge is that the influence of culture and of our social position upon our thinking, our perceptions of God, and our interhuman relations are so subtle and so much a part of our everyday existence that we often are not even aware of their influence and how much they impact the way we organize our lives. Ignorance of these socio-cultural forces leads some to believe that the way they view God, and the people of other races, and the role of women in the church and in society is the pure distillation of the divine understanding of truth for all of humankind in all times and in all places, when all along much of it has been the result of their socialization. This is not to say that God is subject to culture, for God isn't. But much of our understanding of God is. Thus the person who is strongly opposed to women having leadership roles in the church may need to first check and see if she or he is not already coming from a cultural milieu where family roles are pretty well determined, and these in turn are

impacting the way they view God and read Scripture. The point is that people often claim to be speaking for God, when all along they are being influenced by social factors of which they are not even aware.

Some of the biggest offenders here are women themselves, who, as a result of their socialization and religio-cultural experience, have come to accept their unequal role and place in society as God-ordained and not to be altered. Why would women accept such a situation? The answer is that people who find themselves in a "subordinate stratum tend to accept the ideology that justifies their own low status, because they see the existing arrangements as 'natural' and proper, and do not question them."²⁷ This attitude is called in sociology a *false consciousness*, a subjective understanding where women give implicit support to a system wherein they themselves are at a disadvantage. As long as people in this position of social subordination continue to accept their status as natural or divinely ordained, it will persist. Thus, women who appeal to the Bible for such a view are their own worst enemies, for they have accepted in their minds and in their actions human behaviors and social structures, attributed to God, which legitimize injustice towards them as God's beautiful creation. "But if they come to see their situation as socially created—and unjust besides—they are likely to demand change."²⁸ This is what is currently happening in society and in the church.

Scripture, therefore, must be approached from the premise that we all tend to bring to it our biases and interests that we seek to protect. Recognizing and admitting this biased approach is already a strong start towards new discoveries. The real blind person is the one who thinks that she or he comes to Scripture with cleans hands and a bias-free mind.

The arrogance behind such a position is staggering. Such was the position and attitude of the Pharisees. And it may well be that Jesus had this narrow, bigoted mindset in view when He told the Pharisees, "You search the scrip-

tures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39,40).

NOTES: CHAPTER 1

¹Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 136-137.

²Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), 569.

³Nolan, 3.

⁴White., 536.

⁵For a more detailed understanding of how Jesus portrays God in Luke 15, see my book *What Is God Like?* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988).

⁶See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women In the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), for a full elaboration of this position.

⁷For a detailed exegetical study of the position of woman in the first three chapters of Genesis, see the following three excellent articles. Gerhard F. Hasel, "Equality From the Start: Woman in the Creation Story," *Spectrum* 7:2 (1988): 21-28; Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25:2 (1987); and part 2 by the same author, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25:3 (1987).

⁸Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 84.

⁹F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 190. Cited by Richard N. Longenecker, 84.

¹⁰George A. Theodorson and Achilles G. Theodorson, *A Modern Dictionary of Sociology* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979), 295.

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¹²Melville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 15.

¹³Mannheim, 125.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 273-274.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁷Karl Mannheim, *From Karl Mannheim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 132.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 133.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹See my article, "The Nature of Society and the Challenge to the Mission of the Church," *International Review of Mission*, 77:305 (January 1988), 22-37.

²²Howard S. Becker, "Culture: A Sociological View," in *Doing Things Together: Selected Papers* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1986).

²³Herskovits, 15.

²⁴John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 12.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 12-13.

²⁶William B. McClain, "The Genius of the Black Church," *Christianity and Crisis*, November 2 & 16, 1970: 251,252.

²⁷Ian Robertson, *Sociology*, 3rd. edition (New York: Worth Publishers, Inc., 1987), 262.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 322.

2

Jesus and the Patriarchal System

"The Church exists by mission, as fire exists by burning," declared Emil Brunner. Mission is the watchword of the church as it approaches the end of the twentieth century. If the church is serious about the mission to which God has called it, then it will have to wrestle seriously with its understanding of the nature of God. For genuine mission is based on a proper understanding of God.

The mission of Christ was based on such an understanding; in fact, that *was* His mission—to clear up all misunderstandings as to the nature of God. Jesus Christ came at one of the lowest points in the history of humanity. The foundations of society were crumbling; life was cheap, false and artificial. Religion had a deadening effect on people, and the worship of God was supplanted by the glorification of the human in a continual ritual of humanly constructed ceremonies. As the Divine subsided in importance so also did the worth of human beings. The poor became the machines of a pre-industrial society, to do the biddings of the rich, for whom "wealth and power, ease and self-indulgence were [regarded] as the highest good."¹

Such a situation led to the fashioning of God in the likeness of corrupt humanity.

The heart in love with sin clothed Him with its own attributes, and this conception strengthened the power of sin. Bent on self-pleasing, men came to regard God as such a one as themselves—a Being whose

aim was self-glory, whose requirements were suited to His own pleasure; a Being by whom men were lifted up or cast down according as they helped or hindered His selfish purpose. The lower classes regarded the Supreme Being as one scarcely differing from their oppressors, save by exceeding them in power. By these ideas every form of religion was moulded.²

Emile Durkheim, the eminent nineteenth-century sociologist, made a similar statement when he declared that religion is nothing more than society worshiping itself.³ Paul said the same thing in Romans 1:25, "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."

The only hope for humankind was the restoration of the true knowledge of God to the world. "Christ came to restore this knowledge. He came to set aside the false teaching by which those who claimed to know God had misrepresented Him."⁴

Christ's mission was to give human beings a new understanding of God, which understanding differed from the patriarchal concept of God current in His day. Today the mission of the Church must be like that of Christ—restoring to the world a proper knowledge of God.

The focus of this chapter is on Jesus and the new understanding of God He revealed, particularly as it relates to the patriarchal system of His day, and what implications this may have now.

Jesus' Conception of God Based on Actions

Jesus lived in a society wherein every aspect of social life went contrary to His concept of God. As Jesus began to move about Palestine, amidst the masses, the rulers, the rich, the poor, the outcasts, the women, the children, the religious and the profane, He revealed to them, in His life-giving words and in His life-saving acts, a picture of what God was actually like.

Jesus looked at the society of His day and its structural order, and saw that at the basis of that highly stratified society was a strong patriarchal understanding of God. In a patriarchal society the male—the head, the father, the ruler—was the one who held lordship over the rest. It was a society of dependence and domination, of slaves and masters, of class divisions, of inequality, of the weak overpowered by the strong, of the religiously educated and therefore privileged lording it over the religiously ignorant and therefore outcasts. And over this stratified social order ruled a God that had so ordered creation, and thus legitimized such structural divisions. In view of the religious orientation of society, God was seen as the one ultimately responsible for the present social order. The result was, as Ellen White says, “The lower classes regarded the Supreme Being as one scarcely differing from their oppressors, save by exceeding them in power.”

Jesus moved into that society and slowly began to remove, stone by stone, that patriarchal edifice, and topple it down. And He did it, not so much by His words (even though He did use words), but by His actions, as He began a praxis—action based on reflection—that slowly, in three and a half years, questioned the very structures of that society. How did He do it?

His very birth was the first divine step away from a patriarchal understanding of God and its corresponding structures of domination. He did not come as king, as ruler, as lord and master, but as a Servant, in the form of a helpless, vulnerable, frail child. He was born, not in a palace with pomp and human adulation, like human princes, but in a manger, with animals as nurserymates, and societal outcasts like the shepherds⁵ and Gentile foreigners like the Magi, as guests.

The place where He grew up—in Galilee—that multicultural, politically volatile region of social and religious outcasts, looked down upon by the puritan Judeans to the south, left no doubt with whom Jesus identified. This is why Nathaniel asked in amazement, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).⁶

The very titles that He used or avoided made clear how He viewed His own role in that society. He called Himself the "Son of man," meaning that He identified Himself with humanity, and therefore came to serve and not be served. He resisted the rich young ruler for calling him "Good Teacher." He refused the title Messiah, because it already was an emotionally charged, value-laden title, with political, revolutionary connotations. The Jews in Jesus' day expected the Messiah to come as king, lord and master, who would deliver Israel from all enemies and bring in the acceptable year of the Lord. For this reason they did not accept Him when He was born in Bethlehem, because He did not come as king, but as a lowly servant in a manger.

Instead of coming as Messiah King, Jesus came as Messiah, the Suffering Servant, a position Israel was not willing to accept. "We have been suffering for years, under imperial Rome. We don't need a 'suffering servant,' we need a conquering king!" And they rejected Him.

In another setting Jesus prodded the Pharisees for being so caught up with themselves, for wanting the best places of honor and being called "rabbi." The Pharisees loved to be called by their titles: "Teacher," "rabbi," "doctor," "father," "master." For this reason Jesus said: "But you [you, my disciples, you are to be different], are not to be called rabbi." First of all, you have one Teacher, God; secondly, "you are all brethren," brothers and sisters, equal in the Lord. "Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:8,9). Jesus used the word "Father" for God here, not in a patriarchal sense in terms of dominance and dependence, but as the underlying Aramaic *abba*—daddy—the love-expression of a child for his or her compassionate father. It reflects intimacy, warmth, compassion and accessibility.

Robert Hamerton-Kelly, in his book *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus*, declares:

One may wish that Jesus had chosen a less apparently "sexist" symbol for God. Reflection on the

meaning and function of the "father" symbol, however, shows that "sexism" in the current popular sense was far from his intention in using it, and far from the inherent meaning of the symbol itself. . . . The effect of Jesus' using it was to deprive the patriarchy, along with everything else which is compared with the sovereignty of God, of its absolute power. The fact that Jesus chose the "father" symbol for this purpose suggests that he intended to direct his message especially at the patriarchy and to reorganize it by freeing people from its clutches. Far from being a sexist symbol, the "father" was for Jesus a weapon chosen to combat what we call "sexism."⁷

Jesus, by introducing a new understanding of God as "Father," showed that God's children cannot be abused when they are regarded as "sons" and "daughters" of God. His treatment of women, children and Gentiles went contrary to the patriarchal social order of His day. He told His disciples, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man's foes will be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36). Some interpret this to mean that the Gospel will break up families. While this may be true, what Jesus is saying is, "I am going to remove these patriarchal structures, which divide and create dominance and make people dependent. My Kingdom is not that kind of kingdom. In it you are all equal, you are all one, because you are all children of God."

When the Sadducees asked Him the question about the woman who successively married seven brothers, as to whose wife she would be in the resurrection, Jesus replied: "When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mark 12:18-25). Many a biblical interpreter has taken this text to prove that there will be no marriage nor sex in heaven. Jesus, however, was really discussing the levirate marriage, which

served the purpose of continuing the patriarchal family, by securing its wealth and the inheritance within it, a concern important to the Sadducees, many of whom were upper class and priests, rich landowners living in Jerusalem—thus profiting doubly from the fees due them as priests and those due from the tenants who worked their land. For them the levirate law protecting and perpetuating the patriarchal structures of the 'house' was of utmost importance.⁸

Jesus tells the Sadducees that they have erred in thinking that the patriarchal system with its levirate marriage continues on in heaven. Such a position reflects a lack of knowledge of the Scriptures and of the power of God. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that

the eschatological being of men and women 'like the angels' . . . must be understood with reference to the first part of the sentence. It is not that sexual differentiation and sexuality do not exist in the 'world' of God, but that 'patriarchal marriage is no more,' because its function in maintaining and continuing patriarchal economic and religious structures is no longer necessary.⁹

Jesus then closes by saying that they are quite wrong, for God "is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (vs. 27). Jesus tells the Sadducees that the structures of patriarchy will not continue in God's Kingdom. Those are structures of dominance, dependence, and thus, death. God gives life and liberty to the captives, and thus is the God of the living.

In Matthew 19 the Pharisees sought to set a trap for Jesus by raising the question of divorce: "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" (vs. 3). In a patriarchal society women had no right to divorce; only men could divorce, and for the slightest cause. Jesus came back with, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives,

but from the beginning it was not so" (vs. 8). There were no structures of patriarchal, male dominance at the beginning. And to this beginning Jesus is seeking to return His disciples, a beginning reflected in His Kingdom, where all are equal and one.

Challenging the System

Finally, as His one last act, Jesus, like Jeremiah of old, takes on the single most oppressive institutional structure of His day—the Temple in Jerusalem.

And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple. And he taught, and said to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and sought a way to destroy him (Mark 11:15-18a).

Jewish society in Jesus' day was a religio-political society, structured by and centered around the temple. The law required every male Israelite to come to Jerusalem three times a year to worship God in the temple, and to bring an offering to present before the Lord. Since many had to travel a great distance, bringing an animal for sacrifice was somewhat of an inconvenience. Therefore the temple offered the service of providing animals of various kinds for sacrifice, depending on the nature of the sacrifice to be made and on the wealth of the worshiper, but all at a high price. Then too, since Roman coins were the chief means of monetary exchange, the Roman government allowed the temple to mint its own coins for temple usage. The religious leaders held that use of Roman coins in the service of the temple was a desecration of the

worship of God. Worshipers therefore, before they could purchase a sacrificial animal or buy an offering of any kind, had to first exchange their Roman coins for the temple shekel at a high rate of exchange. It soon became a money-making venture which benefited the temple officials at the expense of the poor worshippers, many of whom were sacrificing everything just to worship God.

It must be understood that the reason why all this legalized exploitation was permitted in the temple in the first place was that the chief priests and scribes—the theologians—had fashioned God in their own image, to legitimize their own interests. Thus their God actually functioned as an exploiter.

Jesus knew that it is an “illusion that the hearts of men and women can be transformed while the social structures which make those hearts ‘sick’ are left intact and unchanged.”¹⁰ Therefore the time for healing the sick and preaching good news to the poor and proclaiming release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind and setting at liberty those who are oppressed, was now over! The day of the Lord had arrived; the day of vengeance of our God. This was Judgment Day! “Gentlemen, it is closing time!” And no deceptive theology of institutionalism based on “this is the temple of the Lord, therefore we are safe!” could alter the verdict.¹¹ Jesus, therefore, by cleansing the temple and casting out the money-changers, was putting an end to this institutionalized exploitation which was making people’s hearts sick. The central purpose of Jesus’ action, and the meaning behind its significance, was His desire to give people and religious leaders of His day, and every day since, a new understanding of the nature of God, and that all peoples, no matter their race, class or gender, have equal access to Him.

Since the entire nation and its social structures were organized in harmony with a domineering, patriarchal concept of God, the act of collective worship centered around a God who apparently sanctioned this exploitation. Jesus, by cleansing the temple, was putting an end to this socially

constructed God, who benefited the powerful, and replaced it with the God of compassion, who came to serve humanity.

The temple officials had so structured the layout of the temple as to exclude people from entry into the temple, thereby protecting their vested interests. There was the Court of the Gentiles, beyond which foreigners could not go; there was the Court of Women, beyond which Israelite women could not pass; then there was the Court of Israel, the men's court, beyond which laymen could not enter; and finally there was the Court of Priests, where only priests were allowed. In declaring, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations" (Mark 11:17), Jesus was announcing the new universalism of God and an end to all exclusivisms—no one would be excluded from the presence of God.¹² In His declaration of universalism, Jesus, by breaking down the dividing wall of hostility that created social barriers in people's access to God (Ephesians 2:14-16), was proclaiming a new redemptive social order: *That all of God's children are one and have equal access to God.* "There is neither Jew nor Greek [no division based on racial and ethnic differences], there is neither slave nor free [no division based on social class], there is neither male nor female [no division based on sex and gender]; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This suggests that keeping women and ethnic minorities from full access to the temple is a human construction that goes contrary to the purposes of God for all humankind.

This new truth was dramatically emphasized when Jesus breathed His last breath on the cross, and "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). This final act, brought about by God, made it clear that God's very presence, symbolized by the Holy of Holies, is now accessible to all, bar none. Women, Gentiles and the laity had been excluded; now they all have free access to the temple. There are now no more holy places, for Jesus Himself is the Temple. And where two or three are gathered in His name, Jesus promised He would be there in their midst (Matthew 18:20).

The grand significance of the rending of the veil was that *God in actuality* stepped in and set aside the old order and ushered in the new one. The old order of the Fall with its emphasis on order, subordination, submission, structured separation and inaccessibility to God, has now been superseded by the new order of redemption, where freedom, equality, mutuality, restored relationships and accessibility to God take preeminence. A new understanding of God was to be given to the world—that God is not a Being removed from God’s children and hidden away in sacred cloisters, but is a compassionate God, close to God’s children, whose “door” is always open and God’s presence accessible to all.

Matthew tells us that after He drove out the money-changers, the blind, the lame and the children came to Jesus and He healed and blessed them. By this action Jesus showed what God was really like, a God of compassion; and what true worship was all about, serving humanity at their deepest level of need.

Jesus revealed to the world a God that the world has never fully understood and to this day the Christian Church has yet to fully grasp—a God who challenges and opposes structures of oppression, especially those established in the name of religion. This is what Jesus had declared to be the “unpardonable sin,” the sin against the Holy Spirit—attributing to God the work of Satan and to Satan the work of God (Matthew 12:22-32). Thus the God of Jesus was different, different from the God of the religious leaders, different from the God of the Pharisees. And for this reason He was crucified.

It is too often the case that whenever a person, a group or an organization challenges the privileged position of the ones in power, they not only get rejected, sometimes they get crucified!

We need to remember that a major reason why Jesus was crucified was because of blasphemy—He was charged with blaspheming God. Was this charge true or false? Was Jesus guilty of blaspheming God? The answer is Yes, He was guilty! From the perspective of the Pharisees and religious

leaders He was blaspheming *their* understanding of God, for His God was different! Therefore by His preaching and practice Jesus undermined the God of the Pharisees, as well as the very structures based upon their distorted concept of God. The religious leaders understood this clearly, and for this reason declared: "If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation" (John 11:48). Commentators have usually limited the expression "our holy place" to mean the physical temple, but it can be broadened to include the special privileged position of power that accrued to those who anointed themselves with it. The religious leaders knew that Jesus' teaching as well as His understanding of God did not allow for privileged positions of power for self-interest. In His Kingdom there was no room for such selfishness. In either case, both their position and their temple would be destroyed. Caiaphas therefore concluded: "You plainly don't understand what is involved here. You do not realize that it would be a good thing for us if one man should die for the sake of the people—instead of the whole nation being destroyed" (John 11:50, Phillips). Thus, Jesus, by His life and the final testimony of His death, "radically questioned social and religious hierarchical and patriarchal relationships."¹³

NOTES: CHAPTER 2

¹Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 74-76.

²*Ibid.*, 75,76.

³Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 388.

⁴White., 76.

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- ⁵For a study on the role of the shepherds at the birth of Christ, see Caleb Rosado, "To Shepherds!" *Adventist Review* (December 22, 1988): 10,11.
- ⁶For a study of the attitudes towards Galilee in Christ's day, see Caleb Rosado, "The Significance of Galilee," *Ministerial Digest* 3:2 (Spring 1985), Lake Union Conference, Berrien Springs, MI.
- ⁷Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 102,103.
- ⁸Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 144.
- ⁹*Ibid.*
- ¹⁰Paulo Freire, "Education, Liberation and the Church," *Risk*, 9:3 (1973): 34.
- ¹¹Cf. Caleb Rosado, "The Deceptive Theology of Institutionalism," *Ministry* (November 1987): 9-12.
- ¹²Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 73.
- ¹³Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "'You are not to be called Father,' Early Christian History in a Feminist Perspective." *Cross Currents*, 19:3: 317.

3

The Return to Servanthood

The central message of Jesus in the Gospels is a call to *servanthood*—“Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 23:10,11). This statement that the greatest is the servant, and that the first shall be last, is used seven times by Jesus in the Gospels.¹ The most significant use is the one found in Mark 10:35-45, where James and John asked Jesus for the best places in His kingdom. They suffered from the burning lust to be first, to gain recognition, to feel important, to be admired. It is an instinct which Martin Luther King, Jr., called “the drum major instinct.” It is the desire to be out front, the desire to lead the parade, the desire to be first, to achieve distinction—this “drum major instinct.” The desire to be praised, King says, “is something of a Vitamin A to our egos.”²

Alfred Adler, the psychoanalyst, declared this to be the main force in life. Freud had said it was sex, but Adler argued that the quest for recognition, the desire for distinction, the craving for attention to be first is the most basic drive of human life.³

It was this drive that prompted James and John to ask Jesus, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Knowing where power resided in a patriarchal society, they wanted it all. Jesus then said: “You do not know what you are asking.” They did not understand the nature of God’s kingdom. Jesus

said to them: "You don't even understand that My Kingdom is not that way. Can you drink the cup?" They arrogantly said, "Yes! Of course!"

When the ten heard this, they were angered, because secretly they all wanted power. They also were motivated by the "drum major instinct." Jesus called them all to Him and said: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them." He then adds: "But it shall not be so among you" (vss. 42, 43). Jesus classifies as "Gentiles" all who lord it over others, and He sees such action as incompatible with His Kingdom, and with the nature of His Father's character. It may be that way in the world, but that is not the way it is to be in my Church. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all." Why? Because Jesus has given them an example: "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (vss. 44, 45).

It is easy to forget the hard sayings of Jesus, or even misconstrue them, especially when they go against our practice. We often take this sevenfold message of the first being last and the greatest being the least, and unconsciously use it to justify our hierarchical structures. We rely on a patriarchal concept of God, which Jesus came to set aside, to set up leaders as lords and princes, and then baptize this lordship by calling it "service."⁴

Jesus has called the church, as He calls individuals, not to place itself first, but to serve others. This fact raises a crucial question: Is the mission of the church one to defend itself or to defend humanity? If it is the first, then the church becomes an end in itself and is no longer the means of making hope visible. But if it is the second, then the church follows its Lord in carrying out His mission. Too often the church finds itself thinking that God is on its side, especially when the focus of its mission is inward. There is something that is so self-deceiving about such self-serving action; it leads one to believe that one is in the right, when at

times one may be in the wrong. The words of Abraham Lincoln to some priests during the Civil War seem to apply here: "Let us never say that God is on our side. Let us rather pray that we may be found on the side of God."

James and John felt that by having the best positions and the most power they would best be serving God. Jesus' example reminds us that the basis of Christianity is self-sacrificing service to others. This should motivate all human actions within the body of Christ. The authority that God gives the church is not authority to lord it over, but authority to be of service to others. It is not authority of lordship that God wants, but authority of servanthood.

Servanthood vs. Servitude

But what about people whose social position has already relegated them to servitude? There is a fundamental difference between servanthood and servitude. Servitude is a forced social status, imposed on a person by another, depriving that person of his/her human dignity and the freedom to choose his/her own course of action and life options. Servanthood, on the other hand, is a voluntary action. A person of his/her own free-will chooses to be of service to others. Human dignity is at stake in servitude; but it is enhanced in servanthood. Jesus condemned servitude, but He encouraged servanthood.

The incident with Mary and Martha in Luke 10 gives us an example of how Jesus deals with people who were in a state of servitude in society—He reverses their roles. The one person whom He rebukes for being "too much occupied with serving" is a woman, Martha. By all social conventions Mary should have been in the kitchen with Martha. But Jesus was not interested in keeping women in the kitchen. His words suggest that He called women to enter new realms and accomplish their full potential. Jesus "affirmed Mary's right to come out of the woman's role of [servitude] and become an equal member in the circle of disciples."⁵ "Mary

has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42).

Too often our concept of God is not reflective of Jesus' understanding of God. Jesus told Pilate: "My kingship is not of this world" (John 18:36). Traditionally some have interpreted this text to mean that the church should not get involved in issues other than spiritual ones. Some hold that we should patiently endure the hardships, abuses and injustices of this world, until the time when God ushers in the next. But this is a misunderstanding of the text. The key word in this text is the word "of." The Greek word is *ek*, meaning "out of," "from," "the point of origin." What Jesus is saying is, My kingdom does not *proceed* out of this world. The principles which govern my kingdom do not come from this world, but from another world—a heavenly one. If they came from this world, then my servants would fight. My kingdom, however, is based on, comes out of, proceeds from, *originates* in another world. Therefore, my servants *behave differently*, because they are guided by principles of action from another world, which govern their practice in this one.

The Bible and the Patriarchal Perspective

Some may feel that because a patriarchal view is embedded in the Bible the expansion of women's roles and values is not permitted. It is true the Bible is written within a patriarchal understanding of God. God is portrayed as King, Lord, Master, Ruler. When we go to Paul, we see the struggle waging in his letters between his old pharisaism concerned with the order of the Fall and the liberating theology of Christ based on the new social order of redemption. This dual tension is reflected in Paul's old patriarchal view where husbands are to lord it over their wives who are to be submissive (1 Timothy 2:11-15), on the one hand, and the new servanthood theology of Jesus impacting his life, on the other, where all are one and equal in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

Because the Bible is written from a patriarchal perspective, this perspective becomes a serious concern for people, and it may result in their desire to maintain things as they are, and even demand that this be so. Even the Ten Commandments are written from a patriarchal perspective. The tenth commandment on covetousness portrays women as the property of men, and not even the most important property at that, for they come second behind the "house"; "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, . . ." (Exodus 20:17). How do we reconcile this reality with the fact that the Ten Commandments are the only portion of Scripture actually written by the finger of God? We do it by realizing that God simply limited Himself in speaking to that generation, in imagery and language arising out of their socio-economic setting which they were able to understand. If God were to give the Ten Commandments for the first time to human beings now living in a post-industrial, urbanized society, and no longer in an agrarian one, do you think God would still talk about coveting our neighbor's "manservant," "maidservant" and "ox"? I don't think so.

As stated previously, human knowledge tends to be socially conditioned. None of us—not even biblical writers—ever apprehends truth in a social vacuum. Which means that in patriarchal societies like Moses' and Paul's, they understood God in terms reflective of their setting. God, in communicating with humanity, used self-descriptive imagery reflective of their time and space. Thus for David, God was a "shepherd" (Psalm 23). Though the Bible is written from a patriarchal perspective, I would suggest that this patriarchal understanding of God is not how God actually is. It may have been a relevant imagery by which God communicated in times past to an agrarian society with a patriarchal form of social organization. But if Jesus in His day sought to change that imagery of God to one reflective of the needs of His day, what about the church today? The church now faces the challenge of an information society in an urbanized, global context, which is raising functional

questions about God in relationship to human experience: On whose side is God? Does the blood of Abel cry out to God for the sins of Cain? Is not the God of the Bible the One who hears the cry of the oppressed, and stands up against Pharaoh and demands justice—"Let my people go!"? And so the voices of liberation theology, raising functional questions of God, are heard from all corners of the world—Latin America, Africa, Asia, Black and Hispanic America and the female world.

Because truth is progressive and society is continually changing, we today understand God in a different light from people in biblical times. Failure to understand this, however, has left some in the position of accepting the patriarchal framework of the Bible as the norm of social organization for all societies and cultures, irrespective of time and place. The result is an oppressive application to our times, where power and privilege reside in a select few, and because God is perceived as male only men can be ordained to the ministry, and African Americans must bear the curse of Ham.

Let me share with you right here the most eye-opening concept of this book: *The Bible does not necessarily reflect the thinking of God.* The Bible is written from a perspective that is not completely reflective of God. The Christian writer Ellen G. White makes a most insightful statement with regard to this point:

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen.⁶

The Scriptures depict how *human beings* understood God, as God spoke to them. They in turn wrote about God within their cultural styles of thought and habitual patterns of thinking reflective of their time. Some might ask: "If that

is the case, how can we really know what God is actually like?" I suggest that this is why Jesus Christ came. Jesus knew that even though some forty "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21), that was not sufficient. Though they had been "moved by the Holy Spirit," they were nevertheless men, influenced by their culturally conditioned patterns of thought and social organization.

Jesus had to come as the incarnate Word of God and take on human flesh, in order to reveal by His actions the thinking and nature of God. This is why John calls Him "The Word of God"—the One who makes audible the thoughts of God (John 1:1). In concurrence Hebrews declares: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Or as John said (in light of the best manuscripts): "No one has ever seen God; [no one knows what God is like, except] the Unique One, God, the Eternally Existent One in the bosom of the Father, [and] he has made him known" (John 1:18). *In Jesus, then, we have the ultimate revelation of God.*⁷ The reason why Jesus is able to fully reveal God is because Jesus Himself is God!

Conclusion

When Jesus began His earthwalk, humankind desperately needed a revelation of a compassionate, loving God that would break down the structures of dominance, dependence and death which gripped the social and religious institutions and people's daily lives. In Jesus such a God was revealed.

The same God is to be revealed before Christ's second coming. In *Christ's Object Lessons* we read: "The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of [God's] character of love."⁸ If this is "the last message" to be given, it is because it has not yet been given. And how is God's character to be manifested? "The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own

life and character [and that includes 'institutional life and character'] they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."⁹

Unless we address in our personal and institutional life and character the basic question of the nature of God, then the mission of the church will go for naught.

What I have been trying to express in these last two chapters is that at the heart of all forms of oppression—be they sexism, racism, classism, ageism, or capitalism, in a religious, political, economic or social guise—lies a patriarchal understanding of God, to which appeal is made in order to legitimize and justify oppression. All efforts to rectify problems of injustice, whether at an individual or structural level, which do not address the basic question of the nature of God, upon which people, organizations and nations base their actions, will be futile as an attempt to bring about a lasting corrective to the order of things. It is like trying to de-leaf a tree by plucking the leaves, instead of cutting the roots. We need to get at the "roots" of the problem of oppression in the world today. Thus the debate over oppression, in whatever forms it is manifested, is ultimately a debate over the nature of God.

This was the chief concern of Jesus, and thus, the central focus of His mission—to reveal God's character. "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus Christ came to put an end to a patriarchal understanding of God, and restore in humankind a proper knowledge of God, with a corresponding praxis, best exemplified in His life and ministry of *service*. And He challenges His followers to so order their lives, their interhuman relationships, and their organizational structures, that these may reflect His call to *servanthood*.

Thus, the message of Jesus for the mission of His Church in these last days is a *return to servanthood*.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:16-17).

NOTES: CHAPTER 3

¹Cf. Mark 9:35; 10:41-45; Matthew 18:4; 20:25-28; 23:11; Luke 9:48; 22:24-27.

²Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon, "The Drum Major Instinct."

³*Ibid.*

⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary—The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 84.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 21.

⁷See Caleb Rosado, "Jesus, the Universal Picture of God" *Adventist Review* (June 4, 1989): 14-16.

⁸Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1941), 415-416.

⁹*Ibid.*

4

Jesus and the Social Status of Women

And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to entrap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men, but truly teach the way of God" (Mark 12:13, 14).

These words about Jesus, uttered by His enemies in a deceptive manner to throw Him off guard, are the most honest and straightforward testimony in all the New Testament as to what Jesus was actually like. It is one thing for your friends to declare such things about you. One could always say they are biased. But it is entirely another matter for your enemies to say the same. Even though the words were hypocritical, the purpose being to entrap Jesus, they represent a most trustworthy assessment of Jesus' life and ministry.

Notice the four things the Pharisees declared of Jesus: (1) that Jesus was a person of sincere, honest integrity—"we know that you are true"—His *character*; (2) that concern for what others might think or say about Him had no influence on what He said or did—"and care for no man"—His *reputation*; (3) that He was not swayed by a show of partiality or what others might do to Him if He did not take into account with whom He was dealing—"for you do not regard the position of men"—His *position*; and (4) that He in a very clear manner, one which left no doubts as to what He was about,

declared the type of conduct God required—"but truly teach the way of God"—His *message*.

Perhaps one area where Jesus' concept of God manifested itself as radically different from that of the religious leaders of His day, and may have prompted the above declaration, was *His attitude and action toward women*.

In order to understand Jesus' attitude and action toward women, we need to consider the social status of women in Jesus' day.

Women In Jesus' Day

Women, as well as children, had a low and insignificant social status during the time of the New Testament. The value of women was seen only in terms of sex and motherhood. Up to the age of twelve and a half—the period at which the child became a woman—she was the property of her father, with no rights of her own.¹ In marriage she became the property of her husband, with very few rights. The right of divorce, for example, was the exclusive right of the husband, who could divorce his wife if he found "some indecency in her" (Deuteronomy 24:1). In Christ's day, the expression "some indecency" was interpreted to include such trivial things as: not being pretty, not knowing how to cook well, not having children, etc.² If a divorce took place, the children by law were to remain with the father.³ By such action the Law deemed the father to be of greater social worth than the mother. Thus the provisions Moses had made in the Law were reinterpreted around the whims and wishes of males, who held women in low esteem.

Women, like children, were to be neither heard nor seen in public, as they had no share in public life.⁴ It was considered preferable for a woman, and especially an unmarried girl, in general not to go out at all. When they went out they had to cover their face with two headveils. The function of the veil in Middle Eastern society, even to this day, is to make women invisible in public.⁵ The result is a *nonperson status*; because if a person is not allowed to be visible nor to

speak in public, then for all social purposes that person does not exist. Any woman who went out without covering her face committed such an offence of good taste and social impropriety that her husband had the right—and indeed the duty—to divorce her. And he was under no obligation to pay her the sum of money to which she was entitled under the marriage contract.⁶

Rules of propriety forbade a man to be alone with a woman or to speak to a woman, even his wife, in public. And of course, travel with a woman was out of the question. It was disgraceful for a scholar to speak with a woman in the street. A woman who conversed with people in the street could be divorced without any payment.⁷ A woman's position in the house was to care for domestic responsibilities. In every case, schools were solely for boys and not for girls. Girls were exempt from studying the Torah. It was often said, "If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lechery."⁸ Her value as a woman was in having children. The absence of children was considered a great misfortune, even a divine punishment. She was greatly respected if she provided her husband with male children so as to pass on his name to future generations. Thus, socially women were regarded as inferior to men in all areas of life.

In the area of religious life, women were no better off, if not worse, because it was believed that God had made them inferior to men. The position of women in religious legislation was best expressed in the constantly repeated formula: "Women, slaves and children." They were forbidden to teach or even to give thanks after a meal.⁹ Synagogues were built so that men and women would not come into physical contact during worship.¹⁰ In fact women were not even counted as members of the congregation. In order for a synagogue to exist there had to be at least ten men; nine men plus all the women in Israel would not be sufficient. Paul in his missionary journeys would usually meet with believers in the synagogues (Acts 13:5). But when he came to Philippi, there was no synagogue, even though there were believers. Since

they were all women, he met with them by the river (Acts 16:13).¹¹

Reading the Torah in the synagogue by a woman was strictly forbidden. And it was declared, "May the words of the Torah be burned, they should not be handed over to a woman."¹² But perhaps the saying which most strikingly epitomizes the rabbinic depreciation of women was that of Rabbi Juda ben Elai (c. AD 150):

One must utter three doxologies every day:
 Praise God that he did not create me a heathen!
 Praise God that he did not create me a woman!
 Praise God that he did not create me an illiterate person!

This prayer was looked upon by Jewish authorities as a normative statement. And it was faithfully offered for centuries in the synagogues, in the hearing of women, who were taught simply to pray: "Praise God that he created me."¹³

Thus in everything that touched all aspects of a woman's life in Israel, she was considered a *second-class citizen*, inferior to men, from the day she was born. Widows and single women were just plain outcasts, at the mercy of others.

What chance did these women have of improving their lot in life? None in that society. That is, until Jesus came.

Jesus and Women

Jesus' response to all of these rules, regulations, social mores, class or gender divisions, appears to be one of radical disdain.

For example, He deliberately *sought* the company of women. Notice the incident with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Preachers have usually looked askance at this woman, and have labeled her as having three indemnities of inferiority against her: She was a Samaritan, making her an outcast in the eyes of Israelites—ethnically inferior; she was a woman—socially inferior; and, she was "living in sin," as

she already had five husbands, and the man she was now living with was not her husband—morally inferior (John 4:18). Before we pass premature judgment on her, however, we must remember how easily men were able to divorce their wives. Though she had five marriages, we must not judge her from our Western mores, but rather from the circumstances of her day. Rather than endure another marital failure, she chose to live with a man, the only option she felt open to her. Jesus deliberately chose to talk with her, and it was to her that He most explicitly declared Himself and His mission. For her part she found in Jesus the only man who understood just how she felt. Notice her words of testimony: "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ [Messiah]?" (vs. 29). Those aren't the words of a woman jilted; they are the words of a woman loved!

Jesus was very angered with the marriage and divorce practices of His day and spoke vehemently against them in Matthew 19:3-12. "He said to them 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery'" (vss. 8, 9). Here Jesus provided women a sense of security and importance in an age when they did not count and had few rights. He decried the ease with which men could divorce their wives. The effect of this teaching was to protect and improve the right of women.

Jesus was comfortable in the presence of women. In the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, He could speak with perfect freedom, relax and feel at home.¹⁴ He went out of His way to heal the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (Mark 7). The widow of Nain was restored to dignity with the resurrection of her son (Luke 7). On two separate occasions—with the woman who touched His garment (Luke 8) and the woman in the synagogue with an infirmity (Luke 13)—Jesus stopped the proceedings and ministered to women in need, in spite of male opposition, thereby restoring their self-worth and value as human beings.

Several of His parables were about women. In the three parables of Luke 15 depicting lost things, He used a woman as descriptive of God in the parable of the lost coin. Though some might have difficulty with such imagery, it is important to realize that the central figure in the other two parables—the shepherd and the waiting father—are also symbols of God in search of lost humanity. In order to be consistent with the metaphoric imagery, the second figure—the woman—must also represent God, otherwise one is left with a hermeneutical inconsistency.¹⁵ (The question of God as male will be taken up in chapter 5.)

Have you ever wondered how Jesus, as an itinerant preacher, was able to provide for Himself and His disciples in their journeyings throughout Palestine? Luke gives us the answer in Luke 8:1-3:

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, *who provided for them out of their means.*

There are three points of interest to us here: First of all, Luke declares that Jesus had healed a number of women. Second, some of these women traveled as a group with Jesus and the twelve male disciples. Considering the social mores about men seen in public with women, and especially with women who were neither wives nor sisters, this company of people entering the various villages of Palestine must have jammed up the "Palestinian grapevine" with all kinds of juicy gossip stories. Frankly, Jesus could not have cared less, for as the Pharisees declared, "Teacher, you care for no man." What this text means is that Jesus didn't care what people thought or said about Him, so long as what He was doing was in harmony with the principles of His Father's Kingdom.

That's what is called "living dangerously." One can get crucified for such behavior. Third, some of these women provided for the group out of their resources. "This latter point suggests that the traditional role of the man as the provider was here reversed."¹⁶ The Gospels make very clear that Jesus adopted a pattern of behavior that implicitly opened the way to a new personal identity and social standing for women.¹⁷

The events of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection are all intimately connected with women. Mary's anointing Jesus at Bethany was regarded by Jesus as the embodiment of the gospel. "Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Matthew 26:13). On His way to the cross He thought of the women in the crowd lamenting Him and spoke to them with great tenderness—the only ones to whom Jesus spoke on the way to Calvary (Luke 23:26-31). At the cross, Jesus did not forget His mother, but placed her in the care of His most beloved disciple, John (John 19:26, 27). The closest to the cross were the women, the last ones at the grave were the women, and the first ones back early Sunday morning were also the women.

It is most interesting and significant that God allowed the very first ones to be the proclaimers of the greatest news of Christianity—the Resurrection of our Living Lord—to be women (Luke 24:8, 9). In case there is any doubt as to whom Luke is referring, he declares in vs. 10, "Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles." Yet, notice the attitude of the apostles: "but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (vs. 11), a typical male response. Maybe this is why Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

For consider your call, brethren [read "sisters"]; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame

the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being [read "male"] might boast in the presence of God.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out:

Sinners, prostitutes, beggars, tax collectors, the ritually polluted, the crippled, and the impoverished—in short, the scum of Palestinian society—constituted the majority of Jesus' followers. These are the last who have become the first, the starving who have been satisfied, the uninvited who have been invited. And many of these were women.¹⁸

Prejudice and Sexism

It is important before concluding this chapter to have an operational definition of prejudice and sexism in mind, which will enable us to better understand the situation in Jesus' day as well as in ours.

Most people define prejudice as "pre-judgment," the etymological definition of the word. Prejudice, however, is more than pre-judgment. If it were merely that then there would be nothing essentially wrong with prejudice, because all human beings tend to prejudge others on the basis of limited knowledge, especially if others are different from them. This is a normal human response to racial, sexual and other forms of differences. Thus we are all prejudice, no one is exempt. In this regard, the advice of my professor in seminary, Edward Heppenstall, is most useful: "The mark of a mature mind is the ability to suspend judgment until all the evidence is in."

What makes prejudice so sinister, however, is not just the act of prejudging a person or a group. *Prejudice is the act of prejudging another person or group and not changing your mind even after evidence to the contrary, so that you continue to post-judge them in the same manner you pre-judged them.* The old

adage applies here: "People convinced against their will are of the same opinion still." In the definition of prejudice, the indictment is greater for post-judgment than for pre-judgment. Prejudice is an attitude, however. When it results in an action, it becomes discrimination. Together they form the basis for sexism and racism.

Sexism, however, is more than prejudice and discrimination. *Sexism is an ideology of supremacy which places a negative meaning on biological differences, resulting in an objective, differential and unequal treatment.* By ideology is meant a system of ideas and beliefs about the universe, to which a people adhere in order to justify their attitudes and actions. Sexism is both an attitude and an act of superiority, which justifies its very existence by giving biological differences, such as gender, a negative meaning of inferiority. This negative meaning then legitimizes treating the other as inferior to oneself. The result is an objective—visible, measurable, tangible; differential—there is an obvious difference between groups; and unequal treatment—the difference in treatment is not the same; one groups gets consistently short-changed. The working definition for both sexism and racism is the same. Both refer to evil perpetrated against others. The only difference is that in racism color is the excuse for oppression, while in sexism it is gender. But sexism has little to do with sex or gender. Biological differences are merely the excuse for oppression.

No African American person—nor Hispanic, nor Asian nor any person of dark skin color, for that matter—has ever suffered discrimination because of the *color* of his/her skin, as much as this might surprise some. It is not skin color that forms the basis for discrimination, but the *negative meaning* given to the color of skin.¹⁹ "Color is neutral; it is the mind that gives it meaning."²⁰ Neither are women discriminated against because of their gender. Women are discriminated against because of the negative meaning given to their gender. Let me explain.

William I. Thomas, one of the founding fathers of American sociology, enunciated a most important concept in

1928, "the definition of the situation"—the Thomas Theorem—also known as "the self-fulfilling prophecy": "If a situation is defined as real, it is real in its consequences."²¹ This theorem has far-reaching implications for an understanding of the role of women in the church and in society, for "all social reality is defined, and power comes from the ability to control the definition of situations."²² For example, if women are regarded as emotional, concerned only with domestic matters and immediate concerns, and incapable of achieving leadership positions because of a lack of leadership skills, the consequence is that they are not given adequate occupational opportunities. They end up being relegated to secondary roles, thereby making true in reality the definition enunciated.

Thus the meaning that people give to their reality, whether or not it is true, causes people to behave in a manner that makes the original meaning actually come true. "A man pretending to have a gun can order his victims around just as effectively as if he really had one, provided that they believe he does."²³

What this means is that as human beings we have the capacity of giving meaning to the world around us. However one defines the world, that is how it will be. As human beings we have the capacity of giving meaning to the world around us. Take a piece of cloth such as a handkerchief. What is the function of a handkerchief? To wipe off sweat, clean our hands, wipe our mouth, blow our nose—all menial tasks. Is the meaning of these functions in the cloth? No. It is in culture, in our human society which has taught us to view and regard a handkerchief in this way. You can take the same piece of cloth and make it into a shirt or a blouse and give it the functions of both protecting and celebrating our bodies. You can also take this same piece of cloth, add some red, some blue and some stars and turn it into a flag, and it becomes the signature of a people, symbolizing their group identity and nationality. And many are willing to die and kill for it, and others to stand at attention with tears in their eyes in a moment of triumph, like the many athletes at

the Olympic Games as their national flag is raised in celebrated honor of their world-record victories. Consider Karch Kiraly, Captain of the United States Olympic volleyball team, which won the gold medal in both the 1984 and 1988 games, and who has been designated "The World's Best Volleyball Player" by the International Volleyball Federation. After the team won the gold medal at the 1984 games in Los Angeles, Kiraly declared: "I don't remember much about the last match for the gold in Los Angeles, and I don't remember the medal being put around my neck, but I'll never forget singing—screaming—the anthem as our flag went up just a little higher than the others."²⁴ For what? For a mere piece of colored cloth! Not just any cloth, but a cloth imbued with meaning, significance and national symbolism and in which we invest emotions that bring spintingling sensations in moments of victory or patriotism or outrage when desecrated.

The problem is that for too long in society we have been placing meaning not just on cloth, but on the perception of physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, gender, age, religion, language and social class. We have relegated some people to be the handkerchiefs of life, and others to be the blouses and shirts, all the while securing a prominent place for those whom we chose to celebrate as flags. We even publish magazines and sleaze newspapers so that we can keep up with the daily life of our favorite human flags.

I submit to you that our nation is not only a multicultural nation, but it is also a nation in conflict with its values. For the meaning is not in the cloth, the meaning is not in the gender, the meaning is not in the hair, the meaning is not in the color of the skin nor in the ethnic origin or language of a people the meaning is in the *culture* and in the *social values* transmitted from one generation to the next. It is this negative meaning, based on a system of beliefs that one group is superior to another group, that forms the basis for prejudice and discrimination, which result in sexism and racism in society and in the church.

If there is one task which we as Christians must do which supersedes our occupational work, our national identity, our socioeconomic position, and which must somehow be expressed in our worship and in our Christian witness, it is to *understand the impact of the negative meaning given to the gender, color and class of many of God's children on earth.* The dominant male forces which define social roles have basically relegated women and people of color to inferior positions in society. And some of the worst offenders here are minority males themselves. African American, Hispanic and Asian males are often very quick to expose racial discrimination in the church and in society, but are loudly silent when it comes to sexual discrimination. This is because here we are often some of the greatest offenders and perpetrators of evil against the female gender, owing to the way we have been socialized in our respective cultures. But the gospel does not save us in our cultural sins, but empowers us to rise above these cultural limitations and attain "to mature [person]hood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13), who loved the church—symbolized by a woman (Revelation 12:1)—and gave His life for her. Christ is the new norm of male behavior towards women, which norm transcends all cultural rules of behavior. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

What we have in American society is the problem of a homogeneous value system operating within a heterogeneous society. It is the problem of maintaining stereotypes and actions of discrimination which dehumanize, and in many ways make less of human beings. I submit to you that, *if we are good enough for God, we ought to be good enough for each other.*

The definition we once had of what an American woman is, for example, has changed as women have come to realize that for too long sexism meant that women were denied access to power, prestige and pulpit. And a whole series of explanations were given by males that put the blame on women as victims. What women have had to confront is that

they are no longer satisfied with being the handkerchiefs of life—thus the petitions, the protests and the politics.

The importance of all of this to the church is that we often tend to treat others, especially those who differ from us whether by race, class or gender, as below us and regard them as handkerchiefs, as menial and insignificant; while we regard others, our colleagues and friends, as shirts and blouses; and still others, such as leaders and those in positions of power, as flags before whom we do obeisance and pay our due respect.

Christianity begins with *compassion*—the ability to suffer with another with loving, caring concern. There is a great need of compassion in the world today, for compassion is a rare commodity. There is a vast difference between sympathy and compassion, however. Sympathy looks down with teary-eyed pity and says, "Oh, I am so sorry." Compassion comes down with caring concern and declares, "How can I be of help?" While sympathy tends to stay in the realm of affection, compassion always moves from affection to action. Compassion is the most basic concept and principle in effective Christian practice, for it implies that we take the role of the other, and view life from their perspective, out of their context, out of their situation of need, before any definitive action is taken. For this reason the Bible declares of Jesus, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Jesus' very life was the personification of compassion.

Christianity thus begins with compassion, love-action that gives a positive meaning and sense of worth to all human beings, resulting in our treating each other as the beautiful human flags that God has created all of us to be. Such action will enable our homes, our churches, our schools, our workplaces, our institutions, our communities and our society to become *strong at the broken places*.

Sexism Has Both a Material and Moral Base

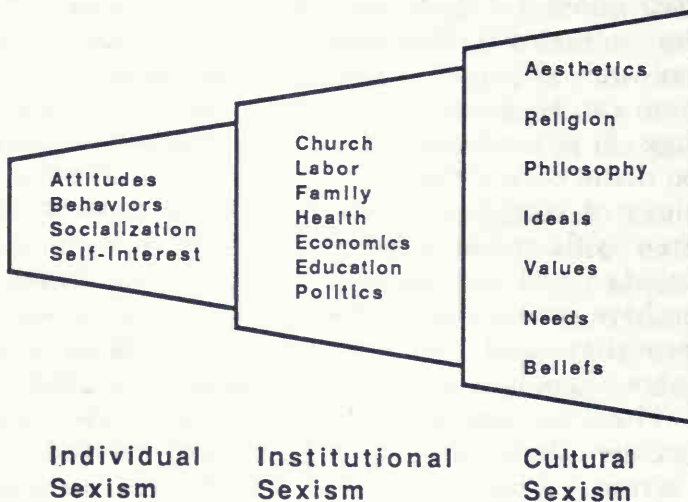
As with racism, however, sexism is more than just a negative attitude towards women arising out of prejudice. If that alone were the case, then sexism would be "reduced to something which takes place inside human heads, and the implicit presupposition here is that a change of attitude which will put an end to [sexual and] racial oppression can be brought about by dialogue, by an ethical appeal for a change of mentality."²⁵ But such an understanding of sexism, and racism, ignores two important considerations which lie at the root of sexism, as well as racism—the *material* and *moral* basis of oppression.

Sexism throughout human history has expressed itself in the male exploitation of women economically as a result of group competition. This *material basis* of exploitation is one of the key factors behind the male domination of women, and the limitation of their access to power, which has resulted in an objective or visible, differential and unequal treatment.

Thus, at the heart of sexism lies the concept of group competition—the quest for power. Sociologically, power is defined as *the ability to influence the behavior of others even against their wishes*. The simplest definition of sexism then is: *Sexism is prejudice plus power*. On the basis of this definition, while all people can be prejudiced, only those who have power can be sexist. To be sexist you have to possess two things: 1) power to force those of the opposite sex to do what you desire even if they don't want to, and 2), belief in an ideology of biological supremacy. Keep in mind that what often is described as sexism is really nothing more than prejudice and discrimination. At present, however, only men have the kind of power and belief in an ideology of supremacy that is at the basis of sexism. What I am talking about here is not *individual* sexism, but *institutional* sexism. There are essentially three types of sexism operating in society: Individual, institutional and cultural. *Individual sexism is a belief in the superiority of one's own gender over another, and the behavioral enactments that maintain*

these superior and inferior positions. Men of all cultures can and often behave in a prejudicial and sexist manner, by setting themselves up as inherently superior to women. But this is individual behavior. Institutional sexism is different and more pervasive, for it is the most powerful form of sexism in American society and in the world. Institutional sexism is the conscious manipulation of the structures of society's institutions so as to systematically discriminate against women by their prestructured practices, policies and power arrangements. Merely conforming to the institution's mode of operation frees men from personal discrimination, as the institutions now do the discriminating for men. Cultural sexism is a combination of both. It is the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one gender's cultural heritage over that of the other gender. We live in a society where sexism permeates all areas of our culture in an expanding manner, at the individual, institutional and cultural dimensions. This "telescoping effect" of all three forms of sexism has a most devastating and self-perpetuating influence on society, for each type impacts the other (see graphic²⁶).

THE TELESCOPING EFFECT OF SEXISM



Thus, individual sexism (based on the attitudes, behaviors, and self-interests by which we have been socialized), is given a structural form through the various institutions in society (such as the church, labor, family, health, economics, education and politics), which in turn impacts our cultural expression (our aesthetics, religion, philosophy, ideals, values, needs and beliefs). Of all three forms of sexism, the most pernicious and influential is the middle one, institutional sexism. Our society is so structured that most people, especially men, buy into this institutional sexism without personally having power. Thus, from a macro perspective, only males as group can be labelled as sexist in society. Now this does not imply that given the reserve in the shift in power, women as a group would not do the same, because in all probability they would. The problem is not gender; the problem is the basic human condition, which God long ago described in the following words: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). This is why Lord Acton declared: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

In order to justify such evil, people will appeal to that which gives them a sense of meaning and ultimate value in life—their ideological belief system which serves as the highest authority in their lives, the *moral basis* of existence. For example, if people use religion to explain their social reality, then a religious ideology with its sacred writings will be used to justify this exploitation, thereby making the Divine the biggest exploiter, even when this is done unconsciously. If, however, a scientific perspective dominates a person's worldview, then a scientific ideology will be used to show that women are inferior to men. In either case, the results are the same—women are granted a second-class status and unequal treatment.

Since in Jesus' day, the Jews as a religious people possessed a theological worldview, it was most natural for them to appeal to their moral understanding of God for the manner in which they had structured their society, with its ra-

cial, sexual and social divisions. Such an approach is still in use today, for sexism like racism is based on the myth of the biological supremacy of one group over another group. And "myths are created to fill psychological needs."²⁷ This being the case, sexism and racism will persist in human hearts as long as they satisfy the felt needs of people—such as the need to feel superior to others.²⁸ "No amount of statistical data or hard scientific evidence suggesting a sociological rather than a genetic origin of differences will change a 'true believer's' mythic ways."²⁹ Except the Gospel.

The Gospel makes it quite clear that sexism, like racism, is a *moral issue*, and is therefore a *sin!* The book of James brings out this biblical truth in chapter 2:8-11. James deals with class distinctions in the church as influenced by society.³⁰ The setting of chapter two is James's critique of the practice in his day of showing preferential treatment to the rich person attending the meetings of the early Christians, in contrast to how the poor were treated.

For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (vs. 2-4)

The principle of conduct that James is admonishing the church to practice is based on the Golden Rule, what James calls "the royal law"—"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (vs. 8). In verse 9, James declares, "But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." The expression "to show partiality" (from the Greek *prosopolempitéo*) is a unique expression meaning to "lift the face." It signifies the ancient custom still prevalent in many societies of lifting the face of the person who has entered the presence of another and bowed in humble greet-

ing. The act of lifting the face signifies an acknowledgement of their presence and is a show of respect for that person.³¹ Thus the term means to show respect for some people but not for others. It describes the act of being biased and showing discrimination in one's dealings with others, something which God does not do, "For God shows no partiality" (Romans 2:11).

The term *prosopoleptéo*, "to show partiality," is singular in that it is a uniquely Christian expression, "found only in Christian writers."³² It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that challenges discriminatory practices in society which tend to creep into the church. What else is sexism and racism if not a showing of "partiality"? James calls such action "sin" and a transgression of the moral law of God. In vs. 11 James equates the showing of partiality on an equal basis with the other cardinal sins of adultery and murder. Throughout history, both church and society have sanctioned people for committing the sins of murder and adultery, but seldom if ever for the sins of sexism and racism—the showing of partiality. Yet for James, those who falter in this area are as guilty as if they have transgressed all of the law. "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (vs. 10).

Such a position was nothing new, for it merely was a reiteration of an Old Testament view. "He who despises his neighbor is a sinner" (Proverbs 14:21). In vs. 12 James then declares, "so speak and so act as those who are to be judge under the law of liberty." What "law of liberty"? The Moral Law of God that liberates us from sexism, racism and classism—"love your neighbor as yourself" (vs. 8). On which, Jesus declared, "depend all the law and the prophets"—everything! (Matthew 22:39).

Sin Has a Social Dimension

This view of sexism as a moral issue and therefore sin is based on a broader biblical understanding of sin, not only as

personal wrongdoing, but also as a *social infraction* of God's holy law. It was in this manner that Jesus and the Old Testaments prophets viewed sin. Our problem is that we have been influenced by a Euro-American theology, arising out of a Western preoccupation with the individual, which has given rise to a privatized form of spirituality, that sees religion exclusively from the personal dimension at the expense of the social. Rosemary Radford Ruether makes a most important point here:

The apostasy of Christianity lies in its privatization and spiritualization. Privatization means one can be converted to God without being converted to each other. Spiritualization means one can declare that the Christ-nature is realized inwardly without having to deal with the contradictions of an unregenerate world.³³

In Amos 2:6-7 God in the same breath condemns both personal and social sins.

Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes—they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same maiden, so that my holy name is profaned."

Here we have two different sins, one social—economic injustice against the poor; the other personal—illicit sexual conduct by both father and son. God condemns both equally as acts profaning the holy name of God. Yet through-out the history of the church, the emphasis of preachers has been more on sins of the flesh, such as sexual immorality, than on sins of injustice and economic oppression of the poor. To God both sins are equally grievous.

Failure to see sin in its social dimension, however, leads many good persons to think that human injustice is not their area of responsibility. "Our job is to save souls, and not become involved in political power struggles," they declare. Yet what we fail to realize is that social sin, as opposed to personal sin, is transgenerational—it "continues across generations. It is historically inherited. It is social sins that God has in mind when the Bible speaks of placing the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exodus 20:5). Rosemary Radford Ruether declares: "Individuals are socialized into roles of domination and oppression and taught that these are normal and right. Discovery that the social system of which you are a part is engaged in chronic duplicity and contradiction, then, comes as a shock and an awakening. One has to reevaluate not only the social system, but one's own life in it; not only what you have actually 'done,' but even more what you have accepted from it."³⁴

Conclusion

Jesus, therefore, by virtue of His radically different understanding of God, utilized methods of action towards people which knocked at the very foundation of the structures of Jewish society. It was for this reason that Caiaphas said, "It is better for one man to die than for the entire nation to perish" (John 11:50, free translation).

Jesus was not concerned with impressing people. That was and ever has been the concern of the Pharisees—impressionism. His concern was, and still is, to lift men and women to that level of manhood and womanhood that He intended for them when He created them male and female in the beginning. Anything short of this comes short of God's plan. Eschatology—the last-day events—is only a restoration of protology—the first-day events. Jesus, in preaching the Kingdom of God, was seeking to bring God's people back to God's original plan for humanity at creation—where justice, love and equality reigned in the presence of God. Everything

that Jesus did during His earthwalk was a sign and a fleshing out of that soon-to-be-realized reality.

When we consider the position of women in Jewish society in Jesus' day, in contrast to our day, and then realize the action that Jesus took in His day, as compared to our feeble and anemic efforts, we stand liable for Christian malpractice. For "into a very structured and restrictive society, the gospel of Jesus Christ came as a very liberating, mighty rushing wind, overturning racial, social, and sexual differences."³⁵

Such practice of Jesus challenges our often ill-used phrase which is uttered, whenever the church is confronted with bringing about justice in a socio-politically unjust situation: "Well, it's not wise for us to do that, for it will only bring discredit and hindrance to the work."³⁶ If our concern is only with safeguarding our social reputation and political well-being, then it can never be said of us, as was said of Jesus Christ: "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" (Mark 12:14, NIV).

NOTES: CHAPTER 4

¹ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 363.

² Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 69.

³ Jeremias, 371.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁵ Soraya Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁶ Jeremias, 359.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁸*Ibid.*, 373.

⁹*Ibid.*, 374.

¹⁰Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 91.

¹¹F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 314.

¹²Albrecht Oepke, "Gyne" [Woman], in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 781.

¹³Jewett, 92.

¹⁴Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 524.

¹⁵For a more complete discussion of God as a Woman in Luke 15, see my book *What Is God Like?* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988).

¹⁶Colin Brown, "Woman," in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 1059.

¹⁷Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 37.

¹⁸Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 129,130.

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²⁰Roger Bastide, "Color, Racism, and Christianity," *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Spring 1967): 312.

²¹William I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *The Child in America* (New York: Knopf, 1928), 572.

²²Randall Collins, *Theoretical Sociology* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1988), 265.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Peter Jensen, "Along the Way/Summer Olympics: The Athletes to Watch in Seoul," *Vis á Vis*, the Magazine of United Airlines, Inc., 2:9 (September 1988): 23.

²⁵Theo Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun: An Introduction to Liberation Theology in the Third World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 45.

²⁶Adapted from James M. Jones, *Prejudice and Racism* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1972), 115.

²⁷Ashley Montague, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, 4th ed., revised and enlarged (New York, 1965), 316.

²⁸Francis M. Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (New York: George Braziller, 1973), 62.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰For an excellent study of this approach to the book of James, see Pedrito Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

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³⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Social Sin," *Commonweal* (January 30, 1981): 46.

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5

The Role of Women in the New Testament

One of the highly debated questions at present within conservative Protestantism and Catholicism is the question of the ordination of women. Should women be ordained to the Gospel ministry, and function as pastors with full privileges in the local church?

In 1881 at the General Conference session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, for example, a formal resolution was proposed, stating, "that females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry."¹ One hundred and ten years later, this resolution still has not been acted on. The same could be said for other denominations who still refuse to ordain women. What's holding it up? It depends on whom you ask. Some give theological reasons, others biblical reasons, others sociological and cultural reasons, others administrative reasons, others economic and political reasons, others job-market competition reasons, others organizational structural reasons, others biological reasons, others historical reasons, while others list reasons of status quo. Can it be that for many, however, it is *fear* of doing what is right?

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

Such was the *modus operandi* of the Early Church. But before we take a look at the action of the Early Church towards

women, let us first look at the action of God, and the role God permitted some women to have in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Women In the Gospels

In God's great plan of bringing about the salvation of the human race, God the Creator chose to allow the Son to become a human being. The process that God used to bring about His birth was the well-known human process of procreation. But God only used one-half of the components of that process, the female component, not the male.

Now some might say, that's obvious, God's choice of a woman was merely a biological necessity, since there can be no birth except through woman. God didn't need the male component; after all, artificial insemination is nothing new. But did God, the Creator, actually need a woman in order for His Son to take on human form? Not really. Mary wasn't necessary either. Just whom did God use to "give birth" to Adam and Eve? Who was the "Mother" of Adam and Eve if not God? God could have done the same for Christ, but chose not to. Instead God used a woman!

It is quite interesting that the name of the woman He selected was Mary, meaning "bitter."² Was her name symbolic of the social situation of the members of her sex, and thus a reason why God chose her? Others say that Mary (from "Miriam") means "exalted."³ If the plight of women has been a bitter one, ever since that glorious day their state of bitterness has been turned into exaltation. "And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God'" (Luke 1:30). With the coming of Christ, women now stand in a favorable position, because of Christ.

The first human being whom God used as a medium through which the Gospel—Jesus Christ—could be given to the world, was a woman, of approximately 13-14 years of age.⁴ Mary was the first person to bring forth Truth, to provide Salvation to the human race. And the first sermon preached in

the new dispensation was Mary's great statement of faith, generally called "The Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-55).

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me
blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their
hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.

In this declaration Mary gives us an important principle underlying God's redemptive action on behalf of suffering humanity—*God reverses the roles in human experience*:

He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. (vss. 51-53)

That God first chose a woman for such a task was no accident; it was all part of the Divine Plan to turn the tables on humanity. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. . . . God chose what

is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:25,27).

Jesus also had the habit of "turning the tables" on people, of approaching them on the blind side, of doing the unexpected. He tended to catch people off guard by His words and actions.

A case in point was His dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus was concerned with the salvation of the Samaritans. He could have entered the city of Sychar in John 4 with His disciples, and not only obtained food, but also provided spiritual food for the people. Instead, He chose to stay behind, while His disciples went on in, because He had in mind another person to bring the Gospel to the Samaritans. The person that God allowed to bring the Gospel to the city was none other than a woman, a woman who as result of experiencing an encounter with Jesus underwent a dual role-change: she not only experienced spiritual transformation from sinner to disciple, but also a social transformation from a pitcher-woman to a preacher. The text says: "So the woman left her water jar [the symbol of her role of servitude as a woman], and went away into the city, and said to the people, 'Come, see a Man'" (John 4:28-29). She had now switched roles and become a preacher of the Gospel. The result is found in verse 30, "They went out of the city and were coming to him."

She must have had a persuasive presence about her, for notice the response by the men of the city, vss. 39-42:

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.

Here we have a successful evangelistic endeavor, one conducted by a person to whom the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians could also very well apply: "God chose what is low and despised

in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (I Corinthians 1:28, 29).

The incident with Mary and Martha in Luke 10 also shows how Jesus comes up with the unexpected, an example of the divine principle of role-reversal. Mary should have been in the kitchen with Martha. But, as was mentioned previously, Jesus had more important things in mind for Mary. "Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42). Jesus was preparing Mary for a broader ministry than just waiting on tables, as Martha assumed. It was a ministry of hearing the Gospel, in order to impart the Gospel (Luke 24:8,9). Jesus called this "the good portion." And it was a portion that women should have, not just the "anxious and troubled" portion that has ever been their lot. Jesus then added, it "shall not be taken away from her." This is Jesus' intent with regard to women, which the church should practice—that they not only be hearers of the Gospel, but proclaimers as well.

The most glorious event in the history of humankind is the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior. One would think that the proclamation of an event of such magnitude, in view of the times, would be given to men in whom people had confidence. Yet God chose women as the first ones to preach the news of the Risen Lord (Luke 24:1-12). God is a God who again chooses "what is weak in the world, . . . what is low and despised, . . . even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

Women In the Early Church

Because of the example of its Lord and Master, the Early Church incorporated women into leadership positions right from the very beginning. Women were part of the Upper Room experience in Acts 1 when the Holy Spirit descended upon all present (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4). On both men and women the gift of tongues was imparted. This gift was not the babbling, unintelligible type prevalent today among the Charismatic

Movement, but the ability to speak foreign languages. This is made clear in Acts 2:5-12. "And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'" (vs. 12). It means that God is no respecter of persons, *nor of gender*, but distributes gifts to all whom God pleases, women as well as men, for the preaching of the Gospel to the nations is too broad a task to be entrusted to just one gender. Pentecost made it clear that all, both men and women, received the gift of tongues—communication—for one purpose and one purpose only—to preach the Gospel to every nation. Peter emphasized this when he declared that even the Old Testament prophet, Joel, had predicted this event, which included women as well as men as the recipients of God's Spirit for the proclamation of the gospel. And as a result of God's Spirit being poured "on my menservants and my maidservants . . . whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:18,21). This text makes the point that the act of preaching carried out by women as well as men was not just a mere prophesying—a declaration of statements about God—but an evangelistic proclamation which resulted in decisions for Christ.

Many of the early missionaries were women, who along with their husbands proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles, as missionary couples. There is a list of them in Romans 16. Prisca and Aquila, who brought the gospel to Apollos, labored together with Paul, Romans 16, vss. 3-5. Prisca is consistently mentioned first, showing that she was the more prominent of the two. Then there is Mary in vs. 6. We don't know who this Mary is. Perhaps it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, who sat at the feet of Jesus, and is now exercising her "good portion." Andronicus and Junia were a husband-and-wife team, of whom Paul says four things: they were his relatives, they had accepted the gospel before Paul, they had been in prison with him for preaching the gospel, and they were not just apostles, but stood out as *apostles of distinction*. Because Paul calls them "apostles," male interpreters have tried to suggest that Junia, a common Roman female name, is really Junias, an uncommon Roman male name. But the early church fathers, such as Chrysostom, understood this text as

referring to a husband/wife team.⁵ There were also (vs. 15) Philologus and Julia, and Nereus and his sister. Three other women are mentioned in vs. 12, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, who were hard workers for God. In all, of the 25 persons whom Paul mentions, a full one-third or eight are women.

One of these eight was Phoebe, who was not only a deacon⁶ but also a *prostatis*, a word which male Bible translators have translated as "helper." But "in the literature of the time the term had the connotation of leading officer, president, governor, or superintendent."⁷ The same word is used in 1 Thess. 5:12 to characterize persons with authority in the community, and in 1 Tim. 3:4f and 5:17 to designate the functions of a bishop, deacon or elder.⁸

Paul is giving Phoebe a letter of recommendation, which was common at the time (cf. 2 Corinthians. 3:1-3), as a letter of introduction to the place where the person was going to work. More than likely Phoebe was headed for Rome to serve as spiritual leader, elder or pastor, and Paul was sending a letter of recommendation or introduction, to the church to cooperate with her in her endeavors for the gospel (Romans 16:1-2).

Then there were the house churches, "where the early Christians celebrated the Lord's supper and preached the good news."⁹

Since women were among the wealthy and prominent converts (cf. Acts 17:4,12), they played an important role in the founding, sustaining, and promoting of such house churches. The following texts which speak of women as leaders of house churches demonstrate this: Paul greets Aphia "our sister," who together with Philemon and Archippus was a leader of the house church in Colossae to which the letter to Philemon was written (Philemon 2). Paul also mentions twice the missionary couple Prisca and Aquila and "the church in their house" (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:5). . . . [In] the letter to the Colossians [Paul] refers to Nympha of Laodicea and the "church in her house" (Col. 4:15). According to Acts the church of Phillipi began with the

conversion of the business woman Lydia from Thyatira who offered her house to the Christian mission (Acts 16:15.)¹⁰

There is a great significance to the connection between the house churches and these women. In Judaism the Temple and the synagogue made women virtual spectators of the worship experience. The Court of Women in the Temple, located to the side of the main area and slightly elevated, was the closest women could get to view the service. In the synagogue women also had to sit on one side and listen. If they had any questions, they could ask their husbands at home. Thus Judaism relegated women to *spectatorship*.

With the coming of Christianity, there was no more Temple or synagogue, as these were not only part of the old dispensation done away with at the cross, but were also the centers of Jewish worship. The church now met in homes of the believers. "The house church, by virtue of its location, provided equal opportunities for women, because traditionally the house was considered women's proper sphere, and women were not excluded from activities in it."¹¹ In fact, "the public sphere of the Christian community was *in* the house and not outside the household. The community was 'in her house.' Therefore, it seems that the *domina* of the house, where the ecclesia gathered, had primary responsibility for the community *and* its gathering in the house church."¹²

More than likely the reasons for the Early Church meeting in homes of the first believers in what came to be called "house churches" were: 1) that women were the principle converts to Christianity responding to a God that had compassion on their socio-spiritual condition and 2) that due to the social mores of the time, the home was the only place where women could exercise their leadership abilities.

Thus, women were not only active participants in the the proclamation of the Gospel in the Early Church, but from the evidence they also served as pastors and leaders of the local house churches, this being the meaning of the expression, "the church in *her* house."

The Bible thus makes very clear that the role for women in the proclamation of the Gospel was a prominent one assigned to them by God, with God being the first one to use women in such a capacity in the person of Mary.

The result of such action was that the Early Church "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6), "so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).

The same will happen today, if we will only free the hands to get the work done.

Conclusion

The time has come for the Church to set out like its Lord and follow His leading and revealed will fully. It is my conviction that the renewal Spirit of Pentecost will not come upon the church until men *recognize* the gift of tongues—of preaching the Gospel—among women, and allow that responsibility to be exercised. The word "recognize" is important because this gift, this calling to preach the Gospel, comes from God and not from men. Men cannot impart it, they can only acknowledge it and act on its recognition.¹³

I long for the day when non-Christians can say of Christians as was said of its Lord: "We know that Christians are true people of integrity, and care not for what people say, for they do not measure their actions based on people's positions, but truly teach and practice the way of God."

NOTES: CHAPTER 5

¹*Review and Herald* 58:25, (December 20, 1881): 392.

²Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, n.d.).

³Alexander Cruden, *Cruden's Unabridged Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968).

⁴Henri Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (New York: Mentor-Omega Book, 1962), 120. Cf. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 364-368.

⁵F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 68.

⁶There is no such expression as "deaconess" in the original Greek text of the Bible. This is an English feminization of the word "deacon," which in the New Testament is applied to both men and women, cf. 1 Timothy 3:11.

⁷Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 181.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 177-178.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 176.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³See Appendix B for a model of how to bring about change in this area at the local church level.

6

Is God Male?

The central message of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the most sublime of Paul's corpus, is the truth that in Christ all religious and social barriers which divide, segregate and create inequality within the Family of God have been broken down, so that Christ might create one new humanity, in place of many, thereby bringing peace. Unity in diversity in Christ is the theme. The locus—the center of activity—where this unity is to be made manifest is in the Church, wherein the peace of God is to be made a living reality. This unity is not manifested in an ecclesiastical vacuum, however, but in living color in the social context of our earthly experience—in other words, in the world.

Thus, the message of Ephesians is that young and old, male and female, and persons of every racial, cultural, and national background are included in the faith community. Basic to this sense of equality and inclusiveness is the recognition that God by nature transcends all categories. In other words, at the heart of this new truth which Paul has received through Christ, and has made manifest to both Jew and Gentile, is a new understanding of the nature of God—the concept of God as Father (Ephesians 4:4-6):

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

God as Father

In the Old Testament God is referred to as Father only 15 times.¹ It was not a common expression by which to address God. It was used primarily as a reference to God's relationship to the nation of Israel.

For the Jew the name of God, YHWH, was so holy that they would not take the name of the Lord in vain, nor would they utter it. Instead they would use the term *Adonai* meaning "Lord," or *Elohim* meaning "God," or simply refer to the place where God dwells—heaven. Thus Matthew, in respect for his Jewish audience, refers often to the kingdom of "heaven" as an expression for the kingdom of "God." Nowhere in the ancient literature did the Jews use the expression "my Father" as a personal form of address to God, not even in prayer.² For them God was too transcendent, remote and removed for God to be addressed in such a manner.

Jesus of course knew all this. Yet the surprising thing about Christ is that He never addressed God in any form other than the Aramaic word, *Abba*. This child-like expression is derived from baby-talk, the first babbling sounds a child makes in recognition of its father—"abba," meaning "daddy." It was a familial term by which not only infants, but also older children, and even adults addressed their parents, much the same as today when children progress from the infant expression of "dadda," to "Daddy" to "Dad." It is an expression reflective of intimacy, oneness, warmth and accessibility. Not everyone can address another person as "Daddy," but those who are part of the family, who are sons and daughters, who have a close, intimate relationship with their father—they can.

The New Testament evidence suggests that Jesus always addressed God as *abba*—Daddy, My Father.³ Behind the term "Father" in the Gospels, on the lips of Jesus, stands the original Aramaic expression (the language Jesus spoke) *abba*. What is so startling about this is that nowhere in the literature did the Jews ever use

abba as a form of address to God, though the expression was a most familiar one in family language. For the Jew the word was too familiar a term with which to address God, and it was therefore regarded as disrespectful and even "inconceivable to address God with this familiar word."⁴ Yet it was the only expression Jesus used to address God. Here is the amazing thing. "It must have seemed nothing short of outrageous that Jesus should make use of the completely unceremonious Aramaic word *abba* as an expression to address God."⁵ Jesus literally surprised His hearers with His manner of praying and addressing God in prayer.

We must keep in mind that Jesus came from a people that knew how to pray. Three times daily the devout Jew would stop everything and pray to God. But their prayers were ritualistic, done by rote to a God who was removed. Jesus by His teaching and practice brings to His disciples a whole new understanding of prayer. As Joachim Jeremias says, with Jesus "a new way of praying is born. Jesus talks to His father as naturally, as intimately and with the same sense of security as a child talks to his father."⁶

Jesus' mode of praying reflected His special relationship to God. It wasn't that formalistic style of praying, worked into a ritual, but a personal, intimate style similar to a child speaking with his father. This greatly impressed the disciples. When they asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1), they were not asking for the basic how-to of praying, for they were already a praying people who knew how to pray. What they were asking for was how to pray as Jesus prayed. Something about the way Jesus prayed moved them, especially the close, intimate manner in which he addressed God, and they wanted to pray like Him. They wanted the same close relationship with God. The astonishing thing is that in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus authorizes His disciples to address God as *abba*, "Daddy," "Our Father," thereby giving them "a share in His relationship to God."⁷ In other words, by telling us to pray, "Our Daddy, who is in heaven . . ." Jesus gives His disciples, Jeremias declares:

a share in His sonship and empowers them, as His disciples, to speak with their heavenly Father in just such a familiar, trusting way as a child would with his father. Yes, he goes so far as to say that it is this new relationship which first opens the doors to God's reign: "Truly, I say to you, unless you become like children again, you will not find entrance into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 18:3). Children can say *abba!* Only he who, through Jesus, lets himself be given the childlike trust which resides in the word *abba* finds his way into the kingdom of God. This the apostle Paul also understood; he says twice that there is no surer sign or guarantee of the possession of the Holy Spirit and of the gift of sonship than this, that a [person] makes bold to repeat this one word, *Abba*, dear Father (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).⁸

The Early Church followed Jesus in addressing God as "Daddy," *abba*, and even admonished us to do so (Romans 8:15-16 and Galatians 4:6.) It is this concept of God as *abba*, Daddy, that lies behind Paul's expression in Ephesians 4:6, "one God and Father [Daddy] of us all."

Jesus gives us a new understanding of God. Not the distant, detached and disinterested God of Judaism, but the intimate, incarnate and involved God of Jesus Christ. This God we are to address as "Daddy," "Father."

Now if some at present have difficulty with such a familial approach to God, imagine how people in Jesus' day must have felt, when they heard Him address God thus, and then were told to do likewise in the Lord's Prayer? Jesus radically altered people's understanding of God. His whole approach was most revolutionary. He broke loose the bonds of a patriarchal understanding of God as Lord, Master, King and Fearful One, and gave His followers a new vision of God, as an intimate, caring, compassionate Daddy,

accessible to His children. "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13).

God revealed an understanding of God's nature to God's people according to their need and reflective of their age and society. In the Old Testament times, in the midst of a strong patriarchal society, God allowed the Divine Self to be revealed in patriarchal imagery. At the time of Christ, when God wanted to reveal God's closeness to the human family, God revealed the Divine Self as the Divine Child crying "Dadda," "Daddy," in the person of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Today, in the new information age of satellite communications, turning the world into a small global village, where we share each others' hurts, and where the needs of the neglected and the despised are now made prominent, God desires to reveal God's self in imagery inclusive of the whole of the human family, both male and female, and reflective of God's entire being and not just in exclusive male categories.

Let me state this another way. Take Paul's famous text in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, . . . slave nor free, . . . male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In the first century the Church had to come to grips with the first line, the conflict between Jew and Gentile, and addressed a new understanding of God reflective of that new experience. This is what the entire letter to the Ephesians is all about.⁹ The concept of Father is used 11 times in this letter, more than in any other epistle of Paul. A new relationship between Jew and Gentile is demanded by the Gospel, at the heart of which is a new understanding of God as father of both Jew and Gentile, which results in a new humanity in Christ—one which experiences oneness with its Savior and oneness with each other. Thus Paul declares in Ephesians 3:14, 15: "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."

In the nineteenth century the Christian Church had to wage war with the second line, proclaiming that human slavery was inconsistent with the Christian faith. It was

during this time also, that the majority of the world's countries practicing slavery brought the practice to an end. This was due to a new understanding of God which had developed. God was one who took sides, who was against oppression in all its forms. The Negro spiritual conveyed this new understanding of God in subtle language. God was a God who made God's people free! "Go down, Moses. Tell ol' Pharaoh, way down in Egypt's land, Let my people go!"

Now in the twentieth century, it is our turn to wrestle with the third and final line of the trilogy, and the most pervasive form of oppression: "There is neither male nor female." The world is ahead of the Church in this matter, but the Church has a greater motivating force, the power of the Gospel. A new understanding of God is being revealed by God to the Church and through the Church it needs to be revealed to the world—that God is inclusive, compassionate and caring for Her children; that God is not just male, but has also revealed Herself in female imagery, inclusive of Her whole creation.¹⁰ In an age of global oppression, we need to grasp a more inclusive understanding of God, as a compassionate, caring Being, who like a Mother cares for Her children. There really is no such thing as "Mother Nature," for Mother Nature is God.

Are we saying that God is now a "woman"? No! No more than God is a man. This raises the question, Is God male?

Is God Male?

As was said earlier, basic to a sense of equality and inclusiveness is the recognition that God by nature transcends all categories. God is more than male or female, and is more than can be described in historically and culturally limiting terms. In other words, "Scripture is written in patriarchal language," because God was addressing a patriarchal society, "but God is not a patriarch."¹¹

Now, as we have moved away from a patriarchal society into a global village of interhuman dependence, a more inclusive understanding of God is needed, reflective of the new understanding that God's children have of each other.

So how are we to understand God? Let me explain by use of the concept of metaphor. "A metaphor is a figure of speech used to extend meaning through comparison of dissimilars. For example, 'Life is a dream' is a metaphor. The character of dreams is ascribed to life, and the meaning of 'life' is thus extended. 'Dream' is used as a screen through which to view 'life.' Two dissimilars are juxtaposed.

"The statement 'God is Father' is also a metaphor. Two dissimilars 'Father' and 'God' are juxtaposed, and so the meaning of 'God' is extended. Although 'God the Father' has been a powerful metaphor for communicating the nature of God, like any metaphor it can become worn. It may even be interpreted literally, that is, as describing exactly. The dissimilars become similar. The metaphor becomes a proposition"—God is male for God is a father.

Now, if one were to say 'God is Mother,' the power of the metaphor would be apparent. To offer the image 'God the Mother and Father' as a lens through which to view God elicits the response of a true metaphor, just as the statement 'God the Father' once did. . . . God is not a father, any more than God is a mother, or than life is a dream.¹² These are just metaphoric expressions by which to extend an understanding into the nature of God. Thus, a metaphor functions as "a new way of seeing."¹³

But some might object by saying, "But you must remember, that even though Jesus described God in the intimate, baby-language of *abba*, "Daddy," "Father," it was still a male term that He used." But that is because He was still in a strong, patriarchal society. "If the society had been reversed and Palestine had been a matriarchy instead of a patriarchy, surely God would have sent her Daughter,"¹⁴ and chosen twelve women as disciples.

I am not suggesting "that there should now be a dramatic switch in our concept of God and that, whereas God

in the past was considered masculine, from now on God shall be known as feminine. Not at all. To do that would be to gain absolutely nothing. What [I am] saying is that it is necessary that we perceive God as containing both the masculine and the feminine, as these qualities have traditionally been understood in our culture. [For the biblical record makes clear that in God's image God created human beings, as male and female, God created them. Thus, the image of God is both male and female.] But it is important to realize also that unlike maleness and femaleness, what is 'masculine' and what is 'feminine' is determined and defined not by nature but by our culture. Of course, God transcends maleness and femaleness since these are human categories. But as long as we have only human experiences and human terms with which to describe God, we will necessarily find ourselves applying human characteristics to God."¹⁵

Now some of you might say, "That's heresy!" No. Let's define heresy. "One definition of heresy states that it is 'part of the truth parading as the whole.'"¹⁶ Heresy is never 100% error. If it were, no one would be deceived. What makes heresy so deceptive is that the little truth contained is amplified and exaggerated to appear as all of the truth.

When we use only the image of "God the Father" in public worship we are guilty of heresy just as surely as if we were denying the divinity of Jesus, because "part of the truth is parading for the whole." We owe it to [ourselves] to make use of the many marvelous images of God. This is one way of saying to ourselves . . . that we do not have God in a box, that God is always "the beyond in our midst"—always more than any of our images can fully capture.¹⁷

Revelation is always progressive, and the full display of the character of God has not yet been revealed. But the

last message which the Church has to give to the world is a full revelation of God's character. That full revelation cannot be made while seeking to go back to archaic images of a by-gone age and society. God is as relevant as tomorrow's events. Therefore, we cannot in the name of the God who sets us free continue to oppress people with dehumanizing language and concepts of God, which are not a full revelation of His or Her character.¹⁸

If Jesus, in His day, portrayed God in a manner which advanced an understanding of the nature of God beyond that commonly accepted at the time, what about us today? As Christians we have to advance the cause of interhuman relations in the Church, and the cause of women within the Body of Christ. What is needed in the church and in the world today is a new understanding of God compatible with the mission of Christ. When the world is negating the existence of God because of the oppressive concepts of God to which God's children still adhere, should not we as God's sons and daughters give forth a broader and more inclusive understanding of God, consonant with His strong and Her compassionate nature? I believe we should.

Conclusion

But there is one final point to be made here. By so revealing God in an inclusive manner, we lift the burdens of oppression off from those who have been at the receiving-end of dehumanizing action. Can you imagine how the women in Jesus' day must have felt when He included them in His conversations, His illustrations, His sermons, His actions, treating them as intelligent human beings, the equal of men?

No wonder He said: "In the beginning it was not so, but for the hardness of your hearts [the hearts of you males] God allowed the oppressive patriarchal structures. But with my coming things have now changed. Behold, I make all things new."¹⁹

No wonder Fanny J. Crosby declares,

A wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord,
 He taketh my burden away,
 He holdeth me up, and I shall not be moved,
 He giveth me strength as my day.

The mission of the church is to do likewise. Will it be faithful?

NOTES: CHAPTER 6

¹O. Hofius, "Father," in Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 617.

²Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, Inc., 1967), 29.

³Jeremias, 57.

⁴Jeremias, 62. Cf. Gerhard Kittel, "Abba," in Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 6.

⁵Hofius, 620.

⁶Jeremias, 78.

⁷Jeremias, 63.

⁸Jeremias, 97-98.

⁹See Caleb Rosado, *Broken Walls: Cultural Pluralism and the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1990).

¹⁰See chapter 7.

¹¹*An Inclusive Language Lectionary*, published by the National Council of Churches (Atlanta: The John Knox Press, 1983). "Introduction."

¹²*Lectionary*, Appendix.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Sharon Neuffer Emswiler and Thomas Neuffer Emswiler, *Women & Worship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 31.

¹⁵Emswiler and Emswiler, 31-32.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Emswiler and Emswiler, 33.

¹⁸See Appendix C for a discussion of the relationship between the Gospel and inclusive language.

¹⁹Matthew 19:8, free translation, and Rev. 21:5.

7

The Feminine Side of the Character of God

Ever since God pronounced judgment—not a curse¹—on Adam and Eve in the garden, a distorted, perverted and twisted concept of man/woman relationship has prevailed throughout human history, and has infected all cultures, with man regarded as master and woman as slave.

Such a mal-conceived relationship between man and woman resulted in the development of a misconstrued understanding of God to legitimize and justify oppressive human relationships. In the on-going dialectical tension between beliefs and behavior, it is not always the case, as we are usually led to believe, that belief determines behavior. In reality the opposite is closer to the truth—behavior determines belief.

Though we often go to Scripture to determine what God is like so as to address our lives accordingly, the greater reality is that we reduce our understanding of God to harmonize with our behavior, and then utilize that conception of God to legitimize our actions. This is the way it has been from the beginning, when Satan read into God's character the negative behaviors of his own life. Adam did the same when he used God to justify the wrong he had done. When God asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man answered, "The woman whom *thou gavest* to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:11, 12). Eve also followed suit, blaming God for the serpent (vs. 13).

No religious faith has been exempt in re-fashioning God in the image of the human, not even Christianity. Based on an abuse of the sentence that God pronounced in Eden, men have developed an exclusively male-dominated conception of God, which has prevailed since the beginning of time, in order to preserve power, privilege and position. Such a one-sided view of God has been used to justify and maintain structures which violate the true character of God as revealed by Jesus Christ, structures such as:

1. The master/slave status.
2. Hierarchical structures centralizing power in a few.
3. Female inferiority.
4. Wife abuse and battering resulting in submission and subjection.
5. Rape.
6. Physical and sexual abuse of children by parents.
7. The dominance of western Christian countries over non-Christian Third World nations.
8. The exploitation of the weak by the strong and the poor by the rich.
9. The dominance of white-skinned people, with their belief in white as holy and pure, over the darker-skinned peoples, with dark viewed as evil.

Such structures, of course, are not reflective of the nature of God. So then, how are we to understand the nature of God?

The Nature of God

We must first realize that the Bible was not given to human beings until after the effects of sin had taken their toll. God was thus faced with a problem of communication—how to communicate to finite human beings the infinite, mysterious vastness of the Creator's incomprehensible nature.

God chose to be revealed in symbols, language and imagery limited within the confines of human understanding. In view of this, the Bible nowhere describes

God as God in full splendor of glory. No human mind would be able to comprehend such revelation. Instead God chose to use imagery from what had been created to communicate with creation. God thus used andromorphic and gynomorphic—male and female images—to portray a God who relates to human concerns.

We are all acquainted with God as: Father, King, Ruler, Master, Lord. But are we aware that the Bible also portrays God as: Mother (Isaiah 49:15), Midwife (Psalm 22:9,10), Seamstress (Nehemiah 9:21, Genesis 3:21), Nurse (Ezekiel 16), Homemaker (Luke 15:8-10)? Though often neglected in Old Testament theology, the female images of God are especially important for an expanded knowledge of ways in which the divine and the human meet and interact. And it all begins in Eden with the creation of humanity:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion . . ." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26,27).

According to Hebrew parallelism—where the same meaning is expressed in different words—"male and female" corresponds structurally to the "image of God:"²

in the *image* of God he created him;
male and female *created* he them.

"Male and female" describes and defines the "image of God." The "likeness" of God's image into which God created humankind is described in Genesis 1:27 as both male and female. Man in the image of God exists as male and female.³ In other words, man created in the image of God is not man alone, but humanity in fellowship—male and female both equal before God. The reason for this is because God is not God alone in one person, but a fellowship of Per-

sons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “Let US make man in OUR image after OUR likeness.” This is not, as Karl Barth clarifies, a “plural of majesty,” but in the light of the New Testament, an anticipating of the Trinity.⁴ The type of unity Genesis speaks of “embraces plurality in both the human and the divine realms.”⁵

The force of this is brought out in an even clearer manner in Genesis 5:1,2.

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and name them Man when they were created.

This text makes clear that man is not even called Man or *Adam*—humankind—until he is united with the female, then together both are called “Adam”—humanity. Therefore, “humanity in its deepest root, is a shared humanity. Humanity that is not is inhumanity.”⁶

Yet “male and female” does not totally describe what the image of God is like, but only that which God allows to be revealed about God. There is a mysteriousness and otherness to the nature of God that cannot be encompassed completely by the concept or imagery of male and female. In other words, by comparison, “male and female” affirms not only the similarity but also the otherness of the divine image.⁷ The sexual differentiation of humankind must not be seen as a description of what God is like, for “God is neither male nor female, nor a combination of the two.”⁸ God is not like the pagan deities that need a female goddess. Our Creator God is not bound to a specific sex and gender, but transcends sexuality. God merely uses male and female images to communicate with finite humans who would not be able to comprehend God otherwise.

Because language is limiting and does not permit us fully to describe the Infinite One, we remain in the realm of shadows when it comes to comprehending the nature of God. This is why the prophet Isaiah declares:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8,9).

And the psalmist adds:

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:11,12).

Such concepts are beyond human comprehension. And yet this infinite God, the knowledge of Whom passes all understanding, has chosen to be revealed in symbols and imagery close to those things and persons nearest our understanding even from the first moments of birth. Thus the next verse in Psalm 103, vs. 13, compares God to a compassionate father who pities His children. "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him." But God is not just a compassionate Father, but also a compassionate, comforting Mother as well:

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you (Isaiah 49:15).

As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you (Isaiah 66:13).

Our minds can only comprehend so much of God, just as our eyes can only capture so much light and our ears only a certain range of sounds. However, the light that is present is more than what we can see with our eyes, as

infra-red cameras and glasses can enable us to see a much broader range of light than can be seen with the naked eye. A prism breaks up light into a color spectrum that we could not see otherwise. In the same manner, animals can hear sounds which are beyond the hearing of the human ear. Just because we cannot normally hear such sounds does not mean that they do not exist, for they are still there nonetheless. In the same way, God is revealed within a range of understanding that human beings are capable of comprehending. But God is not limited to this narrow range of self-disclosure; nor does this range encompass the fullness, completeness and splendor of what the divine is like. Such dimensions are beyond human comprehension. But as human beings open themselves more and more to a more inclusive understanding of God, God discloses more of the substance and nature of the Godhead, so that our comprehension of God grows continually. Heaven will be a continual disclosure of God's all-encompassing character of love.

God Is Neither Male Nor Female

If the Bible likens God to both a father and a mother, this implies that in His own being God is also *unlike* either, since all analogies are comparisons with a difference. A human father's pity for his children and a human mother's care for her infant disclose to us not only something of what God is like, but also something of what He is *not* like. The difference between humanity and God in this regard is that human fatherhood and human motherhood presuppose a sexual distinction between male and female. Because of this distinction, at the creature level, a male can be only a father, and a female only a mother. But unlike us, God can be both a Father and a Mother to God's people; God is not subject to the either/or of fatherhood or motherhood as we are. That is to say, God is like a human fa-

ther, *not* in God's sexuality as a male, but in the *compassion* which God shows for His children; and God is like a human mother, *not* in Her sexuality as a female, but in the solicitude which She shows for the well-being of Her infant offspring. In other words, God's mode of personal existence transcends sexual distinctions."⁹

But while transcending sexual distinctions, by use of such imagery we are enabled to catch a shadowy glimpse of what God is like. Shadowy in the sense, as Paul declares, that "now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12). And what we do see is the full embodiment of compassion, willing never to give us up even if our human mothers will, for the price that God as our Mother paid for us was too dear for Her to give up on us.

Conclusion

This was the God that Jesus revealed, Who like a Woman, took a lamp and lit it; took a broom and began to sweep and search every nook and cranny of Her room until she found that one lost coin—you and me—upon which could still be traced, though marred, Her image in Whose likeness we were formed (Luke 15:8-10).

This God was also like a Hen who wanted to gather all of Her chicks—you and me—under Her wings until the storm of life is over and we are safe in the dawning of that Day (Matthew 23:37; Psalm 91:1-4).

That was the kind of God Jesus revealed. The God we are invited to accept. And the God whose character we must reflect.

Do you know that God?

NOTES: CHAPTER 7

¹The ground and the serpent were both cursed by God as a result of sin, but not man and woman.

²Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 17.

³Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1975), 36.

⁴Cited by Jewett, 35 fn.

⁵Tribble, 21.

⁶Jewett, 36.

⁷Tribble, 20.

⁸Tribble, 21.

⁹Paul K. Jewett, *The Ordination of Women* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 42,43.

8

The Motherhood of God

The object of theology is knowledge of God in light of the human situation. Theological knowledge of God can best be comprehended as it arises out of human experience and human need. Abstract, philosophical concepts of God, generated in a social vacuum, are unknown in Scripture. "In Hebrew 'to know God' is to encounter a personal reality; and a person is not known unless his name is known."¹

John L. McKenzie, renowned Old Testament theologian, makes an interesting observation regarding the Hebrew understanding of the name.

In Hebrew speech there is a peculiar association of the person and the name that is foreign to our idiom. "Name" is used in contexts where modern language uses "person" or "self." To have no name is to have no existence in reality; when one's name is blotted out, one ceases to exist. To give a name is to confer identity and not merely to distinguish from other individuals or species; when God creates, he gives a name to each object of his creation.²

Thus, we read the following in Genesis 5:1,2: "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created." The word "man" in this text is not man as "male," but man as "humankind," both male and female. "Male and female he

created *them*." Man is not given his name, his identity, his meaning in existence until he is united with the female, then both together are called humanity.³

McKenzie continues: "To know the name is to know the reality named. For this reason the OT reflects the love of etymologies which, if analyzed linguistically, are fanciful. The name is pregnant with meaning." To connect the name "with a characteristic of a person or an event in his life reveals the person more fully. Hence the knowledge of God is disclosed in his name."⁴ In other words, to know God we must know His name or names.

The Feminine Name of God—*El Shaddai*

There are four basic names for God in the Old Testament: *Elohim*, the general title for God; *Yahweh*, from which is derived the name Jehovah; *Adonai*, usually translated Lord; and *El-Shaddai*, God Almighty. In addition to these four there is a whole gamut of names which combine these four.

One of these four names is most important to our study of the feminine side of God. It is the name *El-Shaddai*, or God Almighty, as it is usually translated. *El-Shaddai* is one of those Hebrew words that leave Old Testament scholars declaring, after all the semantical dust has settled, "no explanation is satisfactory."⁵

The problem lies in the etymological meaning of the root word *Shad*, which can be translated in one of two ways which appear to be opposite and contradictory. One meaning is "breast," a woman's breast.⁶ The other meaning is "mountain." Now some might wonder what is the difference, breast or mountain, are we not talking about the same thing? No, for the meaning attached to mountain is a lot different from the one attached to breast. The meaning given to mountain is that of "violence," "devastation,"⁷ as in a volcanic mountain that devastates violently. Thus, for some OT scholars, *El-Shaddai* is the "god of the mountain," powerful and almighty in violent destruction.

(This has been one of the most perdurable images of God in the OT—as an angry God of war and destruction, who destroys all enemies—which in turn has had some rather devastating effects on people’s lives, when compared with the God Jesus portrayed.)

But the name can also mean “the Mighty-Breasted One,” from *El* meaning “might,” “power,” and *Shad* “breast.” Or as Robert Girdlestone declares, “The Bountiful One,”⁸ or the “Giver of Life” and the “Purer-forth,” as Andrew Jukes defines it.⁹

Why the difficulty in accepting this latter meaning for *El-Shaddai*? The reason may be found in the male perspective given to Scripture in its translation and interpretation. Throughout the history of the church, men have been the sole translators and interpreters of the biblical text. It has thus been natural for a male point of view to be incorporated, even unconsciously, in the text and its interpretation. For example, Deuteronomy 32:18 says, “You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth” (RSV). Here is a total female image for God! “Begot” means “bore” you and can be used of both fathers and mothers. But the expression “gave you birth” in the Hebrew means “to bring forth in labour-pains,”¹⁰ which can only be applied to mothers. Yet the Jerusalem Bible, one of the more respected versions, translates this verse as “the God who *fathered* you,” a complete misreading of the meaning. Thus the meaning of *El-Shaddai* as the “god of the mountain” may be male interpretation in order to avoid the unacceptable—God as a Mighty-Breasted Woman. Andrew Jukes believes that it was from this image of God as the Mighty-Breasted Woman that the pagan nations derived in corrupted manner the *Sheddim*, the many-breasted idols of their fertility religions.¹¹

However, one must be careful about placing too much emphasis on etymologies, for as James Barr, the noted biblical semanticist, says: “Etymology is not, and does not profess to be, a guide to the semantic value of words in their current usage, and such value has to be determined from

the current usage and not from the derivation.”¹² In other words, what is important is not the meaning of the words, but how they are used in Scripture. When we consider the usage of *El-Shaddai*, God Almighty, in Scripture, the issue is resolved as to which of the two meanings God seeks to have us understand with regard to the name.

The first time *El-Shaddai* is used in Scripture is in Genesis 17:1, where God establishes Her covenant with Abraham and promises to *multiply* his seed and make him “exceedingly fruitful,” since he had no children. In Genesis 28:3; and 35:11 both God and Isaac bless Jacob in the same manner. The next usage of *El-Shaddai* is in Genesis 43:14, “where Jacob, in the intensity of his anxiety on behalf of his youngest son [Benjamin] whom he is about to send into Egypt throws himself upon the tender compassion of the All-Bountiful God, and says, ‘*El-Shaddai* give you tender mercy before the man, that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin.’”¹³ The word for “mercy” in this text is also the word for “womb,” *rachamim*, again a strong feminine image showing that “the place of birth is the vehicle of compassion.”¹⁴

However, the one text that brings all of these meanings into focus is Genesis 49:25, where Jacob is blessing Joseph, the symbol of Jesus as the savior of his people in Egypt:

By the God of your father who will help you,
by God Almighty [*El-Shaddai*] who will bless you
with blessings of heaven above,
blessings of the deep that couches beneath,
blessings of the *breasts* and of the *womb*.

In this text the blessings of *El-Shaddai* are connected with blessings of the breast and blessings of the womb.

In all of these passages the Bible pictures God as a Mighty-Breasted, Compassionate Mother of Her people, who supplies all their needs when they have reached the end of their strength. Abraham, for example, childless and unable to bring about the fulfilment of the promise through

his own strength and efforts (with Hagar), encounters God as Mother, and is made fruitful as he surrenders to Her.

If it is difficult for us to grasp this concept of the Motherhood of God, and if God as Mother goes against the grain of all that we have been taught about God, let us remember that throughout the history of Judeo-Christianity men have been the exclusive interpreters of the Bible, definers and delimiters of the text, writers of the books, explainers of Scripture, formulators of doctrine and theology and preachers of the Word. If women have found themselves absent from all of this, and the female image of God in Scripture made to look masculine, it has not been the fault of women, but of men who have twisted, turned and translated the Scriptures in order to create God in their own image after their own similitude. But while it is difficult for some to comprehend this exclusively female name and image of God, mothers for sure will understand. A baby is crying and restless. Nothing can quiet it. Yes: the breast can. A babe is hungry, its life is going out. It cannot ingest normal child's food, and it will soon die. But no: the breast can give it fresh life, and nourish it back to health. "By her breast the mother has almost infinite power over the child."¹⁵

This is the image which God has chosen to reveal to us infant humans—infant in our understanding of God—a neglected dimension of Her character as a Mother who comforts, cares, and is compassionate towards Her children. God's "Almightiness is of the breast, that is, of bountiful, self-sacrificing love, giving and pouring itself out for others. Therefore, [She] can quiet the restless, as the breast quiets the child; therefore [She] can nourish and strengthen, as the breast nourishes; therefore [She] can attract as the breast attracts, when we are in peril of falling from [Her]. This is the Almighty."¹⁶ Almighty in benevolence, Almighty in sufficiency, Almighty in nurture, Almighty in comfort, Almighty in compassion, Almighty in caring. This is the long-neglected aspect of the Gospel, which provides a fuller picture of God.

A Compassionate God for an Uncompassionate World

The hungry, dying masses of the world need a picture of God like this—the God who seeks to create community around Her compassionate, caring nature. The poor and destitute masses of humanity in the world need a revelation of a God like this, who provides and protects from all which will destroy Her children. The uncaring and the indifferent, those that inflict pain and hardship on others in their selfish pursuits, need a picture of a God like this, who will create compassion in an uncompassionate world.

Christianity is not having the success that it should in certain areas of the world, particularly Asia, because of the manner in which God is portrayed—as an authoritative, dominating father-figure.¹⁷ A compassionate God that is not removed from human suffering, but cares for Her children and “suffers with” them, is One whom many will accept. The suffering masses of humanity will more readily respond to a God that resembles “a warm-hearted mother” than “a stern father.”¹⁸

During the summer of 1980 my wife and I had the privilege of working with Cambodian refugees in Thailand. Though our purpose for being in the camps was to prepare refugees for relocation to their country of destination [what the refugees called, the “third country”—Cambodia being the first, Thailand the second and the nations of relocation the third], we soon discovered a need on their part for an understanding of the God of Christianity. We were faced, however, with the dilemma of how to convey a knowledge of God to a people who had only known suffering. A missionary of another denomination was also in the camp where we were located seeking to do the same thing, but in spite of the fact he had been there for more than a year, only two persons had made a commitment to Christ. After listening to his efforts in communicating God in abstract terms divorced from people’s reality, I knew that another

approach would have to be taken—a contextual, incarnational approach. Upon reflecting on the socio-political experience of these refugees, it dawned on me that *Jesus also had been a refugee*, fleeing the Pol Pot-type of dictatorship of Herod. He too suffered and knew what it was like to be ousted from His country and have to flee to another because of political reasons. And “because He himself has suffered, He is able to help those who” also suffer (Hebrews 2:18). We thus told them that more important than the “third country” to which they were longing to go, was the “fourth country”—heaven—to which they all could have access. Their experience reminded us of the Scripture, “Having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:13-16).

The result of presenting God as One who “suffered with them,” was that the entire group of more than seventy persons in our study group, the majority of them men, accepted and confessed Christ as Lord. Later on, I was able to conduct the first baptism to take place at a refugee camp, when eight souls united their lives to Christ and His Church.

The world is hungering for such a compassionate God, who “suffers with” a hurting humanity. It is with this in mind that God declares in Scripture:

Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it (Psalm 81:10).

Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1).

If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, . . . "out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water (John 7:37,38).

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let him who hears say, "Come." And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price (Revelation 22:17).

No more beautiful picture of God is portrayed than the one found in Isaiah 66:10-13:

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,
all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her;
that you may suck and be satisfied
with her consoling breasts;
that you may drink deeply with delight
from the abundance of her glory.
For thus says the Lord:
Behold . . . you shall suck,
you shall be carried upon her hip,
and dandled upon her knees.
As one whom his mother comforts,
so I will comfort you."

Both church and society need to know and understand the Mighty-Breasted Mother of Israel, God of all comfort, compassion and care, who wants to set up house in our home and life; who wants to convert Her Church into a Caring Community; who wants to communicate to a self-ish society a comprehensive display of Her character of self-less love.

This was the imagery from which Jesus drew, when He declared:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (Matthew 23:37).

Jesus' picture of a mother gathering her children comes from the female imagery of *El-Shaddai* in Psalm 91. In the end of time, when according to Revelation God's people will undergo persecution for revealing God's character in their lives, the words of this psalm, describing the actions of God as the Mighty-Breasted One who protects all Her children, will bring hope and strength to God's people during their hour of trial:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
 who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,
 will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
 my God, in whom I trust."
 For [She] will deliver you from the snare of the
 fowler
 and from the deadly pestilence;
 [She] will cover you with [Her] pinions,
 and under [Her] wings you will find refuge;
 [Her] faithfulness is a shield and buckler (vs. 1-4).

NOTES: CHAPTER 8

¹John L. McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought," in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (eds.), *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968): 737.

²*Ibid.*

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- ³Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 25.
- ⁴McKenzie, 1968: 737.
- ⁵Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon In Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1958), 950. Hereafter footnoted as K-B.
- ⁶K-B, 949.
- ⁷*Ibid.*
- ⁸Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1897). 32.
- ⁹Andrew Jukes, *The Names of God in Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1967), 67.
- ¹⁰K-B, 294.
- ¹¹Jukes, 67.
- ¹²James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 107.
- ¹³Girdlestone, 33.
- ¹⁴Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 55.
- ¹⁵Jukes, 67.
- ¹⁶Jukes, 68. It is interesting that throughout this statement, Jukes consistently uses the male pronoun, showing the influence of cultural bias, in spite of the female force of the name.
- ¹⁷See C. S. Song, *Theology From the Womb of Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).
- ¹⁸Shusaku Endo, *A Life of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973). This book is a portrayal of God from the perspective of Japanese culture.

9

Is the Head of the House at Home?*

Recent discussions in the church have generated a lot of heat, but very little light, on the subject of the relationship of women to men in ministry and in the home.

There are those who maintain the traditional position that women are subordinate to men, based on the divine order of creation,¹ where man was created first and woman was taken from man.² There are others who claim that this order of relationship is a product of sin, since the creation account holds both to be equal. It is only after the Fall that the one is made subordinate to the other.³ But through Christ the oneness prior to the Fall is restored. As a result, "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*" (Galatians 3:28).

These two positions are currently waging a struggle in the church. The sides have been drawn, the verbal swords have been unsheathed, and each claims to be speaking for God.

Both seek to clarify the concept of "headship." The one stresses that man is the head of the home; the other that headship does not mean a lording it over the other.

The problem with both positions is that both focus on the human dimension of the relationship, instead of on the divine. The result is that Christ, the moral standard of conduct, is lost sight of in the scuffle.

The Theme Is Unity

That portion of Scripture to which men through the ages have appealed in order to legitimize their dominance over women in domestic and church relations is found in Ephesians. The problem with the way it is usually understood is that it is read out of context, divorced from the central theme of the letter—unity in diversity. Christ has formed a new community, thereby erasing the impenetrable social and religious barriers that divide the human family. The collective representation of this new community is the Church—the new humanity in Christ, which exemplifies the oneness of Christ in the members' behavior towards each other.

It is not the world that forms this new humanity, for the world does not know God. Jesus said, "O righteous Father, the world has not known thee" (John 17:25). It is in the Church where this new humanity is to be made visible, for this new humanity is the Church! The structural form this new humanity takes with regard to interhuman relations is one wherein there are no differences based on race, "there is neither Jew nor Greek"; there are no differences based on class, "there is neither slave nor free"; neither are there differences based on gender, "there is neither male nor female." Why? Because "you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In the portion of Scripture often cited by those who seek to maintain the subordinate status of women, Ephesians 5:21-6:9, what Paul is saying is that this new humanity in Christ is to be made manifest in domestic relations, for it is here where Christian unity often falls apart—relations between husband and wife, parents and children, masters and slaves, though we no longer have the latter. As with relations between Jew and Gentile, so with domestic relations, these are no longer to be governed by social proprieties which divide and differentiate. So also with the Church, the real subject of the passage. "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (vs. 32,

KJV). Both the Christian household—the physical home—and the Christian Church—the spiritual home of this new humanity—must reflect the oneness brought about by Christ's saving act.

For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances [those rules and regulations which divide and differentiate between people], that he might create in himself one new [person] in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both [not just Jew and Gentile, not just slave and free, but also male and female] to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both [Jew and Gentile, male and female] have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure [the church and the home] is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.⁴

What Paul is saying in this letter is that what is true in the household of God, the Church—that the members of that household are one and equal in Christ—must also be true in our own domestic households. If the Church could only grasp the truth of this, then questions of who is the "head" of the house, who is subordinate to whom, and who can be ordained to ministry in God's household, would be seen as irrelevant. If we are all one in Christ, in God's

household, then *all* can serve Christ equally, as the Spirit guides.

Unity In the Home

Let us consider this passage as seen through the prismatic theme of unity. The letter to the Ephesians is divided into two parts: The Plan of God for the Church, chapters 1-3; and the Practice of that Plan in the Church, chapters 4-6. Part two of Ephesians, the practical portion, begins with one word—humility.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Why does the Apostle Paul begin the exhortation section on the practice of Christian unity with the concept of humility? I believe it is because pride, the opposite of humility, "is the prime source of Christian disunity."⁵ Ellen White declares: "There is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable."⁶ Why? Because pride knows no need. And along with racial pride stands sexual pride, as the worst form of pride.

At the root of both types of human exploitation is pride, whether it is pride of race or pride of gender. For this reason Paul begins with the concept of humility, a Christian virtue. This virtue of humility lies at the basis of the principle which undergirds the passage on the domestic relations. Ephesians 5:21: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." This is the principle that governs all domestic relations. As Henry Chadwick says, "The primacy of humility means that Christian marriage is a

relation of mutual giving and subordination,"⁷ first to Christ and then to one another.

The expression, "out of reverence for Christ," suggests that "Christ's self-sacrificing love for others (5:1) is now the model for home life."⁸ Throughout this section the model for both wife and husband is Christ (vss. 22 and 25). "This presentation of Christ's love for the Church as a model for married love is unique to the NT."⁹ The basis is Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Verse 25 of Ephesians 5, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," is an outgrowth of 5:1,2, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

The Christian is invited to make his life a sacrifice of love for others like that of Christ. When husband and wife do this by subjection and love, or mutual self-giving, then their married love will be a visible sign that they are imitating and sharing this invisible action of Christ.¹⁰

That's what it means to be the "head"—not head in authority, for Christ never lords it over the Church, but head in saving, self-sacrificing love (vss. 25, 29). Any man that fails to demonstrate that standard of love, and yet demands that his wife obey and respect him out of his own self-interest, has no right to claim headship, according to this passage. Jesus does not demand our love and obedience, He has earned it. Love and obedience cannot be forced, only earned.

The same holds true in relation to children. Headship there also means an example of self-sacrificing love (6:4). The Lord again is the example.

This relationship of love and mutual surrender between husband and wife is a human object lesson of a divine relationship—Christ's relationship with His Church. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.' This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31,32).

The word *mystery* in Paul's writings signifies God's long-hidden secret, which has now been revealed with the coming of Christ—that God through Christ has brought the human family into a oneness which results in inter-ethnic peace (Ephesians 2:11-22). This means that the text in Genesis which Paul quotes (Genesis 2:24) has a hidden meaning now brought to light by Paul. And the meaning is that the union between husband and wife is symbolic of the union between Christ and the Church, a union of oneness and personal fulfilment for both parties. And without that union, neither party is fulfilled—neither husband nor wife, neither Christ nor the Church.

Conclusion

Is the head of the house at home? That salesman's question refers not to the husband, but to Christ, the real Head of the home. Is the Head of the house at home? Only where self-sacrificing love is made manifest can we dare to speak of the head of the house being at home.

Thus, the old hymnwriter is correct:

Happy the home when God is there,
 And love fills every breast;
 Where one their wish, and one their prayer,
 And one their heavenly rest.¹¹

NOTES: CHAPTER 9

* This chapter is drawn from my book *Broken Walls: Cultural Pluralism and the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1990).

¹Which is really the result of the Fall and not of creation, since at creation both were equal (see chapter 1).

²Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women In the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987).

³Gerhard F. Hasel, "Equality From the Start: Woman in the Creation Story," *Spectrum* 7:2, (1988): 21-28; Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26:1, (Spring 1988); and part 2 by the same author, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26:2 (Summer 1988).

⁴Ephesians 2:14-22.

⁵Henry Chadwick, "Ephesians," in Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley, eds., *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1962), 984.

⁶Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1941), 154.

⁷Chadwick, 984.

⁸Joseph A. Grassi, "The Letter to the Ephesians," in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (eds.), *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 348.

⁹Grassi.

¹⁰Grassi, 349.

¹¹Henry Ware, the younger (1794-1843).

10

Mary—The Humanization of the Church*

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:39-43).

This text tells us two things about Mary, and they both are found in the words of Elizabeth. First, Elizabeth regards Mary as "blessed among women." Second, she calls her "the mother of my Lord," the mother of God.

Interestingly enough, in Protestant Christianity Mary has not received the attention and the blessedness she herself said she would receive. "For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me" (vss. 48-49).

While Catholic Christianity has gone too far in its regard of Mary, making her co-mediator with Christ, Protestant Christianity is guilty of the opposite error in not going far enough, in not giving her any special recognition, possibly in reaction to Catholicism. Yet when one thinks of the distinctive privilege which was Mary's, of being the

chosen instrument through whom the Creator of the Universe was to take on human form, the thought is mind-boggling indeed that greater attention is not given to Mary than what she has received.

This act alone—of being “the mother of our Lord”—places Mary in a category all by herself, in relation to other human beings. Yet, she only considered herself to be a handmaiden, an instrument, a “nail” upon the wall holding Christ’s picture in its place.

God’s Nail

Make me, O Lord, a nail upon the wall
 Fastened securely in its place;
 Then, from this thing, so common and so small,
 Hang a bright picture of Thy face,
 That travellers may pause to gaze
 Upon the loveliness depicted there:
 And passing on their varied ways,
 Each radiant face may bear—
 Stamped so that nothing can efface—
 The image of Thy glory and Thy grace.
 A sweet reflection, Lord, of Thee.
 Lord, let not one soul think of me,
 Let me be nothing but a nail upon the wall,
 Holding Thy picture in its place.

—By Mildred Hill

That was Mary, simply the instrument.

The Rejection of Mary:

Why has Mary not received as much attention in Protestantism as she deserves? There are two possible reasons: Jesus and the New Testament.

When one of the women in Jesus’ audience was taken back by the thought of what it must have been like to have been Jesus’ mother, and blurted out, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!” Jesus

replied: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:27-28). For Jesus, a greater blessing than feeding from the human is feeding from the divine. This was not so much a depreciation and repudiation of His mother, as it was to show where the greater blessing is to be found.

The second is that outside of the Gospels very little is said about Mary.¹

The New Testament does not include much on the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus, either as a historical figure or as a theological symbol. Paul does not refer to Mary by name at all. His only indirect reference to her is in Gal. 4:4, where he says that 'when the time had fully come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law.' Paul has a developed symbolism of the church as a feminine being (Eph. 5:21-33). But he never refers to Mary as a symbol of the church. This suggests that Mary had not become linked with the theology of the church in Paul's thought.

In Rev., ch. 12, there is a striking image of a woman crowned with stars who is in birth pangs with the Messiah. Traditionally this image has been linked to Mary. But there is no evidence that the author of the book linked the image of the woman to Jesus' historical mother. The mother here in Revelation is a symbol of the church in the time of persecution that is 'pregnant' and in birth pangs with a Messianic king who is to come at some time in the future (i.e., the Second Coming of Christ).

References to Mary by name appear only in the Gospels and the book of Acts. Let's look at some of these, specifically the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke.

The Infancy Accounts and Mary

Matthew's infancy narrative is actually quite different from Luke's, although we are used to reading them together. Matthew does not in fact make Mary an important figure at all. It is Joseph who is the central actor. It is he who receives the visit of the angel informing him of the miraculous nature of Jesus' birth. It is he who receives the second message from the angel telling him to take Mary and the child and flee to Egypt. In the genealogy that begins his gospel, Matthew traces the Davidic descent of Jesus through Joseph (Matt. 1:1-16).

The virgin birth is treated somewhat ambivalently by Matthew. Mary's pregnancy during the time of betrothal falls under suspicion of wrongdoing. Joseph is about to divorce her quietly when the angel tells him that she has conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary is never the active person in Matthew's story. She is a passive instrument in a drama.

Luke's infancy narrative conveys a different emphasis altogether. Here Mary is the central figure. The angel's visit comes to her, not to Joseph. She is consulted in advance and gives her consent; thus she becomes an active, personal agent in the drama of God's incarnation. She goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth on her own initiative. At no time in these two events does she ask permission from her husband-to-be. Whereas Matthew merely reports that Jesus was born, Luke makes Mary the central actor in the birth (Luke 2:7). . . .

Luke makes Mary an active participant in the drama of Jesus' birth, accepting it through an act of free consent, and meditating upon the meaning of His future mission. Thus Luke begins that tradition which transforms Mary from being merely the historical mother of Jesus into an independent agent cooperating with God in the redemption of humanity.

In other words, she begins to become a theological agent in her own right. This is expressed especially in her obedient consent to the divine command: "And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word'" (ch. 1:38).

In the Magnificat, Mary proclaims herself as the embodiment of Israel. She is God's betrothed rejoicing over her expected delivery by the Lord. Through her role she becomes a key figure in the history of God's work. . . . She is the one through whom God has acted.

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,

he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;

he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy.

(Vss. 51-55)

In these passages Mary becomes much more than just a passive instrument of God. She becomes an active agent, cooperating with God through her personal will and consent to bring about the Messianic advent. She becomes a symbol of Israel, or the New Israel, the church, the redeemed people of God."²

But she is also a symbol of what God intends to do to redeem God's people from all forms of oppression.

The Unique Message of Mary

The message that Mary declares to the world at the birth of her son, Jesus Christ, is not the usual message that we all too often hear at Christmas time—sweet little

Jesus boy, lying in a manger, innocent, vulnerable and helpless.

No! It is a message of power; it is a message of justice; it is a message of reparation: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (vss. 52,53).

If there ever was a time when this message of Mary's needed to be heard, it is today, when the rich are getting richer, and millions are unemployed, and several million are homeless and dispossessed, and much of the world is in dire poverty due to political and economic exploitation.

The message that Mary gives to the world is that with the birth of Christ God stepped into human history to bring about a reversal in the order of things. No longer would it be "business as usual." A new divine order, based on the heavenly principles of love, justice and compassionate action was to be enacted. "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy [compassion]" (vs. 54). Or as the prophet Daniel declared, the Anointed Prince would come "to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness" (Daniel 9:24).

That is the message the world needs to hear. And God declared that message through a woman, His own mother, Mary of Nazareth. No wonder the prophet Jeremiah declares: "The Lord has created a new thing on the earth: a woman protects a man" (31:22). Through the deeds that God performed through Mary, men everywhere, as well as women and children, now have protection from sin. And the message that she proclaims to the world at the birth of her Son is the greatest protection that a man can ever have:

For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Luke 2:11; Matthew 1:21).

Mary—The Humanization of the Church

Thus Mary, the embodiment of the New Israel, the Church of God, serves as the model of redeemed humanity, made free from the old forms of domination. Mary presents to us the real meaning of Christianity and the Christ-event—it is the new order of restored, reciprocal relationships within a humanity reconciled to God.

Why is it that at Christmas time, the time we celebrate the Christ-event, people get in a happy mood, and in a sharing and giving spirit? Because that is what the real message and meaning of Christmas is all about, God bringing about a change in the order of things. At Christmas we don't behave the same way we have done all year round, thinking of ourselves and our own interests. The spirit of Christmas reverses all of this. The old order is changed into the new. For the Christian, however, the one who has truly allowed Christ to be born within, he and she continues this practice all year round, not just for one week or one month, between Thanksgiving and New Year.

The message of Mary in the Magnificat reflects end-of-time relationships practiced in the present. The text does not say, He "*will do*" mighty things, but "He who is mighty *has done* great things for me." It does not say, "he *will* put down," but "he *has* put down the mighty from their thrones."

These redemptive reversals already have a present reality. This reality creates a new understanding of human relationships in society and in the church.

This message of Mary gives us a new understanding of the Church. Have you ever wondered why God uses a woman as symbolic of the Church (2 Corinthians 11:2)? It is not because God is portrayed as male and therefore needs the female counterpart in the embodiment of the church. Such a concept is ludicrous for the nature of God, who is both male and female, for in His image we were created, male and female (Genesis 1:27).

I believe God uses a woman as symbolic of the Church because in all ages, from the beginning of time, women have been symbolic of the worst forms of oppression and injustices that mankind could inflict on other human beings. God came to redeem humanity from the lowest depths of degradation and dehumanization, and lift humankind to the highest levels of divine worth and value.

I believe that God, therefore, chose women to become symbolic of the Church, the recipient of God's best as a result of grace, because women have been through the centuries the recipients of man's worst as a result of sin. Thus, those who receive man's worst have become the recipients of God's best.

No wonder Jesus said of Mary Magdalene, after she anointed His feet, "Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Matthew 26:13). Mary Magdalene's act of loving, unselfish giving was an illustration of women everywhere, and thus of the power of the Gospel in lifting a soul from the dregs of hell to the heights of heaven. Gomer, the harlot-wife of Hosea, is another illustration of how God used a woman to symbolize His love for humanity—from the depths of prostitution to the wife of a prophet. For this reason I believe God chose a woman, symbolic of the "victims" of society, to be the mother of His Son, instead of a man, symbolic of the "victimizers," to be the father of His Son.

Thus Mary the mother of God stands for the eschatological humanity of the new covenant—the Church, that "new thing" which God has created on earth, "a woman protects a man" (Jeremiah 31:22). In light of this new reality, we must all become "women"; for it makes no difference whether we are men or women, girls or boys; we must all "give birth" to Jesus in our hearts, if we expect to be part of that new humanity which God will declare as God's Bride.

Conclusion

This is the message of Jesus to the Church and to the world, a new understanding of God. This God has created a new humanity, one where there is neither male nor female, neither slave nor free, neither Jew nor Greek, neither black nor white, for we are all one, equal in Christ, here and now in the present and in the Age to Come.

The result is that we all have equal access to God, the divine "equal opportunity employer." The old order of domination, passive resistance and structured inequality has been reversed. Reconciliation and restored relationships, brought about by the new order of redemption, have now taken its place.

The challenge before the Church, in view of this message, is to practice it! There is often a reluctance, however, to put this biblical message of inclusiveness into practice, based on past behavior. The best that many churches will do is to turn the matter over to a committee for further discussion or seek a vote on the matter, assuming that the church is a democracy and when it comes to matters of truth, a 51% majority will determine the appropriate action of the church. But question. Does one put the Doctrine of the Resurrection to a vote? Does one put the Doctrine of Salvation to a vote? Does one put the Doctrine of the Sabbath to a vote? No! One simply begins the practice of these doctrines, as their validity to Christian practice has long been established.

The same with the ordination of women and their inclusion in the ministry of the church. If the biblical message here is clear, and the content of this book should have borne this out, then the challenge before the church is not just to discuss it or place it to a vote, *but to practice it!*

The words of Jesus then to His disciples are most appropriate here: "Now you know this truth; how happy you will be if you put it into practice!" (John 13:17, TEV).

NOTES: CHAPTER 10

* The title for this last chapter is taken from one of the chapter headings of the book by Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary—The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977).

¹The following sections are adapted from *Mary—The Feminine Face of the Church*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ruether (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977): 31-34. Adapted and used by permission.

²This ends direct citing from Ruether's book.

Appendix A

The Family In a Multicultural Society: Undergoing Crisis or Change?

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: Much of the confusion and misunderstanding with regard to the role of women in the church and in society, has to do with the failure of recognizing that the family, like any other institution in society, is influenced by changes taking place in society. The family, like individuals, does not operate in a social vacuum, but in a socio-cultural-historical environment which changes with time. Unless one understands how society has changed, one will not be able to fully know what is happening to the family, for problems in the one—family—are in large measure influenced by what is happening in the other—society.

In view of this, I am including in this appendix an article by John Scanzoni, "Family: Crisis or Change?", published in *The Christian Century* and reproduced here with permission from the publisher, with material that I have added, which provides a broader insight into the contents of this book. Because it is more sociological than biblical, it is being placed here in the appendix. But the substance of this appendix enables the reader to more fully understand what has been written in the chapters, by showing *how* and *why* the family and the role of women have changed and need to change both in the church and in society. The sections within quotations marks (" ") represent material from Scanzoni's article, the remainder as well as material in curved brackets ({ }) is Rosado's.]

On January 20, 1977, just four hours after he had been sworn in as the 39th President of the United States, Jimmy Carter asked to see, as his first official appoint a young man by the name of Max Cleland, whom he appointed as Head of Veterans Administration. Max was a triple amputee. Nine years earlier, with only one left to

complete his tour of duty in Vietnam, Captain Cleland was asked by his commanding officer to set up a radio relay station on a distant hill. Taking several men and the necessary equipment, he got into a helicopter and moved over to the designated location. As the helicopter lifted after having dropped them off, Max noticed a grenade on the ground where he had touched down. Realizing that it might be his, as grenades sometimes fall off the web gear, he bent down to pick it up, when suddenly there was a blinding explosion.

When Max Cleland regained consciousness, he found that he couldn't move, for both of his legs were blown away at the knees; he couldn't reach out, for his right arm was blown away at the elbow, and he couldn't call out for help, for shrapnel had cut his throat.

Max Cleland wrote his story, from that moment of sudden tragedy in Vietnam, all the way to the pinnacle of political triumph under the Carter Administration, in a book he entitled: *Strong At the Broken Places*.¹ It is a powerful title, and derives from a line of Ernest Hemingway: "Life breaks us all and afterward many are strong at the broken places."²

Hemingway was right. Life does break us all. Especially is this true for the family in American society which has experienced a great deal of brokenness as a result of domestic conflict and social change throughout history. "From pulpit and newsmagazine alike comes the message that the American family is in crisis. Concerned clergy and laity are asking, 'What can we do to solve its problems?'" How can we make the family strong at the broken places? The problem is not only having an impact on the family, but also on the wider society, our communities and our schools.

In order to place the problem of the American family in proper perspective, I first have to share with you a short anecdote. The story is told of a drunkard searching under a street lamp for his house key which he had dropped some distance away. A stranger happened by and asked why he

didn't look where it had been dropped. To which the drunkard replied, "Because the light is here."

How one defines a problem determines the kind of questions which will be asked and the type of solutions given and actions taken. For problem definitions are based on assumptions about the causes of the problem and where these lie.

The drunkard defined the problem as one of not being able to see, thus his obsession with the light. Whereas the real question was, "Where did you lose the key?" Thus, the way a problem is defined determines not only what is done, but also what is not done, or apparently need not be done. One does not look under the street lamp, no matter how much light may be there, if that is not where the key was dropped.

Because preachers, and the press often ask the wrong questions about the family, they often offer solutions which do not bear on where the problem lies. Thus the problem of faulty solutions due to faulty definitions. "But to solve a problem, one must first ask the right question. 'How many miles can I sail before my ships fall off the end of the world?' was a terrifying question to ancient seafarers, and one that puzzled people" during the Middle Ages until Columbus came on the scene, and began asking the right questions. "How far must I sail from my western coast before I arrive at my eastern coast?" And the discoveries that followed made the old question about 'falling off the earth' irrelevant," and have made possible 500 years later America's navigation of outer space.

"During the 14th century, millions of Europeans died from the 'black plague.' 'Why is God displeased with us?' they asked. The answer they got was 'our sin.' The authorities ordered 'that everything that could anger God, such as gambling, cursing, and drinking, must be stopped' (*A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, by Barbara W. Tuchman [Random House, 1978], p. 103).³ But to ask why God was displeased was the wrong question. Five hundred years passed before Louis Pasteur asked the right question:

'What are the tiny organisms that carry the black plague?' That question led him to the right answer—an organism that traveled in the stomach of the flea and in the bloodstream of the rat. And that answer brought an end to the black plague.

"Similarly, to inquire 'Why is the family falling apart?' or 'What's wrong with the family?' is as pointless as asking 'How far till I fall off the ocean?' or 'Why is God sending us the plague?' The question to ask if we want to improve the quality of family life is this: 'Why are families changing?'"

Four Areas of Family Erosion

It is a fact of human history that every generation idealizes the one preceding it, by magnifying the good things and minimizing the bad. Look at what we are doing now in the present revival of the 50s and 60s in the media, in politics and in music.

This revisionist image-making is also prevalent in the way the family is today viewed in comparison with ages past. The family of the 1950's and 1960's, as stereotyped in television by programs like *Ozzie and Harriet*, is portrayed by many today as the norm of family life, where father goes off to work and mother stays home as a homemaker. Yet anyone who lived through the 50s and 60s knows that *Ozzie and Harriet* was no more an example of the typical American family, than are the *Huxtables* in the 80s and 90s in *The Cosby Show*.⁴ Media has the uncanny ability of giving people a false sense of reality, so that if it appears on TV that must be the way it is. Yet it isn't. But because of such myths, often perpetuated through the media, there are four areas where family alarmists are crying "crisis"—Divorce and marital stability, family violence, the unique needs of children, and sexuality.

"Take *divorce*, for instance. We like to think that in the 'good old days' there was little or no divorce—marriages were stable. But were they? It is true that there were relatively few *legal* divorces prior to the Civil War. It's also

true that the frequency of divorce has been growing ever since.

“But historians are uncovering increasing evidence for the ‘poor man’s [or ‘poor woman’s’] divorce,’ namely *desertion* (*Marital Incompatibility and Social Change in Early America*, by Herman R. Lantz [Sage, 1976]). Throughout colonial times and the 19th century expansion of the western frontier, it was exceedingly simple for men especially—but also for women—to slip away from their families undetected and never return. And it was almost impossible to trace them. There were no social security numbers, no FBI, no computers, no effective way to track down someone who left a family in Cincinnati and took off for Walla Walla. While the actual numbers of annual desertions are unknown, they are thought to be substantial. And since no one knew you once you arrived in Walla Walla, you could claim to be unmarried, and then remarry without anyone being able to trace your former family connections.”

I have friends who live in the Yukon Territory, in Northwestern Canada, who told me that a good number of the residents there are divorced or deserters or single people who have moved there to get away from their past life. Because of such social conditions few people goes by their last names; first names only.

“In this century, there have been many more legal divorces for a number of reasons, but one factor is that it’s harder to ‘drop out’ and resurface without being detected. In short, when we look longingly to the past and say, ‘My, wasn’t it grand when marriages were stable,’ we have to face the hard fact that they weren’t as stable as we once thought.”

A second area of family “erosion” is *violence*. “We like to think also that our ancestors had harmonious and happy families, and that the violence characteristic of contemporary families didn’t exist. However, social historians are becoming increasingly aware of just how much violence went on in pre-20th-century families (*A Heritage of Her*

Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women, edited by N. F. Cott and E. H. Pleck [Simon & Schuster, 1979], pp. 107-135). While a great deal of violence occurs today, there was probably more of it during earlier times because there was then greater community support for it. A 'good' husband routinely beat his wife to keep her in subjection; 'good' parents often beat their children in order to 'get the devil' or the 'sin-nature' out of them.

"In a study of 18th century family life, one historian tells us that walls were paper-thin and houses crowded. One source quotes a woman who said of her neighbors, 'We lived next door, where only a thin partition divided us and have often heard him beat his wife and heard her scream in consequence of the beating' (*ibid.*, p. 111). In short, family violence was not invented during the 1970's—it's been around for a long time.

"A third 'problem area' has to do with *children*. Certain observers argue that our ancestors cared more for children than do today's parents. Critics complain that modern mothers go to work and leave their kids with sitters or in nursery schools; and when they're home, parents plunk kids down in front of the TV. The charge is that parents don't 'relate' to their children the way they used to. Observers also worry about the family's helplessness to protect young children from exposure to sex and violence.

"Here again historians are helping us sort fact from fiction. Take, for example, the idea of working mothers. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, most women were married to farmers or shopkeepers. They worked with their men from dawn to dusk and simply had no time for 'full-time motherhood' as it came to be defined in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (*Women and Men: Changing Roles, Relationships and Perceptions*, edited by L. A. Cater and A. F. Scott [Praeger, 1977], pp. 93-118)." The idea of a non-working mother, the "kept wife," was a product of the leisure class, the wealthy class, where the husband was sufficiently well off so as to be able to support his wife. Thorsten Veblen, the 19th century sociologist who coined

the term “conspicuous consumption,” also spoke of “conspicuous leisure” in his classic work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. As Veblen describes it, being able to make enough or possess enough capital so that a man’s wife did not have to work, was regarded in the late 19th century as a status symbol and a sign of wealth.⁵

“But who took care of the children while mothers and fathers—and all other able-bodied adults—struggled to survive economically? The truth is that no one gave the matter much thought. Any available adult, or older brother or sister, who happened to be around when the child needed something, did what had to be done for the child.

“But the idea that the child is a “special” person requiring extraordinary attention, nurture and care never entered their minds. Only in relatively recent times has there been concern about ‘child development’ and ‘quality of children.’ One historian describes the experiences of most children during that preindustrial era as a ‘nightmare’ (Cott and Plect, *op. cit.*, p. 118). Clearly, many of today’s children suffer a great deal. But along with that suffering is a societal concern to alleviate childhood suffering—a concern that did not exist years ago.

“And then there’s the matter of the child’s exposure to sex. Historians are discovering that because houses were small and crowded, adults could not conceal their sexual activities from children. There were no ‘private bedrooms’ {except among the affluent}, and children understood sexual details at a very early age from watching adults (*ibid.*). They also watched farm animals have intercourse and give birth. But no one thought that such ‘sexual exposure’ would harm a tender child’s innocence.

“A fourth ‘problem area’ has to do with sex itself. Many people—especially those under 30—seem to have the idea that sex came in with the space age: that people didn’t have sexual ‘highs’ before then, that married people didn’t really enjoy the sex they had with their own spouses, that unmarried people weren’t having sex or that married people didn’t have sex with persons to whom they weren’t mar-

ried—that somehow all of this sexual behavior is new. Our difficulty in understanding today's sexual patterns is that we compare them with the 19th century Victorian middle class and stop there. The prevailing idea during the 19th century was that women were *passionless*. As one writer puts it, women 'were [thought to be] less carnal and lustful than men' (*ibid.*, pp. 162-181).

"But historians tell us that prior to the 19th century, female sexuality had not been 'suppressed,' and it never occurred to anyone that women were less sexual beings than men. In fact, precisely the opposite was true. a 15th century 'witch-hunter's guide' warned that 'carnal lust in women is insatiable' (*ibid.*). After analyzing 18th century Massachusetts divorce court records, one historian concludes that the prevailing wisdom was that 'if women made advances they were irresistible' (*ibid.*, p. 125).

"In short, prior to the 19th century women as well as men thought of themselves, and of each other as *passionate* sexual beings, and often their passion led them to deviate from existing community norms. Studies comparing marriage and birth records during colonial times show, for instance, that Elijah and Hannah married on January 1, and on June 1, Hannah gave birth to an eight-pound, six-ounce baby girl! That kind of historical evidence has emerged often enough to suggest that rather than having enormous premature babies, ordinary people like Hannah and Elijah were havng premarital sex (*Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations*, by P. Laslett, [Cambridge University Press, 1977]).

"So when critics today say that premarital and extra-marital sex are destroying the family, what they may have in mind is the 19th century middle class family, in which women were supposed to be passionless. But before the Victorian era, sex was much less suppressed, and yet families somehow persisted.

"Therefore, when we consider all four of these areas—divorce and marital stability, family violence, the unique needs of children, and sexuality—and then compare yester-

day's with today's families, the contrast is not so striking as some would have us believe. To be sure, there have been and continue to be significant *changes* in the family. But the 'problems' that observers perceive are simply the surface manifestations—the *symptoms* of the underlying changes. Therefore, rather than focus primarily on symptoms—or family problems—it makes more sense to focus on the *changes* themselves. *Why* is the family changing?

"As we think of the four problem areas we have considered, one central theme emerges: a developing concern for the rights, privileges and well-being of the *individual* as over against the maintenance of *traditions*. That development is brilliantly illustrated in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Tevye, the village milkman, struggles with tradition versus freedom. 'On the one hand,' he says, 'parents should arrange their children's marriages.' But on the other hand, he sympathizes with the freedom sought by his daughters to choose their own husbands—to marry the men they love. He experiences enormous dissonance coping with the erosion of tradition; he sees the whole of family and society collapsing around him, culminating finally in the decision of his youngest daughter to marry a gentile rather than a Jew."

The Impact of a Changing Society on the Family

Why is the family changing? And what are the symptoms that inevitably accompany these changes? A close examination of the matter gives rise to the discovery that the changes in the family result from the changes which have taken place in the structure of society. We need to realize that the family, like other institutions in a given society, is a product of that larger society, constantly shaped and influenced by the cultural values and structural form of the same. This society is not a static entity, but an ever-changing one. As society changes so also do the various institutions, including the family. Problems in the family cannot be understood without first understanding the

changes taking place in society. This is because we today live in a society different from that of generations past. It is important, therefore, to know not only the way society has changed, but also how these changes have influenced the family so that we can understand where we are today in comparison with generations past, and the different challenges the family now faces (see chart on Stages of Societal/Family Change).⁶

STAGES OF SOCIETAL/FAMILY CHANGE

SOCIETY:	Agrarian	Industrial	Information
ECONOMY:	Primary Sector	Secondary Sec.	Tertiary Sec.
FORM:	Tribe	Town	Technopolis
STRUCTURE:	Patriarchal	Patriarchal	Egalitarian
WORLDVIEW:	Familial	National	Global
MACHISMO:	Positive	Negative	Destructive
FAMILY SIZE:	Extended	Large	Nuclear
CHILDREN:	Necessity	Liability	Luxury
OPTIONS:	Either/Or	Several	Multiple
LIFESTYLE:	Ritual	Reformation	Revolution
TRADITION:	Institution	Institution	Individuals

This chart does not lay claim to being the only way of suggesting how the family has changed, nor does it imply that these are the only changes which have taken place. It merely reflects a sociological perspective. An anthropologist or a social historian might present facts differently. But the following areas of change are suggested as representative of major changes which have occurred in society and in the family. Movement across the stages does not necessarily mean that the former way of existence has ceased. Life may be carried on by different sectors of the population in all three stages, even though one tends to be the predominant way of life. Often, in fact, the former stage or stages are safe-guarded and their disappearance becomes a means of contention, as people fear they are losing their way of existence.

Society: An *agrarian society* pretty much dominated human history until the nineteenth century, when the

economic base shifted from agriculture to industry, first in Europe then in the United States, as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The primary result of this shift was that for the first time society, as we know it, came into existence. Prior to this time, because of the economic base, the villages and communities were isolated enough and sufficiently independent of each other to prevent a collective way of life from developing with a sense of unity.

With industrialization, hordes of people were brought together from different walks of life and of different ethnic origins, and were forced to interact with each other, and form some collective sense of existence. The result was the birth of society—that organized group of individuals who share a common way of life. It was also at this time that sociology, as the science whose object of study is society, came into existence, in an effort to provide explanations for the changes taking place.

The *industrial society* held sway until 1956 and 1957, when the *information society* had its beginnings. Two factors brought about the change. The year 1956 was the period in American history when white-collar workers outnumbered blue-collar workers for the first time. “The following year—1957—marked the beginning of the globalization of the information revolution,” declares John Naisbitt. That year saw the launching of the Sputnik satellite by the Russians, Naisbitt declares that, “the real importance of Sputnik is *not* that it began the space age, but that it introduced the era of global satellite communications.”⁷

We have now shifted from a labor intensive economy to a knowledge intensive one, dominated by the computer and the communications satellite.

Economy: The economy of any society usually contains three basic sectors in which people find themselves occupationally. Depending on the society, one type of sector tends to be the dominant one, in the sense that the majority of people make their living in that sector.

The economic base of the agrarian society was located in the *primary sector*, which involved the gathering or extract-

ing of raw materials. Virtually the entire population in this sector was engaged in hunting, herding or harvesting. The family was both the unit of production and of consumption, as people gathered or produced what they ate. Communities were small, as people usually worked in and around the place where they lived.

The industrial society came into being when the economic base shifted to the *secondary sector*, the turning of raw materials into manufactured goods, such as clothing, furniture and automobiles in workshops and factories. Life now shifted to the cities, people no longer worked in and around their homes, and rarely did they consume what they produced, for now they were working for money with which to buy what they needed. With the majority of people in "blue-collar" occupations, labor unions came into existence to defend the rights of laborers.

As the economy expanded, the need for professional services grew. Eventually the economic base shifted to the *tertiary sector*, which involves the providing of services such as banking, health-care, education, clerical, janitorial, etc., and the processing of information in the new information society. The number of persons in the primary and secondary sectors dwindled, due to mechanization and competition from foreign markets. Today 2% of the population in the U.S. is involved in farming, and less than 29% in manufacturing. Unions lost their membership and influence, as the workforce became predominantly "white-collar" and more diversified, with greater autonomy. The emphasis turned to consumption rather than production, and the rising standard of living encouraged a materialistic view of life. The economic needs of the family, as well as the opportunity for career and personal development, enabled women to enter the workforce in even larger numbers. Predictably, these dramatic social changes did not take place without altering patterns of family development and their values.

Form: With the shifts in society have also come corresponding shifts in the social form or organized pattern the

society takes. In the agrarian society the family—the *tribe*—with its extended kinships and close-knit sense of community, dominated the structural form around which society was organized.

In the shift to industrialization, the small *town*, where everyone knew each other, became the dominant form of social organization. But now in the information society, the sprawling *technopolis* with its massive network of communications and human interrelations dominates society.

Whereas in the tribal form the population was a few hundred, and in the town several thousand, in the technopolis the numbers are in the millions.

Structure: The structural organization of the family in the agrarian society was dominated by a *patriarchal* social structure in which the father or the patriarch was the sole ruler and singular authority. Upon his death the authority was past to the eldest son, the primogeniture. Women knew and for the most part kept their place in society.

During the industrial society a *patriarchal* form of organization still dominated the family structure, though changes were beginning to take place. In the information society, with the rise of the women's movement and concern for the individual, an *egalitarian* form of family structure is starting to influence the family, as men and women more and more view each other as equal partners in an experience of mutuality. However, the old patriarchal forms of family organization still persist in many communities and ethnic groups, especially among Hispanics and Southern Europeans.

Worldview: In an agrarian society the parameters within which people viewed reality did not extend much beyond the tribe, the family, the small commune. The family was the center of everything, with the various members knowing well their place and role they had to discharge. It was a close-knit community, with a *familial* worldview, where everyone knew where they stood.

In the industrial society the worldview was *national*. There was a sense of strong nationalism, building up the nation, developing a sense of peoplehood. But there was also a strong ethnocentrism, where an emerging people and nation viewed their culture and way of life as central to everything they did.

In the new information society, the shift in view is now *global*. As a result of multinational corporations, the computer and the communications satellite, an international market economy and political network have given rise to a global perspective which now transcends national boundaries. One example will suffice. The ever-present threat of nuclear war transcends national ideologies and places everyone on this planet in the same potentially sinking ship, with no life boats. In such a situation, the "every-man-for-himself" attitude of nationalism, now gives way to a "we are the world" and a "united we stand, divided we fall" chorus of concern. In the information age, the slogan is "think globally while acting locally."

Machismo:⁸ Machismo is a greatly misunderstood concept in many circles, especially in view of the changes for greater equality taking place in society. In essence it is *an exaggerated orientation towards life where males see their role in society as being one of protector, provider and predator*. The need for this mode of living around which all areas of life are organized is best understood as a way of responding to the socio-economic situation wherein people find themselves. Depending on the type of society in which an individual or group find their existence, machismo can be a dominant force in that society or a less imposing one.

Thus, because of Catholicism's strong communal ties and group integration within a patriarchal society, resulting in a centralized authoritative system, machismo tends to be most prevalent in those countries where the Roman Catholic religion dominates the social life, such as Italy, France, Portugal, Spain and all of Latin America. By way of contrast, Protestant societies, with their strong sense of individualism and independence, have not experienced

machismo to the same exaggerated degree as have these Mediterranean societies and their former colonies in the New World.

These two differing worldviews—communitarian versus individualistic—represent two distinct though not dissimilar orientations towards life which still differentiate Catholics from Protestants.⁸ According to Andrew Greeley, it is here where the fundamental difference between Catholicism and Protestantism is to be found, and not in doctrinal beliefs and ethical issues.⁹ Both life-organizing perspectives gives rise to two different views of God—one immanent, the other transcendent.¹⁰ Machismo comes out of a communitarian approach to life, where the concern is with the preservation of the community.

MACHISMO AND SOCIETAL ORGANIZATION

	CATHOLICISM	PROTESTANTISM
WORLDVIEW	Communitarian	Individualist
HUMAN RELATIONS	Social Integration	Independence
VIEW OF GOD:	Immanent	Transcendent

Machismo arises out of a communitarian way of life

In an agrarian society, for example, one with little to no infrastructure—such as police protection, health-care system and a system of governance—machismo had a *positive* function, in that the reputation of a man to protect and provide for his family extended beyond the family to the community at large. This reputation gave his family a sense of security, in what was otherwise an unprotected environment, and elicited a sense of respect from the community for what belonged to the man. “Hey, you better watch it. That’s the daughter of Don Rodriguez, and you don’t want to mess with him.” To be able to stand up, no matter what the social position of the man was, and defend what was his was an admirable trait that no man could afford to

be without in an agrarian society, and which women desired to see in their men.

The negative side to this machismo was a "double standard" that tolerated a certain amount of sexual indiscretions towards women, in that it allowed a man the "privilege" of pursuing sexual improprieties as a form of social reward for the responsibility of providing for his family. It is this aspect of machismo that is usually the focus of much of the criticism of this form of social orientation. The real macho, of course, was the man who not only had the respect of the community, but of his family as well. This was the man who not only was the provider and protector of his family, but also the "priest"—the spiritual guardian—who limited his pursuits to the moral development of his family and of the community.

With a shift to the industrial society with its built-in infrastructure and movement to the city in pursuit of economic gain, the role of the male changed. The need to protect the family in this environment was no longer as crucial a demand of the male as it was in an agrarian/rural context. Because of economic needs which moved the wife to find employment outside the home, or in some cases she was the only one to find a job, the role of provider took on new meaning. In this kind of social context, machismo, with its exaggerated role of the male, takes on a *negative* or dysfunctional aspect, which tends to tear down instead of build up the family.

In the information society, with its fine-spun network of communication and interchange, the role of the various members of the family changes even more. The availability of services to all members of the family, brings about a needed change of attitude towards the role that each member is to play in the well-being, maintenance and development of the family. In this social context a sense of equality and mutuality tends to be more of the norm. The continued expression of machismo in this context tends to be *destructive* to survival of the family as family, for it forces the various members of the family to be subservient to one

of its members, the father. When the man of the house continues to make unrealistic demands of his family, thereby limiting their social, educational, career, spiritual and other forms of development, and enforces these demands with physical aggression or pathetic pronouncements, such as "I am the head of this house; therefore I am to be obeyed!" the destruction of the family has set in and the sapping away of the vitality of the individual members has begun, resulting in an increase of divorce.

This often happens because a change of society does not always result in a change of mindset. Thus men may find themselves living in a new social environment, but operating under an old mental frame of reference. This is especially true of people that come to an urban context from a rural environment, as is the case for many first-generation Hispanics, Italians and others from strong patriarchal/rural societies, with a traditional cultural heritage.

This does not mean that the husband and father no longer has a role of provider, protector and priest to play out in the family, for he does. But changes in society bring about a new orientation towards life resulting in changes in the attitudes, understanding and significance of the role of being male, husband and father in today's family. The greatest service that a father—a true macho—can provide for his family is the total development of every member to their fullest capabilities, in a supportive, caring and nurturing environment.

Religious groups, with a patriarchal view of God and social structure, who deny equality to women and refuse their ordination to the ministry, are operating with a *religious machismo—an appeal to God to legitimize and justify social inequities and male domination of the family*. Such a stance is not only an affront to the gospel, but is also anachronistic, in the sense that while people are living in the information age, they often think with an agrarian mindset, all the while utilizing methodologies from the industrial age. To be relevant both church and society must be current in both *mindset and methodology*.

Family Size: Shifts in society have also brought about shifts in the size of the family. In the agrarian society the large *extended* family, with its extended kinships of children, parents, grandparents, and relatives as a close-knit community, served as the model of family size.

In the industrial society, the family was still quite *large*, but more limited to parents and children, and in many cases grandparents. The limitations placed on the family were now due to its economic needs as well as competition for living space in the towns and cities.

In the information society, the family is now *nuclear*, meaning just the parents or parent and children or child. Today the old sociological definition of the family, as a social unit of two or more persons living together who are related to each other by blood, marriage or adoption, no longer holds true. Divorce and remarriage, homosexual relationships and artificial insemination have permanently altered traditional family patterns. The result is not the destruction of the family, as many doomsayers believe—for the family will always be in existence, as no society is possible without the family—but its continual reshaping in the midst of an ever-changing society.

Children: In an agrarian society a large number of children was a *necessity* not only to run the farm, but also as an agrarian form of social security or investment for the future, when parents could no longer take care of themselves.

In the industrial society, with its competition for space, work opportunity and low wages, having a large family was a *liability*, even though older children could also share in the work-load and bring in an income to help with family expenses.

In the information society, children tend to be viewed as a *luxury*, with potential parents often asking themselves before taking on the responsibility of a family: "Can we afford to have children?" With both parents working, children mean an investment in time as well as finances. Thus, families tend to be quite small because of social and living demands.

Options: The matter of choices and available options increase as we move from an agrarian/rural society to an urban/technological one. Urbanization contributes to the freedom of choice. In an agrarian society the choices were small, essentially limited to an *either/or* type of choice. The small towns and cities of the industrial society gave one *several* choices, more than before. However, the present technopolises of the information society give one *multiple* choices, more than one can indulge.

As we move from an *either/or* society to one of multiple options, freedom of choice increases. But so does the need for discipline, because one cannot exercise all the available options. And here is where the difficulty comes in. If our young people are not being prepared for the real world, they will experience a situation which in sociology is called *anomie*—a state of normlessness, where the old guidelines are of no help and there is nothing to take their place to provide guidance in the new environment.

Lifestyle: The age of *ritual*, where things were done by rote, handed down from one generation to the next without much thought, is over. But so is *reformation*, concerned with improving things, without necessarily changing them. Today we are living by *revolution*—a complete overthrow of things, salvaging from the past only that which is functional to the needs of the present and has a usable future.

Tradition: The traditional way of viewing the family as an *institution* has changed to viewing the family as a group of *individuals*, as we move from an agrarian society to the information society.

In seeking to understand the change of focus from the family as an institution to the family as a group of individuals, "we discover that the changes result from the erosion of ancient traditions—*traditions that favored the family as an institution over its individual members*. During past eras, the institution had priority over the individual; and for the sake of the institution the individual was called upon to sacrifice. Even today some observers continue to perceive

the family as being larger than life—larger than people. They see the family as a pattern into which people are fitted.” The concern is with the family as an institution over against its individual members. So when individuals do not fit the perceived pattern of what the family should be like, something must be wrong.

This focus on the institution at the expense of individuals has created serious problems for the family in society. Take, for example, the situation of *singles* in society. Since the focus of society is on families, what do you do with singles? The answer is nothing, for they are looked upon as some sort of aberration or deviance from the norm. Something must be wrong with them, especially if the single happens to be a woman. If it is a man, then the usual response is, “He sacrificed marriage in order to have a good career.” If it is a woman, however, the response is usually: “What a pity! Such a nice person. I wonder why she never got married?” As though the *question of choice* is never considered.

What do we do with the physically impaired, the handicapped and homosexuals, as well as those who have chosen alternate conjugal life styles or who have acquired AIDS? Since these do not fit the pattern of a normal family, children whose parents ought to be proud, the result is rejection, neglect, or worse, indifference. This focus on the family as an institution has resulted in making people the servants of the family, instead of the family being the servant of people.

The Sabbath Principle

Where does the solution lie to the dichotomous situation of institution versus individuals? The solution is to be found in the Sabbath Principle, a principle long neglected in society because many have rejected the Sabbath as a day of worship, while those who do observe the Sabbath have failed to recognize this most important principle behind the day. The principle was first enunciated by Jesus Christ,

when He declared: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath Principle is the idea that *the institution exists for the purpose of serving the needs of individuals and not individuals the needs of the institution*. Both the Sabbath and the family were established by God at creation, and were given for the purpose of serving human needs—spiritual development, human fellowship and the propagation of the human species. Throughout human history, however, the emphasis shifted from the purposes of these institutions—to meet human needs—to the institutions themselves. Thus, both institutions have often been used as arenas for oppression rather than liberation and human development. Jesus came to liberate both. It is from this principle where we get the Servant Model of leadership, that those in leadership are to serve their followers. Thus the institution is to serve its constituents and not the other way around. The successful companies, businesses and organizations are those that follow this principle.

"In the 17th century, John Milton {had an understanding of this principle when he} insisted that God did not create human beings for marriage; rather, God created marriage for human benefit. Therefore, said Milton, how much sense does it make to assert that a loving God forces people to suffer in an arrangement that God originally designed for their happiness? 'No so sense at all,' he concluded, arguing that the churches and government of his day should allow divorce on the grounds of what we now call 'mutual incompatibility.'¹²

"In fact, it took more than 200 years for Milton's ideas to permeate the thinking and behavior of ordinary people. It wasn't until the late 19th century that divorce became relatively common in America; and immediately, certain critics began to predict the extinction of family and society. Interestingly enough, many critics connected the rising divorce rate with feminism and its goal of suffrage (*Divorce in the Progressive Era*, by W. L. O'Neill [Yale University Press, 1967]). But, of course, feminism was and is much

more than that: it is the right to be an autonomous person—one who acts out of self-determination and for self-actualization. Milton says that marriage should serve the person; the feminist argues that marriage has ill served women (as well as men) and that marriage must change to better serve the needs of women (as well as men). The logical outcome of the argument is that if a particular marriage doesn't change, it becomes legitimate to leave rather than to endure it."

Problems Are Symptomatic of Changes

"As marriage has changed to accommodate individual rather than traditional interests, Milton's ideas have become increasingly acceptable. During prior decades, for instance, men married for sex, but they also wanted their family's life style to be a showcase proving to themselves and to the world that they were worthy providers. Women, on the other hand, married mostly for companionship and to have a provider. But since World War II, certain demands have been added to the marriage. Women want *satisfying* sex out of marriage, and they want intimacy—deep friendship. Some men are beginning to desire intimacy as well." This need has always been present, but has now been made prominent with the shift to concerns with the individual.

"Furthermore, increasing numbers of women want their marriages to facilitate their occupational efforts in the same way that marriages have made it possible for men to pursue their occupations. Many women see occupational involvement as the only sure means to guarantee their autonomy. Given this enlarging range of significant demands placed upon marriage, it's no puzzle that there are so many divorces. Perhaps we should ask why there aren't more. But plainly, divorce is a symptom of underlying changes. It is a painful symptom that no one welcomes.

"The basic reasoning that explains changes in divorce patterns also explains changes in patterns of family vio-

lence. Recent research has shown that next to the police, the family is the most violent institution in American society. Most murders are committed by people who know their victims personally, and a great proportion of these involve the killing of a family member. Besides guns, those who engage in family violence use an assortment of other weapons, including knives, boiling water, and just plain old fists. But since men are generally stronger than women, they almost never lose a fist fight. Hence, the term 'battered wife' has entered the English language during the past decade. While the term is new, battered wives have been around for a long time.

"But why is the term so new, if the behavior is so ancient? The answer has to do with a change in traditions, with the individual coming to be valued as much as, or more than, the institution. While wife-beating has apparently always been common, it was in earlier times accepted as being a 'normal' part of family life. As long as most women believed that tradition, they never complained about their beatings, nor dared talk about them openly with other similarly abused women. But that tradition is being eroded. It is being replaced with the idea that protecting a woman's body is more important than holding a family together, that violence need not be tolerated for the sake of perpetuating a marriage.

"Today virtually every city in America has a shelter where battered women can go to flee their husbands. In many cases the husband pursues his wife and wants her back—not that he intends to stop beating her, but chiefly because he insists on holding his family together. Consequently, because women are rejecting the idea that family itself is more important than one's own physical well-being, the violence that has been hidden for centuries is finally being talked about, and emerging into public view. And that's the very sore 'problem' called 'family violence' of which we are becoming increasingly aware. But the emergence of the 'problem' is symptomatic of underlying changes—changes away from {an agrarian society to an in-

formation one, with its resulting change away from} traditions that made the family pre-eminent over the individual, and gave the man unquestioned authority over his wife—all in the name of family stability. And in place of those former traditions, the care of the woman's body and of her human dignity have come to be regarded as more significant than the institution itself.

“That same shift—from institutional pre-eminence to individual rights—also applies to sexuality. Just as family violence was tacitly accepted during former times, so was violation of community sexual standards—especially by men. While they had the privilege of discreetly looking for sex both before and after marriage, women were not supposed to have that privilege. That ‘double standard,’ along with the Victorian idea that women were passionless, placed 20th century men at a substantial advantage over women. But why did men have these freedoms while women did not? There were many reasons, but the idea that ‘nice virtuous women’ were the foundation of the family and of society had much to do with women's sexual limitations. These limitations were defended in the name of the family as an institution.

“But throughout the past 25 years we’ve seen that tradition being replaced by the idea that women have the same sexual rights as men. Moreover, if sexual liberties are indeed a threat to the family, as some critics maintain, the current idea is that men are as responsible for the situation as women. Increasingly, women refuse to be the sole *moral guardians* of {the} family—insisting instead that if the family requires ‘moral guardianship,’ then men have to become co-partners with women in that enterprise.

“Perhaps the most troubling byproduct of this increasing sexual freedom is the steep rise in the numbers of unmarried adolescent mothers. More and more teen-age females are having intercourse at an increasingly younger age. Yet the males with whom they’re having sex seem to feel little responsibility to protect their partners from pregnancy. These teen-age males seem to be the last

bastion in the long history of the sexual exploitation of women. Adolescent women have accepted the idea that they have the right to enjoy sex. Unfortunately, they don't have {the moral undergirding which enables them to refrain from sex until marriage, nor} the sense of autonomy that would lead them to refuse sex if their own life-chances (as well as those of their as-yet-unborn children) are in danger of being damaged by male reluctance to use the simple means of contraception readily available.

“Among adults, a troubling byproduct of increasing sexual liberty is the discovery that sex does not equal intimacy. Gay Talese's . . . best seller *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, filled with page after page of extramarital affairs, including his own, missed the distinction completely. While in years gone by the kinds of marriages held together solely by the tradition that ‘stability is the best policy’ often lacked intimacy, relationships held together solely by sex may be equally devoid of intimacy. And yet, as part of the pursuit of individual rights that is changing the American family, intimacy is coming to be valued as highly as sex.

“The difficult of balancing differing interests also emerges in the last of the four ‘problem areas.’ Critics worry that while adults are busy pursuing their own rights, children get left in the backwash. There are, for example, the alleged negative effects on children of divorce and of working mothers. More recently, the question of children's own rights has come into sharper focus. What demands can children legitimately make on their parents? Some children in their 20s have gone to court to sue their parents, alleging that they were not raised properly, were mistreated as children, and as a result suffer from poor self-esteem. Recently we have read of the case of Walter Polovchak, the 12-year-old son of Russian immigrants who in 1980 refused to leave America when his parents decided to return to the Soviet Union. The U.S. government granted the boy temporary asylum, but some critics disagreed with that decision. As one put it, ‘I think it's a bad

precedent to let a 12-year-old boy tell his parents what he wants to do.'

"Clearly, the question of how to do right by today's children is an unsettled one. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the basic trend of changing relationships between adult men and women can simultaneously be enormously beneficial to the rights and well-being of children. The desire of growing numbers of women to seek autonomy through activities *outside* the household can be a great boon to children if, alongside this trend, there occurs a corresponding move to bring men *into* the household, to involve them as fully as women in child care and child nurture. Films such as *Kramer vs. Kramer* help to impress the public with the fact that some men want to be deeply involved in parenting; moreover, they can be just as good at it as women.

"The tradition that every male must be a successful achiever dies hard. Nevertheless, some men are coming to realize that for decades they've been cheated by being cut off from child nurture. It was thought that the family as an institution would suffer if men gave up their work roles for parenting roles. But once again we observe the force of individual rights changing the family. As men came to believe that they *personally* will be better off if they get more involved in child nurture, and that the children will be better off as well, we can expect greater number of men to begin pursuing those kinds of benefits. And if men actually do change their parenting patterns, while women change their occupational behaviors, the positive consequences of that kind of parental symmetry could be profoundly beneficial for the family.

Towards a More Balanced View of the Family

"But,' responds the critic, 'with all this talk about individuals giving their rights and 'doing their thing,' is there any place for the family as an institution? Is there any sense in which family traditions and family obligations remain important in today's world?' Of course there

is, and the trick is to balance the well-being of the institution with the well-being of the individuals that make it up." Our concern is not in throwing out the baby with the bath water; we just want *clean bath water*.

"But how can that be done? Freud said many things that today we totally reject. But now and again, he made statements that remain simple yet timeless. One of these classic insights was his assertion that more than anything else, adults need to *work* and to *love* (*Themes of Work and Love in Adulthood*, by N. J. Smelser and E. Erickson [Harvard University Press]). And we might add that children need to *love* and they need to *learn to work*. Therefore, to identify the optimal conditions under which the family can be a prosperous and robust institution, and to establish the kinds of traditions that will best meet the needs of its members during the decades ahead, we need to consider Freud's insights. The ideal family institution is one that provides maximum opportunities for all its members to *love* and to *work* to the fullest extent possible.

"Traditional family structures have prohibited most women from enjoying meaningful *work* experiences." This does not mean that women cannot have a meaningful work experience as homemakers. However, "their labors were generally limited to the home, even if their talents would have permitted them to enjoy the rewards of paid employment. And those same family structures have prohibited men from enjoying meaningful *love* experiences. They were too busy making money to learn to love and to share themselves, and to participate fully in the nurturing of family relationships. And who suffered from these limitations on both sexes? {The whole family suffered!} Women suffered, not only because they lacked meaningful work, but also because they didn't get the kind of love from their men that they needed and deserved. Men suffered because they couldn't enjoy the release from financial anxiety that comes from having a co-provider in the household, and also because they were unable to receive and participate fully in the love their wives and children held out to them. And

children suffered because they grew up {with lousy parental role models,} repeating the same dreadful patterns. Those patterns sprang from traditions in which the whole assumed more importance than its parts." Thus, the "sins of the fathers" [parents in this case] are passed from generation to generation.

The concern of the critics to go back to the family structures and traditions of another period, is a nostalgic throwback to a bygone agrarian age that no longer exists, nor are its forms functional in the present information society. Therefore, we must avoid the temptation to romanticize any one society and place it on a pedestal as the ideal and norm for all time. Each is functional to its time period, and is determined by the prevailing social and family needs.

"We are heading now toward new traditions that *balance* individual with institutional well-being. That balance will come about through the total involvement of all family members in meaningful work and intense love and caring.

"What can our churches do to help achieve that balance? First, they must resist the temptation to doomsaying: 'Never ask "Oh, why were things so much better in the old days?" It's not an intelligent question' (Eccl. 7:10, TEV). Second, they should encourage married persons to analyze their own marriages and consider whether they are governed either by traditionalism or by some form of individualism. In either case, couples should then ask themselves whether theirs is a satisfactory arrangement, or whether a richer marriage might be possible through a greater balance of the two poles. For those seeking greater balance, the challenge is to provide practical suggestions for involving all family members in meaningful work and love opportunities.

"It is also vital that the local church become a support group—a caring community—for persons struggling with these sorts of difficult but not insuperable tasks. Often churches are faulted for following instead of leading soci-

ety. In this case, however, the church may be the one institution in our society uniquely suited to raise aspirations aimed at new family traditions, and to provide a framework for their attainment." Such a compassionate and caring environment will enable the family to become *strong at the broken places!*

NOTES: APPENDIX A

¹Max Cleland, *Strong At the Broken Places* (Lincoln, VI: Chosen Books Publishing Co., 1980).

²Cited by Cleland in "Introduction."

³References imbedded in the text are part of Scanzoni's article. References in the endnotes are part of Rosado's additional material.

⁴See the excellent special edition of *Newsweek* magazine, "The 21st Century Family," Winter/Spring 1990.

⁵Thorsten Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: The New American Library, 1953), 53.

⁶For a similar analysis of society as it relates to the mission of the church, see Caleb Rosado, "The Nature of Society and the Challenge to the Mission of the Church," *International Review of Mission* 77:305 (January 1988): 22-37.

⁷John Naisbitt, *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives* (New York: Warner Books, 1982), 12.

⁸Credit for this term goes to Samuel Betances

⁹Andrew Greeley, "Protestant and Catholic: Is the Analogical Imagination Extinct?" *American Sociological Review* 54 (August 1989): 485-502

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 486. Max Weber and Emile Durkheim—two of the founding fathers of sociology—held that these two different approaches to life and group relations impact the economic development of societies and the individual's relationship to the same, respectively. Weber held that the Protestant focus on individual achievement led to economic success, while the communitarian ethic of Catholicism tended to impede education and economic achievement [*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribners, 1958).] For

Durkheim, the relationship between communal integration and a low incidence of suicide in Catholic countries stood out in sharp contrast to the individualism and high rate of suicide prevalent in Protestant countries [*Suicide* (New York: The Free Press, 1951).]

¹¹It is not a coincidence that both communism and liberation theology tend to flourish most in Roman Catholic societies, for both orientations promote a communal way of life and belief system. It is important to note that First Century Christianity was also communitarian in nature (see Acts 4 & 5).

¹²For a fuller exposition of Milton's position see V. Norskov Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce: A Study of their Interpretation from Erasmus to Milton* [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1971].

Appendix B

A Model for Effective Change

There are two ways of bringing about change—one is passive, the other is active. The Passive Model of Change is based on the idea that beliefs change behavior. It follows a four-step process:

The Passive Model of Change

(Based on the idea that beliefs change behavior)

1. *Knowledge*—provide people with all the necessary information.
2. *Attitudes*—knowledge will result in attitudinal change.
3. *Individual Behavior*—attitudinal change results in individual behavioral change.
4. *Group Behavior*—individual change results in group change.

This four-step process looks very logical, neat and workable. But there is only one problem with it—it seldom works. All the knowledge in the world does not necessarily change people's attitudes. In addition, individual behavioral change does not necessarily translate into group behavioral change. Just look at the racism and sexism prevalent in society today. Thus, as the old adage says: "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

A more workable model is the Active Model of Change, which is based on the idea that behavior changes beliefs.

As can be expected, this model involves fewer steps—a two-step process:

The Active Model of Change

(Based on the idea that behavior changes beliefs)

1. Change Behavior.
2. Change Beliefs.

The first step in this model is to focus on behavioral changes consonant with the Word of God and the practice of Christ. (It must be recognized that Christ went to the cross not so much for what He believed but for what He practiced. And His practice towards women, in contrast to that of the society of His day, was radical indeed. The problem is that today church and society have reversed their roles. Society is often more open to change in the right direction than the church. This is because society is oriented towards the future and thus takes a *dynamic demeanor*, while the church is oriented towards the past and therefore takes a *static stance*. Because the church often serves as the gatekeeper of the values of society, it tends to be a conservative institution, reluctant to change.) People will then bring their beliefs into line with their behavior, which in turn affects their beliefs, and so on through the spiral. Social psychologist Thomas F. Pettigrew declares: "It is commonly held that attitudes must change before behavior; yet social psychological research points conclusively to the opposite order of events as more common. Behavior changes first, because of new laws or other interventions; individuals then modify their ideas to fit their new acts."¹ Christianity, and the concept of conversion, is based on the Active Model of Change and not on the Passive Model. That is why, as the saying goes, "There are no atheists in foxholes."

The process used by the All Nations Church to ordain women as elders was the Active Model of Change. On the

very first day the church met in business session, the church voted to accept in principle women as elders. This action was based on the fact that the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists had already approved such action, and that the ministry of All Nations Church must be one which cuts across all social divisions—racism, sexism, classism and ageism—which dehumanize the family of God. When the Nominating Committee came to do its work several weeks later, women were naturally considered for the position with no hesitation, since in Christ “there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Seven were ordained the first year (1979), nine the second year, and so forth as women have continued to be part of the leadership of the church. The belief of church members with regard to the role of women at All Nations fell into line with the practice of the church. The second First Elder of All Nations was a woman who served her designated three-year term. The policy of All Nations Church now is for a woman to serve as First Elder every other three-year term, with a man as Second Elder, in addition to other women as elders. During the off-term, a woman serves as Second Elder when a man serves as First Elder.

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¹Thomas F. Pettigrew, “Prejudice,” in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Stephan Thernstrom, ed. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1980), 829.

Appendix C

The Gospel and Inclusive Language

One of the distinguishing characteristics of a Christian, which sets him or her off from non-Christians, is their manner of speaking. They speak differently. Swear words, filthy jokes, obscenities, cursing God—such forms of speech cease to be part of a Christian's vocabulary.

All of this is the result of a *transformed walk*. The Apostle Paul speaks of this "transformed walk" in Colossians 3:5-17. In other words, the Gospel not only cleans up the life, it also cleans up the language.

Thus, throughout the ages, Christians have been known for the purity of their speech, a speech which does not dehumanize, but rather uplifts the speaker as well as those who hear it.

The Function of Language in Society

What is the function of language in society? At first, this question must sound rather meaningless or unnecessary. The answer should be obvious—language serves the purpose of communication.

But communication alone is not the sole purpose of language. Language also serves as the means by which we give meaning to our world; it is the vehicle by which we define our existence, and our identity finds self-expression. Without language, we cease to exist. By this I do not mean that we physically disappear; but socially, in our sense of self-worth, and value to others, we are insignificant.

"Linguists and psycholinguists have long recognized the fact that our language filters our perception of the

world and limits our ways of making sense of what we perceive."¹ Every single minute of the day our mind is bombarded by thousands of stimuli, bits of information demanding our attention. In order to handle this information overload, our brain has a "reduction value" that "narrows the array of incoming stimuli to an acceptable range but in doing so necessarily limits our image of the world."² The more education we have, the greater the diversity of experiences we have been exposed to, the better able we will be to cope with a greater array of information, thereby broadening our image of the world.

The concept that language reflects the culture of a people is most important to understand, because many people believe that the worldview of a society stems from its language patterns. This is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.³ Studies have shown the opposite to be true, however. "It is cultural values, arising out of the lifeways of a society, that determine the purpose of language, the mode of language behavior, and the methods of language teaching. Once in existence, the language patterns reinforce and perpetuate the worldview of the culture, but this is a secondary, not a primary, phenomenon. And when the worldview changes with changes in the social structures and institutions, the language patterns change to correspond."⁴

In the nineteen fifties, how many of us had heard of astronauts, microwaves, Watergate, videos, hi-tech, star wars, sexism, women's movement, space shuttle, multi-cultural, inclusive ministry or super-conductivity? Yet these are now all part of our expanded image of the world.

This is the reason why we must move towards more inclusive language when it comes to the sexes. As our worldview of the roles of women within the structures and institutions of society changes, so also must our language change to be compatible with such changes.

Thus, by means of language I know how my world is defined and what my place in that world is. But why is "inclusive language" so important?

The Case for Inclusive Language

Because of the function of language in society, the Christian must be most sensitive to how language affects other human beings and their sense of self-worth. Any form of speech that dehumanizes people, that denies their total existence, that belittles others or excludes them, must not be part of the Christian's way of life. For the Christian operates out of compassion and concern for others, and not out of self-seeking at the expense of another's dignity. Notice what Paul says in Colossians 3:12-14, 17:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. . . . And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Jesus Christ came to restore women as well as men to a full humanity, one which makes possible their dignity as human beings, by the power of the Gospel. Yet, throughout the ages women have been denied full humanity by a pattern of exclusion in language usage. Several quotes from helpful sources illustrate this point:

Consider, for example, the traditional English use of the word "man." A man is a male being, as opposed to a female being. But in common usage "man" has also meant "human being," as opposed to "animal." On the other hand, "woman" means female, but never *human being*. No word that refers to a female person identifies her with humanity. So, in common English idiom, "man" has been defined by his humanity, but "woman" by her sex, by her rela-

tionship to man. "Woman" becomes a subgroup under "human." Man is the human race; woman is his sexual partner in traditional English [as well as Spanish] usage.⁵

The words for the male specific, "man," and the words "human" or "human being" are interchangeable [but not so with "woman"]; thus woman stands apart from human.⁶

This is simply one example of how language *reflects* the way in which we think but also *informs* the way in which we think: English [and Spanish] translations of the Bible perpetuate the assumption that man is primary and woman secondary.⁷

If you are a man reading this and still are not convinced of the need for more inclusive terms in our language, or if you are a woman who has not experienced any difficulty with the predominance of masculine words, try this experiment: Turn to 1 John 2:9-11 and read it out loud. Now read it aloud again substituting the appropriate feminine word every time a masculine word is given.

Do you *feel* any difference in your reaction to that passage when using feminine terminology? Do you, as a man, feel as close to the meaning of that passage when reading it the second time? Do you, as a woman, feel closer or further from it when using the feminine words?⁸

The words we use, whether in worship or in everyday speech, "are important because of the *images* they form in our minds."⁹ These images will be positive towards ourselves or negative; our humanity will be denied or fulfilled by the images we form of ourselves on the basis of language.

The Role of the Church

What is the role of the church in all of this? The following statement by John C. Bennett clearly answers the question:

In the case of many forms of oppression and of dehumanizing ways of feeling and living, the church has been an accomplice. This is true of white racism and it is true of economic injustice and international imperialism. But in the case of the subordination and oppression of women the church has been a major *cause* of the oppression, a prime mover. It has been the prime preserver of this oppression through its theology, its liturgy and its ecclesiastical organization.¹⁰

In light of such complicity, the church must move from being a "prime preserver" of oppression to being a "prime mover" of justice. If the gospel means anything, it means change—change in our behavior, change in our thinking, change in our speech and in our language usage. But in order to be relevant to human needs the church must not only respond to change, it must *anticipate* it!

The one thing the church must not do is in the name of Christ and in an effort to uplift humanity, is to put people down! Such was the case of the woman in the synagogue, who had been afflicted with a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years, in Luke 13:10-17. The preacher, the ruler of the synagogue, tried to stop her from being healed, but Jesus restored her. In this incident we have set before pastors today the two models of ministry with regard to women—refusal or restoration. The model of refusal reflects the attitude of many male pastors towards women down through the ages; the other, restoration, reflects the ministry of Christ. Our attitude and action towards women is already an indication of our choice of models.

Towards More Inclusive Language in Worship

In order to be sensitive towards and inclusive of all who join in the worship experience, the following examples of inclusive language are given as ways of addressing God and one another.

Addressing God in Prayer

Instead of the traditional and exclusive use of "Father," use the following:

God O Lord our God	Our Heavenly Parent
Our Loving Creator Lord	Our Divine Maker
O God our Creator	Our Father/Mother God
	Our Father and Mother

(If you ask God for wisdom, you will be able to come up with your own creations.)

Addressing one another in worship

Traditional Expressions: Inclusive Expressions

The principle here is to include women when referring to groups in which they are participants.

Brethren	Brothers and Sisters, Family, Friends
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Brotherhood	Sister/Brotherhood, Family, Unity
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Man, Mankind	Humanity, Humankind, Human Beings, Human Person(s), Persons the Human
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Sons of God	Sons and Daughters of God, Children of God, Followers of God, Believers
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Layman	
Laymen	Laity, Layperson(s)
Spokesman/men	Spokespersons(s) Advocate
Chairman	Chairperson, Chair
Lady Elder(s)	Elder, Female Elder(s), Woman Elder
Deaconess	Deacon (both Elder and Deacon are functions and are not gender-specific, in the same manner as Doctor and Lawyer. There is no such word as "doctress" or "lawyress.")
Forefathers, Founding Fathers	Ancestors, Forbearers, Founders, Founding Fathers and Mothers
The common man, The average man	The average person, the ordinary citizen, commonfolk
Housewife	Homemaker
He	He or She, S/He
Manmade	Manufactured, handmade
Ladies and men	Ladies and Gentlemen, women and men
Businessman	Businessmen and women, Merchants, people in business
Primitive man	Primitive men and women Early men and women

Manpower	Labor force, work force
Coed	Female student

English pronouns referring to God are almost always masculine: "God . . . He." These should occasionally be avoided by rephrasing sentences, substituting a relative pronoun (who, whom, that), repeating the noun, or using the second-person pronoun (you).

Gender Forms of Address

<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>Correct</i>
Mr. and Mrs. John Smith	John and Mary Smith or John Smith and Mary Smith
García and his wife	Juan García and Aida García
Mrs. Robert Wong	Ms. (Mrs.) Cathy Wong
Woman Pastor	Pastor
Lady teacher	Teacher
Ladies of the church	Church women
Dear Sir, Gentlemen	Dear Friend, Dear Person, Greetings, Dear Customer

The principle here is to give both spouses their full recognition and not simply to see one as the extension of the other.

The Principle of Symmetry

It is also important to practice the principle of symmetry¹¹ in speech—in *gender language usage, equivalent terms should be used in reference to pairs, unless one is being age-specific*. For example, “men and girls” is an asymmetrical expression, while “men and women” is a symmetrical one, unless one is specifically referring to girls by age. The rule is consistency.

Asymmetrical

Men and Girls

Man and Wife

Men and Ladies

Symmetrical

Men and Women or
Boys and Girls

Husband and Wife or
Man and Woman

Men and Women,
Ladies and Gentlemen

For additional help in nonsexist writing see, “Guidelines for Nonsexist Language in APA Journals,” available from the American Psychological Association. Also helpful is Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

NOTES: APPENDIX C

¹Gerard Egan and Michael Cown, *People in Systems: A Model for Development in the Human-Service Professions and Education* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1979), 26.

²*Ibid.*

³Edward Sapir, "The Status of Linguistics as a Science," *Language* 5 (1929): 207-14; Benjamin Lee Whorf, "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language." In *Language, Thought, and Reality* (Cambridge: The Technological Press of M.I.T./New York: Wiley, 1956), 134-159.

⁴Ruby R. Leavitt, *The Puerto Ricans: Culture Change and Language Deviance* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1974), 242.

⁵*Lectionary, An Inclusive Language Lectionary*, published by the National Council of Churches (Atlanta: The John Knox Press, 1983). "Introduction."

⁶Sharon Neuffer Emswiler and Thomas Neuffer Emswiler, *Women & Worship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 5-6.

⁷*Lectionary*, "Introduction."

⁸Emswiler and Emswiler, 5.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰John C. Bennett, "Fitting the Liberation Theme Into Our Theological Agenda," *Christianity and Crisis*, July 18, 1977: 166.

¹¹Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (New York, Harper & Row, 1979), 2.

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