



Women and Jesus were no strangers. They contributed to His ministry from start to finish. When He was 40 days old, Anna "talked about the child to all who were looking for the liberation of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38 NEB). During His ministry, women "followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him" (Matt. 27:55 RSV) and these many women were there at His death. Dorothy L. Sayers states it this way:

Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man---there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized: who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as "The women, God help us!" or "The ladies, God bless them!"; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously: who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female: who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend: who took them as he found them and was completely unself-conscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity: nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything "funny" about woman's nature.

Sayers, Dorothy L. Are Women Human?  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971:47

Our Lord considered women:

1. Worth teaching Luke 10:38-41
2. Reliable enough to be commissioned by Him to deliver His message  
Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father: and to my God and your God  
John 20:17
3. Worthy of reward for able words Mark 7:29
4. Candidates for discussing "theology"  
God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth John 4:24 (NIV)
5. Able to receive revelation and pass it on  
I am the resurrection John 11:25 (Spoken to Martha)
6. Capable of deeds worthy of remembrance Mark 14:9
7. An instrument for revealing His Messianism to men and women  
"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman, which testified..."  
John 4:39
8. Blessed for hearing and obeying rather than giving birth  
Luke 11:27-28

Little by little women learned of a new family of which they were to be a part. This family would be related through the Son to the Father. They heard Him say, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, my mother." Mark 3:35.

Furthermore, there would be new relationships, not only to God and the Son, but also to each other. This new family would be composed of new creatures, living under a new covenant, for "behold, all things

are become new" II Cor. 5:17. And the world, seeing these new creatures, would notice the difference between them and itself and eventually this new family would bring about the restoration of all creation to God ("the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" Rom. 8:21).

There would be a new relationship:

Perhaps the best word for the new relationship would be "oneness." One in God: One in Christ: One in each other.

But it is not for these alone that I pray, but for those also who through their words put their faith in me; may they all be one: as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that Thou didst send me. John 17:20-21.

This oneness in Christ marked a change for the women:

1. Under the old covenant males were circumcised: under the new both male and female would be baptized into Christ Acts 16:15

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (One Faith). For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put Christ on (One Baptism). There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond or free; there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ. Gal. 3:26-28.

2. Under the old covenant a minimum of 10 males must be present for worship: under the new, two or three gathered in His name were sufficient. Matt. 18:20.
3. Under the old covenant in assembly women were segregated: under the new her home could be the place of worship. (Lydia, and Mark's mother)

There would be newness in life:

Perhaps the best word for newness of life would be "oneness"

By baptism we were buried with Him, and lay dead, in order that, as Christ was raised from the dead in the splendour of the Father, so also we might set our feet upon the new path of life. Rom. 6:4.

This oneness in life marked changes for women:

1. In the one family: each served the other, so that among the in-Christ people there was no power struggle, no jockeying for the dominant positions, no special caste, no people to be kept in their places, no one denied freedom.

Why? (a) These new creatures remembered the words

of their Lord

He that is greatest among you must be your servant. Matt. 23:11.

- (b) The Apostles remembered the words of the Lord: You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. Matt. 20: 25-28.

2. In the one family: each demonstrated by his peace that one Spirit dwelt among them.

Spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives. Ep. 4:3.

So they were:

- (a) To live in harmony in likemindedness Rom. 15:5

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Ph. 2:2

- (b) To lay down their lives for each other I John 3:16

- (c) To use their gifts to serve one another - Eph. 4: 12 - for all were priests. I Pet. 2:9.

A summary of Hans Kung's position states: Jesus did offer sacrifice once and for all; he gathered into himself the whole meaning of priesthood and sacrifice, and obliterated forever the need of a priestly caste. The result of that action and his entirely original contribution was, for the first time in the history of religion, to enable an entire people to be priest. Is this not one of the biggest differences between Christianity and all other religions on the face of the world?

Kung, Hans. The Church.  
New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967.  
pp. 363-387

- (d) To submit to one another Eph. 5:21

- (e) To remember that love does not insist on having its own way I Cor. 13:4-8

They remembered that the one Lord was tempted to use power (Matt. 4:1-11), but He chose the way

of no coercion. Anyone has the freedom to say, "no", to Him: he steals no one's freedom.

- (f) To use their freedom responsibly, recognizing that each one has something to contribute to the assembled family

To sum up, my friends, when you meet for worship, each of you contributes a hymn, some instruction, a revelation, an ecstatic utterance, or the interpretation of such an utterance. All of these must aim at one thing: to build up the church.

I Cor. 14:26

- (g) To remember that authority belongs to the Lord-- He has it all. Matt. 28:18

The government of the Church is on His shoulders. The so called "rulers" have "only to see that the laws are obeyed, but have no power or right to legislate in any one instance, or for any one purpose."

Campbell, Alexander. "Ancient Order"  
Christian Baptist. Vol. V: p. 429  
St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co.

We wonder what it must have been like when the talents of each child were recognized, accepted and put to use by the family, when the temptation to rule was resisted and the new creatures walked the one Lord's road of service, self-sacrifice and death!

Let's find out by attending an assembly of "Little Christs" for whom race, gender, social position no longer separate but enhance. We must help ourselves by covering that which may hinder our seeing the oneness of the family. By doing this we shall see the Spirit working through the gifts He has given.

So, as we approach the place of assembly we will be handed a sheet which will cover all but our eyes "that we may see". When we don our sheets we are aware that we have all become of one size and all have the same voice pattern. No longer can we distinguish age, gender, race, color, profession, wealth, poverty, etc.

Eventually we are all seated and there is silence. Soon one of the sheets rises and says, "I think it appropriate that we begin this worship service with a hymn. Would anyone mind if I lead it?" No one minds. The choice is good --- one of the great old hymns of the church extolling the majesty of God is sung. Then, silence. Another stands and requests the privilege of leading the congregation in prayer.

Request granted. Never was such a prayer uttered in their hearing. The leader expressed just what was needed and each felt as if he stood before the very throne of God. Silence. One asked and received permission to read Scripture. This was done very poorly.

Silence. Another rose suggesting it was now appropriate to come to the table. From all over the assembly sheets rose to help with the serving. It was noticed that some of the servers by their very mien conveyed how blessed they were in having the privilege to pass the emblems: others haphazardly went through the motions. This latter proved true when the offering was received. The one who wanted to preach was adequate -- just adequate. Eventually the worshippers left.

This continued for 3 months. By this time each of the assembled was leading according to his ability and talent --- singing, preaching, teaching, serving at the table, janitorial service, cooking and serving meals, etc.

After another 3 months of accord it was suggested that since all was going along so decently and in order and all were accepted in their serving, that an unveiling take place. It began.

The janitor was Dr. Thomas. Why not? He insisted that his surgery be clean. Of course, he wanted a building dedicated to the worship of his God as clean and he had willingly done it. The two who had made the passing of the emblems so significant were Mary, the elementary child, who loved her Lord and recognized the importance of handling aright the body and blood, and Bill, Captain of the Basketball Team, who spoke up for Christ and lived the Life in the halls of the High School. Who had been praying all this time for them? Elder -ly Aunt Suzie, a saint of the church, who lived a life of serving and teaching in spite of a lifetime of burdens and heartache.

The revelations continued. The results noted. Each had served using his given talent: each had been accepted for that talent. No distinction had been made because of race, color, gender, social position. One in God: One in Christ: One in each other. As in Christ there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, so we have attended an assembly of "in Christ" people.

In the New Testament the names of some of the "in Christ" leaders are recorded: Jew and Gentile (Barnabas and Luke), free and slave (Philemon and Onesimus), male and female (Gaius and Phoebe).

It is amazing that any women were named in light of the position and education of women under the old covenant. Born into a patriarchal and hierarchical society, few women could read or write; few were learned in the Scriptures. Yet, these New Testament women found themselves under a new covenant in which the Head had forbidden a hierarchical authoritarian structure. Matt. 20:28. In this covenant an individual did not assume authority over another in God's family, for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. II Cor. 3:17.

Freedom was new to these women, but their Lord had set them free, and that entailed responsibility. The women, realizing their deficiencies in education, had little trouble understanding they must be taught. By no stretch of the imagination could they serve as leaders until they were readied and made perfect for the work of ministry. Eph. 4:12.

But, a few women were ready, educated for leadership. These must have felt like Esther when it was said to her:

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Esther 4:14.

So, these prepared women stepped out into new ventures for Him.

The following are the functions performed by these women leaders: some names are listed.

Women functioned in public worship (I Cor. 11:5 - praying and prophesying) - see introduction.

Named: The women prophets who were the 4 daughters of Philip. Acts 21:9.

Women functioned as teachers

Named: Priscilla - Acts 18:26 - see introduction.

In rabbinic usage a woman was designated only as the wife of a particular man, whereas Paul in his Epistle to the Romans greeted women by name.

Bloesch, Donald G. Is The Bible Sexist? Beyond Feminism and Patriarchalism. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982: 31-32.

It should be noted that Priscilla is listed before Aquila 4 times out of 6 times. Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3; I Cor. 16:19; II Tim. 4:19. This may or may not be significant, but if not significant, it is at least peculiar that Paul did this.

Women functioned as administrators

Named: Phoebe - Διάκονος, προστάντις Rom. 16:1-2

Διάκονος is a Greek word that has no feminine. (Deaconess is a concession to our culture).

Διάκονος was used by Paul nearly a dozen times and is translated minister or deacon (when used of men). Thus, Phoebe, minister of the church at Cenchrea or, Phoebe, deacon of the church at Cenchrea.

Προστάντις is translated "rule" or "be over" in other N.T. texts: Rom. 12:8 (KJV) I Thes. 5:12; I Tim. 3:4, 5, 12 and 5:17).

Phoebe is mentioned at the head of a list of 29 people, 10 of which are women. She is to be received worthily as befits the saints and is to be helped in whatever she requires. "Stand by her in any business in which she may need your help". Rom. 16:2 (NEB). (We are reminded of Isaac Errett's editorial, "Help These Women").

Women functioned as apostles

In Paul's view the requisites for apostleship were to have seen the Risen Lord and receive a commission to proclaim the Gospel (I Cor. 9:1-2; 15:8-11; Gal. 1:11-17) and in Luke's view to have accompanied Jesus during his ministry. Women met these criteria. Consider Mary

Magdalene. She had accompanied Him, seen the Risen Lord and been sent by Him to tell the others. In church history we find her referred to as "Apostle to the Apostles".

Brown, Raymond. "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel".  
Th St 36(1975): 693.

Named: Junia - Rom. 16:7

During the first centuries of the church this common feminine name caused no trouble. The earliest manuscripts have the feminine name.

"Apparently the openness of the early church to women in positions of leadership was such that their identification as 'apostles' was received without difficulty, just as was Barnabas."

Bilezikian, Gilbert. Beyond Sex Roles. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985: 198.

Oh, how great is the devotion of this woman (Junia) that she should even be counted worthy of the appellation of apostle - CHRYSOSTOM - CHURCH FATHER (app. 350 A.D. - 407 A.D.)

Cited in William Sandy and Arthur Headlan,  
The Epistle to the Romans. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1902: 423.

Women functioned as laborers "sharing the struggle with me in the gospel" Phil. 4:2-3.

Συνήθλησαν. ἀθλέω to contend. Here the word suggests the side by side contending for the defense of the Gospel. The Apostles could scarcely have used this strong word if they had merely meant "assisted him with mutual help".

Thomas, W. D. "The Place of Women in the Church at Philippi". Expos. T., Vol. 83 (1971/72: 117-20.

Named: Euodia and Syntyche Phil. 4:2-3

Mary Rom. 16:6

Tryphena and Tryphosa Rom. 16:12

Paul admonished the Corinthians to be "subject to every co-worker and laborer" I Cor. 16:15ff.

The Thessalonians were exhorted to "respect those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you". I Thess. 5:12.

Women functioned by "doing good and helping the poor".

Named: Dorcas the Disciple -- only place in the New Testament where the feminine form of this word is used. Acts 9:36.

That the beneficiary of this unprecedented event in the life of the church was a female leader should give us reason to pause. Her leadership was important enough to the church for it to send two men on a mission to fetch



Peter, for Peter to interrupt a successful evangelistic campaign (v. 35) and return with them for the funeral of a woman he did not know, and for Peter to decide that at that period in time in the life of that community, Tabitha had become indispensable and irreplaceable, that the only solution to the crisis created by her death was to bring her back to life. Some leader she must have been, Tabitha. Gilezikian, Gilbert. Beyond Sex Roles. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985: 204.

Women functioned in founding and housing churches - comp. Acts 18:2, 18-18 with I Cor. 16:19, and Rom. 16:3-5.

Named: Priscilla - I Cor. 16:19  
Apphia at Colossae-Philemon 2  
Nympha at Laodicea - Col. 4:15  
Lydia - Acts 16:14, 40

If women had the ability, talents, gifts from the Spirit, they were received as leaders in the New Testament. That so many women were listed as leaders is remarkable for the average woman had a long way to go before she would be ready to accept the service of leadership. She made many mistakes in her eagerness to serve. She accepted or assumed leadership when not ready. She was deceived by false teaching. Yet, this was not surprising. Education was new to her. Which of us has not followed the teaching of a beloved college professor, only to learn later that he was dead wrong?

Problems arose. Paul found it necessary to state, "I am not presently permitting women to teach", I Tim. 2:12 (ἐπιτρέπω Pres. Ind. Active ), thus, restraining the women at Ephesus from teaching until they themselves were well instructed -- a good principle for all churches. As for not having authority over a man, this the women learned not to do when they digested Paul's letter to their own church which said, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" Eph. 5:21 (NEB). Eventually they would be so well taught that they would realize that no teacher, man or woman, has authority over others. Authority does not rest in the teacher; it resides in the truth taught.

At Corinth where qualified women prayed and prophesied, we find "one of the most emphatic statements for female participation in the worship of the church. The participle ἡ introducing 36v indicates that if one phrase is the case then the other is not. The ἡ which introduces I Cor. 14:36 declares that v. 33b-35 are to be emphatically refuted by the two-fold rhetorical query of v. 36. "WHAT! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you (men) the only ones it has reached?"

Odell-Scott, D. W. "Let the Women Speak in Church: An Egalitarian Interpretation of I Cor. 14:33b-36". Bib. Th. Bul. 13(1983): 90-93.

In Christ's fellowship woman is as essential to man as man is to woman. I Cor. 11:11 (NEB). So "let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body: and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom:

teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Col. 3:16 (KJV)

Not one of us in this room has all the answers to our differences over leadership in the church. Future scholarship may be able to enlighten us. We are teachable. We are not satisfied to build a theology on one text while ignoring others. We are not content to play word games: subordinate but not inferior: equal in worth, but subordinate in action: still under the curse of Eve but free in Christ.

To reform the church to Apostolic teaching is excellent. Perhaps we could start by dropping from our vocabulary the terms "hierarchy" and "office".

The title ἀρχή - ruler, head, leader, never refers to individuals within the communities, but significantly only to Christ himself - Col. 1:18 (comp. Rom. 15:12). The term τιμὴ which emphasizes dignity of office, and the term τέλος, which stresses the power inherent in such, are also absent from Paul's ecclesiastical vocabulary.

Banks, Robert. Paul's Idea of Community.  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980: 135.

It is time to give the congregation its rightful place in church polity and to drop the word "office", supplanting it with "function", for how is "hierarchy of any kind to be evaluated in light of his rejection of all privileges and power in terms of control or coercion?"

Bartchy, Scott. "Jesus, Power and Gender Roles".  
TSF Bulletin (Jan. Feb. '84): 2-4.

Perhaps we should consider the word "ordination" and learn that it meant blessing and not imparting some magical power. Is it not tradition, rather than New Testament teaching, which allows "officers" to endow others with a priestly character?

To reform the church to Apostolic Teaching is excellent, but to restore people to oneness in Christ and God and each other is excellence - par excellence. Is the Restoration Movement passé? It is vital and alive. There is much left to be done to restore to oneness. There are occasions when we see it happening:

Whenever a mother baptizes a child (Lansing, Mich.), whenever a young man insists that a woman/co-worker baptize him because she taught him the truth (Topeka, Ks.), whenever a woman publicly speaks the Good News (even if she must do it standing on the floor level or her words are announced as a "report", not a sermon), we are witnessing practical demonstrations of the restoring of people to "oneness".

The Restoration Movement is needed for the freeing of all God's children - not to realize vain ambition in leadership, but that they may serve for the advancement of the Kingdom of God in the World.

Help us, Father, to continually remind ourselves that we are servants, not rulers. Help us to show the world that we are in Christ and that in Him there is no Jew-Gentile: bond-free: male-female, that the world, seeing our oneness will realize that it is seeing new creatures, living under a new covenant.

In the name of the one who prayed for that Unity. Amen.

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