Women and Ministry
Introduction

BY COLLEEN BENSON

How does culture impact the relationship between women and ministry? This relationship—as well as many other aspects of our Christian faith—is deeply embedded in culture. Since cultures are constantly in the process of change, this question needs to be readdressed from time to time. It is hoped that this issue of Theology, News and Notes will provide some new perspectives on this subject.

To begin our discussion, Ruth Tucker presents a historical survey of women and ministry in which she highlights the roles of Christian women down through the ages. As an academician and historian, she examines several historical models of ministry while demonstrating the importance for women to become involved in full mobilization for the Great Commission.

Next, Dorothy Dahlman defines facets of the development of women's ministries within the church. She traces the transformation of women's functions in the church from ladies' aid societies into women's missionary societies and then, finally, after becoming equipped for ministry, she describes how contemporary women now have the opportunity to do "real ministry."

This is followed by my article that describes the women of the nineties—the baby boomers and busters—two generations who have been much involved in changing the roles of women in society as well as in revolutionizing the ministry of women in the church. The concerns of the modern woman are also addressed, including vocation, marriage and family, and spiritual issues.

Gordon Kirk considers which issues regarding women in leadership must be viewed as cultural and which must be understood as theological and discusses how all Christians have both traditional and ecclesiastical inhibitors.

Finally, David Scholer, a long-time advocate for the full use of women's gifts, documents... 

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...the significant roles played by the women who worked side by side with Paul in the New Testament church that provide transcultural models for all women in ministry.

One dynamic not addressed in these articles is the intra-psychic factors [that occur within one's psyche or personality] which explain the diversity of opinion regarding women's roles throughout the Christian era. Surely there are other principles operating besides theological presuppositions to explain how different peoples using similar hermeneutics can arrive at diverse positions regarding issues such as ordination and hierarchy.

Perhaps, just as preference for worship styles is determined
to some extent by personality factors, one’s position about women and ministry may also be influenced by these dynamics. Thus, it seems necessary not only to distinguish between the cultural and theological elements, but also the psychological, to explicate this complex subject.

Hopefully, as a result of this discussion on women and ministry, bridges will be built over any remaining barriers to women, and gender-free opportunities will occur for all women and men to exercise their spiritual gifts and callings in service to Jesus Christ.

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A Historical Overview of Women in Ministry

BY RUTH A. TUCKER

My best men are women.” So said General William Booth, reflecting on the “soldiers” in the ranks who were serving with him in the Salvation Army. There was no position too difficult, no place too dangerous for these hardy “hallelujah lassies” who spread out into the city slums and over the globe to give their lives for the gospel. They served in the trenches and behind the lines, but rarely in command themselves. They endured ridicule and contempt and persecution, utterly convinced they were following God’s call.

In many ways, the humble service of these forgotten women reflects Jesus’ vision for ministry. Jesus radically redefined ministry as servanthood—a ministry devoid of status that required self-denial and sacrifice and involved full mobilization. No one was excluded. His disciples were commanded to carry the gospel to their neighbors and to the ends of the earth.

The Old Testament concept of ministry was different. In ancient Israel the focus of worship between a covenant people and their God. The sign of covenant was circumcision, a reminder of God’s promises and responsibilities. The tabernacle, temple, and family rituals were conducted by men. The primary duty of women was that of maintaining the home and bearing children. When the people were faithful and true to God, they were blessed materially and militarily.

In the fullness of time, God sent forth his son to redeem his wayward children by the precious blood of Christ on the cross. Baptism for both males and females replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant. Under this new covenant Jesus set forth a radical new standard for ministry. Family responsibilities were still in place and righteous living was a priority, but the primary emphasis was disseminating the gospel—a message that was no longer associated with a particular people or nation.

To the woman at the well who reminded Jesus that Jewish worship was at the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus countered, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” Her recognition of him as the Messiah sent her back to Sychar to evangelize her own people.

Jesus had a compelling message that freely offered living water to all who would believe, but discipleship was costly. A spirit of sacrifice and self-denial was the prime requisite. “Take up your cross and follow me” was his motto for recruitment. This life of hardship offered the followers no status or position—only servanthood: “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave” (Matt. 20:26-27, NRSV).

The new concept of ministry that Jesus set forth is best summed up in the Great Commission—a radical injunction that thrust his followers out into “all the world” to teach, preach, disciple, and baptize. This set the stage for ministry for all generations to follow.

The Apostle Paul took up the same themes in his epistles and, like Jesus, he became the chief
example and role model for self-denial and lack of recognition. He expected his followers to do the same. Both women and men risked their lives for the ministry—as did Priscilla and Aquila. Both women and men sacrificed marriage and family for the ministry. And both women and men heeded the Great Commission, without status or prestige.

But as the generations passed, the unique character of New Testament ministry faded, and in its place developed a distorted concept of service and spirituality. On one hand, a growing church hierarchy paved the way for worldly position and prestige, and on the other hand, an accepted pattern of ascetic values called for extreme measures to deny worldliness.

Women, who were generally denied office and leadership roles in the church, found asceticism to be their only avenue for ministry. This model for women’s ministries predominated until it was replaced by the Reformation model, which was later superseded by the evangelical outreach model. Today we have moved into the self-fulfillment model of ministry. It is helpful to reflect back on our heritage to see where we have come from and where we are going.

THE MEDIEVAL MODEL: CELIBACY, SELF-DENIAL, AND SECLUSION

The concept of celibate ministry was presented by both Jesus and Paul. In order to more effectively spread the gospel, disciples were encouraged to remain single. This was a radical notion in the ancient world, and it is not surprising that it was easily distorted. For a man not to father a son to carry on his name and for a woman to forgo her very identity by not bearing children was the ultimate form of self-denial. So it was with a sincere heart that many men and women sacrificed marriage and family during the early centuries and Middle Ages, but not necessarily for more effective ministry. Rather, their self-denial became a means of spirituality.

This was true especially during and after the reign of Constantine, when official state persecution ceased and the ultimate sacrifice of a martyr’s death was no longer available to Christians. So asceticism, which included celibacy, became the sacrifice of choice. Anyone who claimed to be following Jesus as a true disciple lived a celibate life, and out of this ideal developed monasticism.

The beginning of Christian monasticism is typically associated with hermits such as Antony of Egypt and the Desert Fathers, but according to David Wright, “Ascetics, especially women, tended to separate themselves from congregations as well as society long before monasticism proper began.”

Formalized female monasticism began in the Western Church in 512 when Bishop Caesarius founded a convent and placed his sister Caesaria in charge as the abbess. The women who joined took the vow of celibacy as “holy virgins devoted to God” and were expected to spend the rest of their lives in their cells “seeking in earnest prayer the presence of the Son of God.”

Benedictine monasteries were the first to be developed on a wide scale for women. These were headed by Scholastica, the twin sister of Benedict of Nursia. They were as highly structured as the male Benedictine monasteries and were marked by the vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

In the centuries that followed, female monasticism expanded as new religious orders were formed and as more and more women flooded into the only avenue of Christian ministry available to them. In most instances the women were cloistered and outside the church hierarchy but, nevertheless, they attained positions of leadership and influence.

There were periods of decline, however, especially during times of monastic reform when women lost prestige and position and were further restricted in their activities. In 1293, at the very time that new orders of preaching friars were abandoning the cloister, Pope Boniface VIII issued a papal bull requiring the seclusion of nuns in their convents unless they had a special dispensation from their bishop.

The edict established the cloister as the only officially sanctioned place for women in the church. But despite these restrictions, women inside and outside the convent continued to play an important role in the church, especially as visionaries and mystics.

The medieval model for women’s ministries was not designed for married women, but so exalted was the ideal of celibacy that it was practiced and encouraged by churchmen even within marriage. Some of the best known medieval mystics practiced celibacy in marriage. Margery Kempe is one example. In 1413, after 20 years of marriage and 14 children, she convinced her husband to agree to a commitment of celibacy. Margery’s heroine and role model...
model was Bridget of Sweden, one of the "most revered saints in northern Europe." Bridget, born 70 years earlier, married early and had eight children. She confessed that she had enjoyed sexual relations early in her marriage, but then insisted that she and her husband live as brother and sister. After an illness he agreed to take the vow, but died soon afterwards.

The celibate lifestyle of the medieval mystics was bolstered by their visionary experiences. Both Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena claimed revelations verifying the immaculate conception and perpetual virginity of Mary. Their words not only gave strength to a position that later became dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, but also established virginity as God's highest ideal for women.

How do we evaluate these medieval women in ministry? In many respects they are far removed from contemporary evangelical women. Their focus on celibacy as the key to true spirituality was misdirected, as was their intense mysticism that often gave support to erroneous doctrines—all of which may have been fostered by the restrictions they endured. Yet many of these women possessed a deep spirituality and commitment to God that has served to challenge and inspire Christians of every generation. They were women of prayer and devotion, and their lifelong faithfulness to Jesus as their Lord stands as a remarkable testimony to the Christian faith.

THE REFORMATION MODEL: A FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

Reformers judged the medieval model harshly. The Reformation was a time when the Christian family was reaffirmed, and the Roman Catholic ideal of celibacy was condemned. Luther was the most vehement. He scorned those who insisted that virginity was superior to the married state.

Most of the Reformers took wives and became family men, and in so doing, they made a deliberate statement about the priority of the family in creation and in God's Kingdom. In many instances their wives found a vital niche in the ministry of the church that allowed them the freedom of serving in a supporting role behind the scenes or in a more public role in partnership with their husbands.

The feisty, red-haired Katie Luther found her niche somewhere in between. Her husband referred to her fondly as his "kind and dear lord and master, Katy,

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Lutheress, doctress, and priestess of Wittenburg." She managed a busy household that often included students and colleagues of her husband, yet she also found time to take care of her farm some distance away from Wittenburg.

Idellete Calvin's role was that of a behind-the-scenes supporter of her husband and his ministry. She reached out to the sick and needy in their parish, but most of her time was devoted to the well-being of her husband. When John Calvin had enlisted the help of his friends to find a wife, he had specified that, among other things, he wanted a woman who "would be interested" in his health. Idellete met that requirement but, unfortunately, her health much of the time was worse than that of her husband's.

Katherine Zell stands out among the Reformation wives as a full partner in ministry, and it could be argued that she was a Reformer in her own right. Katherine's decision to marry Matthew Zell, a priest-turned-Reformer, corresponded very well with the Reformation focus on the family. Katherine was actively involved in a partnership ministry with her husband—so much so that when he died, she felt obliged to stand up at his funeral and assure the congregation that, contrary to rumor, she would not be assuming the title of "Dr. Katrina" and taking over his pulpit.

But the Reformers simply did not know what to do with women who felt called to ministry. While they affirmed the "priesthood of all believers" in theory, they had no professional ministry to offer women. The Roman Catholic convents were anathema. Yet the only recognized service for women—in exchange for the cloister—was marriage and motherhood.

The Reformation women's ministry model came to its fullest flowering among the Puritans. Still, "a woman's place" was in the home, and if her husband allowed her to venture outside that realm, he was endangering her and the well-being of the family. From a Puritan perspective, the ideal of a well-ordered society required women to devote their lives entirely to their families as wives and mothers.

Although she was not a Puritan, Susanna Wesley exemplifies this perspective among women, and she is often viewed as the ultimate Christian mother whose maternal devotion gave the church two of its greatest spiritual leaders, John and Charles Wesley. Her time-
consuming commitment to her 19 children was not a sacrifice most women were able or willing to make, though it was held high as the ideal and was strongly defended by Susanna herself.

Although Susanna was a powerful preacher in her own right and conducted Sunday services that overflowed the parsonage when her husband was away, her motive for doing so was primarily for her own family's spiritual growth. When the crowds exceeded 200, however, her absentee husband vehemently objected.

But a new era of ministry was dawning. Though she herself was firmly entrenched in the Reformation model, Susanna became the "grandmother"—though not by design—of what might be described as the evangelical outreach model. The Wesleyan movement, founded by her sons John and Charles, paved the way for a new era of women in ministry, in which women reached out in public service alongside their male counterparts.

The motivating force behind this new era was not a spirit of liberation for women, but the evangelical fervor of reaching out with the gospel. The task was considered too great for men to accomplish alone, so women were welcomed into public ministry—or they took it upon themselves.

The Wesleys were not the first to allow women to participate in public ministry. Quakers and other sectarian groups preceded them. But it was the Wesleyan movement, more than any other, that opened the floodgates for women to participate in public ministry.

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Included in this vast movement were lesser movements, some made up exclusively of women, others dominated numerically by women. These included the social welfare movement, the Sunday school movement, the antislavery movement, the temperance movement, and the women's missionary movement—all of which gave women an outlet to public ministry that had been denied them for centuries.

The social welfare movement—primarily ministries to prostitutes, prisoners, and the poor—was the most encompassing of these outreach networks, and it overlapped other areas of ministry. One of the outstanding representatives of this movement was Elizabeth Fry, England's premier prison reformer. Born into a prosperous Quaker family in 1780, she married a tea merchant at the age of 20 and quickly became consumed with household duties and raising her 11 children. Although she was fulfilling the expected role of a married woman of her day, she was despondent. So she began to look outward for fulfillment and soon found her niche in ministering to women prisoners at the nearby Newgate Prison—a notorious hellhole with a reputation for dehumanizing its inmates.

Fry's ministry at Newgate began with a humble request to the prison governor: "Sir, if thee kindly allows me to pray with the women, I will go inside." Once inside, however, she quickly realized that her ministry could involve much more than prayer. With the help of friends, she brought food and clothing to the starving, naked inmates. She concentrated her efforts on education and enterprise. So effective were her efforts that Newgate became a showcase for prison reform, and she was recognized worldwide for her self-giving Christian ministry.

Balancing family responsibilities with ministry was not an easy task, as Catherine Booth, cofounder of the Salvation Army, was forced to concede. Other women made similar sacrifices, including Phoebe Palmer, the "mother of the Holiness movement," who founded the Five Points Mission in New York and conducted other social welfare programs, in addition to her ministry as a traveling evangelist. She, like Catherine Booth, modeled ministry before her daughters who, in turn, followed her into the ministry.

The leading figures behind the American Sunday school movement were a mother-daughter team, Isabella Graham and Johanna Bethune. Together, they started classes for poor urban children and encouraged other women to do the same. Johanna urged her husband and
women, they were attacked and jeered, but their antislavery message had a powerful influence. The temperance movement was another avenue for women's ministries in the nineteenth century. The most highly visible woman in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was Frances Willard, a single woman who was known for her Bible lectures and who was also associated with D.L. Moody's Boston campaign. She had been converted when she was in her early twenties at a Methodist revival meeting, and her Christian faith became the motivating force for her temperance work. Indeed, the WCTU sponsored a wide variety of evangelistic ministries, many of which were directed toward men, including Bible readings and gospel work in prisons, in police stations, and among railroad employees, soldiers, sailors, and lumbermen. The WCTU was divided into districts, each headed by a woman who coordinated work on the local level. These women, wrote Willard, "make an aggregate of several thousand women who are regularly studying and expounding God's Word to the multitudes."7

The women's missionary movement was comprised exclusively of single women—women who were denied access to mission outreach due to their single status. But it was not enough for women to merely support missionaries—especially when they heard of the desperate needs for more workers in foreign lands. Most of their church leaders objected, however, arguing that the Apostle Paul's teaching prohibited single women from serving in that capacity. So the women went ahead on their own and launched their own female agencies. The first of these was the Women's Union Missionary Society, founded by Sarah Doremus in 1861. And in the remaining decades of the nineteenth century, a total of 40 such mission societies were established. Thousands of single women went abroad as missionaries, supported by millions of women on the home front.

Recognizing that this surge of single women overseas was unstoppable, most general mission boards began accepting single women into their ranks and, by the early twentieth century, many of the female agencies began merging with the general boards of their own denominations. Women leaders and missiologists lost their positions of influence, but single women continued flooding into foreign missionary service in the decades that followed. Today, however, much of that high level of enthusiasm for missions among women is no longer evident.

—Please turn to page 23.

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Defining the Development of Women's Ministries

BY DOROTHY DAHLMAN

The definition for women’s ministries changes with each stage of the church’s development. These stages are characteristic of many denominations and women’s organizations. The models have even been transplanted to other countries, primarily by missionaries. Our first awareness of women in ministry through the church might fit one of the following stages.

STAGE 1: THE LADIES’ AID SOCIETY

The first form of women’s ministry is rooted in the immigration from Europe to this country in the middle 1800s. Visionary pioneers pushed the frontiers to establish communities and churches. The women organized ladies’ aid societies.

I’m one of thousands of Swedes whose forefathers and foremothers emigrated to central Minnesota in the middle 1800s. My church was founded by my great-grandfather and 20 young adults who emigrated from central Sweden. They left for economic reasons, but more compelling was their desire to worship God as they chose and to teach the Bible to their children. In Sweden, they read the Bible undercover in small groups and were referred to as Bible readers, because such activity was not permitted by the religious leaders at that time in Sweden.

The pilgrimage of these stubborn Swedes to the new land had purpose. They carved out farms, raised families, developed industries, built homes, schools, and planted Swedish Baptist churches. In east-central Minnesota, 13 Swedish Baptist churches were planted within a radius of 25 miles. It was in a church founded by these young adults that I learned to know Jesus Christ as my Savior and what it means to be part of the Body of Christ. Probably a large percentage of older evangelical adults have a European heritage similar to mine.

Responsibilities for ministry were thrust on the youth of our church. Our farmer/manufacturing parents were models of ministry as they led us and several more generations of youth. As a child I enjoyed being with my mother, grandmother, great-aunts, and friends at the monthly meeting of the “Ladies’ Aid.” Our favorite hour was “coffee time” when we helped ourselves to the Swedish breads, hot dishes, and desserts. (Our grandfathers usually appeared in time for those bountiful smorgasbords.)

Some form of the ladies’ aid society was the first stage of women’s ministries in most churches.

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as much as in small-town America. For example, Filipino church planters around Chicago have told us that their people felt uncomfortable without the big fences, the security they had as middle-class families in their own country. Their pastors say that their churches provide them with the security and sense of belonging they need.

My church in the middle of Chicago, established in 1908, has survived the transition from being a Swedish-speaking ladies’ aid society model to the contemporary multicultural, multi-ministry model that it is today. Over 40 different ethnic groups have been identified within a few blocks of our church. Our church leaders think of these waves of immigration as the world coming to our doorstep and providing new opportunities for ministry.

STAGE 2: THE WOMEN’S MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The next stage of women’s ministry began in the midst of the evangelical movement into “foreign missions.” In the middle 1940s, our denomination became aware that unless they left behind the “old language” and moved on to reaching non-Swedes for Jesus Christ, our denomination would soon dissolve. And that almost happened.

It was World War II that thrust many of our young adults into foreign lands such as Europe, Japan, the Philippines, Guam, North Africa, and the Middle East. These young adults returned with a vision to reach people around the world for Jesus Christ. It was the young adults, the baby boomers of that day, who nudged the leadership in our denomination to establish a new direction for our group of traditional Scandinavians. They called for a world mission board to send men and women to the harvest field. The older leaders listened, and missions became one of our denominational identities.

Questions were asked. Who will support our missionaries?

Who will pray for them? Who will provide evangelism, education programs, medical supplies? The women came forth with a resounding, We will! Many of the missionaries were sons and daughters from our church families. We were close to them in heart and in mission.

Women’s missionary societies organized to support, pray, and provide supplies. It was their reason for being. A common cause, a definite focus. They gave strength to the church’s mission in the world. For the most part, their boundless energy was directed across the ocean.

Women’s missionary societies in major denominations organized to study the countries, write letters, furnish residences for missionaries on furlough, send Christmas and birthday remembrances, learn more about the work of missions where they served, and organize prayer ministries and youth clubs with a mission emphasis.

Denominations established enterprises such as missionary boutiques to provide new clothing for missionary families in times of crisis, or when they left the field and came home on special assignments. Women’s missionary societies sponsored projects such as “White Cross,” which provided supplies for clinics and hospitals. Fifty-five gallon drums were filled with surgical gowns for doctors, baby layettes, and various sized bandages. (I’ve seen those recycled bandages in hospitals in India and Ethiopia. National leaders thanked us for caring enough to provide these supplies.)

In the midst of that world missions emphasis, there was a concern for the spiritual and social needs of people in the church and community—and for home missions and church planting.

Today things have changed in missions-minded churches. Women still serve on missions committees with the same commitment, but in the context of the church as a whole. Yet, as an active member in the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department, the National Association of Evangelical Women’s Commission, and the World Evangelical Fellowship Commission on Women’s Concerns, I’ve observed how this model still continues today. We might be surprised to learn how much money is raised for missions through present-day women’s missionary societies.

An interesting forerunner of women in volunteer mission societies provides us with an understanding of women’s heart for missions. In the past, some denominations and interchurch groups would not allow single women to serve as missionaries. So enterprising women formed their own mission boards to support and send single women to reach the world for Christ. When that policy no longer existed, many churches continued to support missions through women’s missionary societies.

STAGE 3: EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

The next stage in women’s ministries, the equipping stage, merges with the fourth stage which I refer to as real ministry. In the seventies I was director of girls’ club ministries, a weekly club program of evangelism and discipleship to teach girls how to
live the Christian life. At that time I was asked to be the executive secretary of the Board of Women's Work for our denomination. I answered that I didn't see the need to get involved in the women's missionary society. But they asked good questions:

"Why don't you want to serve in this way?" they asked.

"The Women's Missionary Society doesn't need my help. In fact, I don't see any future for them as they now exist," I replied.

To my surprise they answered, "Neither do we. What do you think we should do about it?"

My response was that I'd like to see women

- become spiritually mature in Jesus Christ
- develop and use their leadership and ministry skills
- use the gifts God has given them for ministry
- evangelize their neighbors and friends
- learn to study the Word of God for themselves
- develop ministry for target groups, such as single moms, etc.
- coordinate with the adult ministries of the church.

They asked more questions. "What about structure?"

Our women's missionary societies were organized on a formal, rigid structure. I responded that I believed churches should design their own ministries to meet the needs of their own women.

"That sounds good," they replied. "What about missions?"

"Missions are important, but should not be the whole program for women today," I answered. "Women will find ways to support missions, but they don't all have to do it the same way."

"What about our program books?" (Our denomination published a book a year.)

"We'll need them for awhile," I said, "but when good study books are available from other publishers, we'll recommend them."

More questions. "What about training for ministry?"

"That's where I believe we should focus our attention," I suggested. "Why don't we equip or train women in leadership and ministry skills, teach them to assess the needs of other women, design new ministries, and minister to people."

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**There is great freedom in doing what God wants us to do in ministry.**

"It sounds like they may have to meet more than once a month," they said.

"That's right," I agreed.

"Some groups may meet more often—in small groups for Bible study, evangelism, spiritual growth. We may meet weekly. We can have prayer days, evangelism rallies, mission festivals. We can be flexible. We can celebrate what God has done. We can use the gifts of women and encourage them to reach out to families, to women in the workplace, the community, the world."

"What about coordinating with the whole church program?" they asked.

Some women's societies had become "little churches" within the church, totally independent in their decisions and projects. We needed to establish more credibility within the local church. Our momentum reached a climax when church leaders realized we were serious about reaching people for Jesus Christ, training women for ministry, and coordinating with the entire church program.

Women became confident in serving on church boards, integrating ministries through the church, and providing unique ministries for women.

Women coordinated with the various functions of the church, such as missions, hospitality, evangelism, leadership training, and small-group ministries.

Leadership teams for each of these functions became the natural way to organize in both large and small churches. Women designed ministries for one person, for two-on-two, and for small and large groups—including women's retreats.

In some districts the largest event of the year was the women's retreat. Women heard outstanding speakers, attended workshops, and discovered they had gifts they had not been using. Women in leadership were brought into positions of district responsibility.

Resources were developed or recommended to meet specific needs in ministry skills, evangelism, spiritual growth, hospitality, and social ministries. We published books for mass markets. Selected leaders from each church were invited to one-day seminars, and their churches paid the seminar fees. District leaders were trained. A national resource team became the sounding board and initiator of creative ideas for ministry. A newsletter shared new ideas and model ministries.

Other denominations asked how we made the transition to women's ministries. International organizations requested that we train women's leadership groups around the world. Our denominational leaders recognized what was happening. God was doing a miracle.

What were the results of this approach to women's ministries? It was exciting to see the creativity, to see ideas put into place, new purposes and goals defined, and new resources used. For instance: Our publishing depart-
ment discovered that women are readers, so we designed an annual catalog for leaders of women's ministries.

There is great freedom in doing what God wants us to do in ministry. Through new evangelism programs, unbelievers meet Jesus Christ as Savior, hurting people find healing, immature people grow in Christ, lonely people find support, people find help.

Women experience joy in serving Jesus Christ and using their gifts. Marriage relationships are enriched. Parenting skills are learned. Families grow together in the church. Women gain confidence in serving in all areas of the church. People enter new vistas for ministry in the community and the world. Women learn skills for ministry, leadership, and organization. They gain experience by serving in all areas of the Body of Christ. Churches grow.

I call this our “equipping for ministry” stage. Of course, varieties of ministry, creativity, and training can become ends in themselves. They do not ensure ministry. But this is a stage of development we need to go through.

STAGE 4: DOING REAL MINISTRY

As director of women's ministries for my denomination, I knew we had to move past the priority of equipping for ministry and become involved in doing real ministry. Sometimes I had more answers for others than for myself when it came to guidelines for leaders.

What is real ministry? It involves a relationship. It is a process of reconciling women with the love and saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It begins with getting to know individuals, teaching them the Word of God, and bringing them to the place in which they will decide to live for Jesus Christ.

It means teaching, mentoring, constant contact, and finally releasing women to live on their own for God. It means providing opportunities to use their gifts and to minister at their level of understanding. It means providing a system of accountability. It means watching women stumble, then being ready to help them on their way again. It means celebrating when they discover new steps of faith. It means guiding them toward resources for establishing a Christian family, or helping them find a job. It means

Our job is not done when we've taught Bible studies, evangelism classes, or trained leaders. Women must then be taught how to minister.

encouraging them to reach people for Jesus Christ, wherever they may be.

For me, real ministry has been the reconciling of women with Jesus Christ and what he has done and will do for them in their lives. Since I retired a couple of years ago, three women have appeared in my life, each needing specific help. My friend Ruth and I have ministered to these women. I have changed their names in the following descriptions:

Pat was a certified public accountant but found herself in a Chicago jail—a difficult situation for an attractive woman. A volunteer Baptist chaplain led her to faith in Jesus Christ and suggested that she find a church where she could worship and have fellowship. She did. Our multicultural church welcomed her.

As Pat came from a dysfunctional family, had spent many years in a 12-step support group—and had no job and no family who cared about her—when she came to us—she really needed help. The members of our church became her “spiritual family,” involved her in Bible study classes, provided scholarships for her to attend district retreats, and helped her make the transition into living the Christian life.

After participation in a rehabilitation center and working at a part-time job, she now has a new job using her acquired skills. Today, she’s not only a member of our church, she designs many of our church bulletin boards and has helped me teach a class on spiritual gifts. Most Sunday afternoons, when my friend and I have dinner with Pat, we have the privilege of listening, teaching, and mentoring this developing disciple of Jesus Christ.

Kim came from China seven years ago. She wanted to find God. She had heard about God while she was still living in China, when she listened to a radio late at night under her pillow. Kim came to the United States, graduated from college with a master’s degree, became involved with International Students, Inc., and eventually found her way to our church.

After attending my course “Learn How to Pray,” she asked me to teach her one-on-one. So Kim comes to my home on Friday evenings. After we pray together, my friend and I listen, teach, and mentor her. Kim has become a member of our church, is now working at the international headquarters of my denomination, and has married a fine, Christian man.
INDICATORS OF GROWTH TOWARD REAL MINISTRY

The following indicators will help identify whether a denomination, church group, or parachurch organization is moving women toward real ministry. These indicators come from the observation of many ministries in a number of denominations.

1. Awareness of leaders about meeting the real needs of people. Leaders are more concerned about meeting people's needs than about conducting programs and measuring quantitative success.

2. Commitment to the development and use of women's gifts. Women are studying, teaching, and using their gifts in ministry as a biblical mandate—and their churches are welcoming the use of their gifts.

3. Ministries designed for target groups of people. Women are creatively designing ministries for target groups, getting involved in real ministry, and expanding the model.

4. Ministries coordinated with the total church program. Leaders are contributing to the church by coordinating goals for adult programs and for the church calendar, finances, and celebrations.

Last summer Ruth and I spent four and one-half months in Moscow. Our purpose in going to Russia was to mentor Baptist women leaders who serve in the new Commonwealth of Independent States. I spent 20 hours a week teaching basic leadership skills to Svetlana, the new executive secretary of the Russian Baptist women’s organization. Our constant prayer together was that she’d be an effective instrument in guiding the Baptist women’s leadership team in her country, who will join 400 other national leaders of women’s ministries in an international women’s leadership conference in Argentina this year.

Is this ministry? For me it’s real ministry. The needs of women—these three women—have helped me to redefine ministry. Real ministry may not show up in numbers that indicate great progress. It may mean ministries designed to meet the needs of a target group of women. No denomination or parachurch group can minister to all women. But every church or group can identify those women who God has placed in their lives and who are in need of their ministry.

Real ministry could be one designed to meet the needs of a particular group within an organization. For instance, Pamela Heim, our current director of women’s ministries,

—Please turn to page 23.

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5. Flexibility in programming to provide options. Flexible options are provided for outreach, for new believers, for mature Christians, and for the training of new leaders.

6. Availability of creative resources for ministry. Leaders are providing sufficient resources and making them easily available to each person involved in ministry.

7. Awareness of the needs of women in other parts of the world. Modern media are being used to enable women to become partners in ministry with women of other countries.

8. Leaders joined to a network of Christians around the globe. Church, denominational, and group leaders are networking with other leaders for support and resources.

9. Ministries recognized by church and denominational leaders. Women’s ministries are attracting the attention of the church leadership and given appropriate recognition.

10. Biblically focused training for ministry leaders. Leaders are focused on Jesus’ model for teaching, mentoring, prayer, study, small-group ministry, and discipleship.
The Mindset of Women Today

BY COLLEEN BENSON

The nineties finds us in the midst of a new world order, evidenced by the collapse of Communism, the rise of the Pacific Rim, and a revolution in telecommunications which has turned the world upside down. We have gone from an industrial-based society to an information-based society, from modernism to postmodernism. Rather than a 30-year generation, we have a five- to seven-year informational generation. With the new world order has come changes in values, including a multiparty democracy, freedom of choice, free trade, privatization, and prosperity based on the marketplace.

Many studies have been done on the baby boomers, those individuals born between 1946 and 1961. They number 78 million, while the baby busters (born between 1962 and 1977) number only 38 million. We have also recently begun to hear about “Generation X,” the new generation still searching for an identity. Busters are also termed the dis-generation: disenchanted, dissatisfied, disenfranchised, disgruntled, disillusioned, disconnected, disgusted, and distrustful. This cynicism of the baby busters is idealism that has soured because it has never been expressed. They see the challenges, but unfortunately, they have no accompanying vision. They are said to be waiting for both a hero and a mission, after having been raised in a world of MTV, AIDS, and a trillion-dollar national debt.

Women are the primary agents of social change. Throughout the world women are rejecting the role of second-class citizens and asserting their power to bring about change in society. In this focus on the modern woman, we will consider three areas: the vocational lives of women, marriage and family issues, and personal and spiritual concerns. Gender considerations, however, must always be intertwined with race, class, and sexual orientation, as well as other variables of human identity. As Spelman argued, “All women are women, but there is no being who is only a woman.”

Throughout the world women are rejecting the role of second-class citizens and asserting their power to bring about change in society.

THE VOCATIONAL LIVES OF WOMEN

We live in an era of ongoing change for women in business, politics, and the professions. There are 57 women in Congress this year, which represents ten percent of the total. Four out of 14 Cabinet members are women. A woman, Laura D’Andrea Tyson, was named the chair of the President’s Council of Economic Advisors by President Clinton and is consulted by him on an almost daily basis.

The ban on women flying combat planes was lifted in April 1993. Over four million businesses in the United States are owned by women that employ more people than all the “Fortune 500” companies. Forty percent of medical and law degrees are earned by women, while women make up 30 percent of all seminary students. Thirty thousand women are ordained today and two-thirds of Roman Catholics in America think women should be allowed to become priests. Many female role models exist at the present time for women in professions once dominated by men. A wife with a career is no longer an indication that her husband isn’t able to provide for the family.

Two-thirds of adult women are employed, and three-fourths of all employed women are working full time. Less than seven percent of our population lives in the fifties-style middle-class family with an employed father, a stay-at-home mother, and two or more dependent children. Most women today expect to pursue a career. Along with that, they are usually expected to organize the home and be primarily responsible for childcare, even though their partners may be willing to help. For most women, struggle and achievement are themes that go together.

Although job discrimination is now illegal, 70 percent of women who work full-time make less than $25,000 per year. The pay gap between men and women is still staggering: In 1993 women working full time earned 71 cents for every dollar earned by men, a gain of 7 cents in 15 years. In 1988 women college graduates were making 59 cents for every dollar earned by male graduates. This, in light of the fact that over the past ten years, women earned at least half of all the bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

F.T. Crosby, in a book aptly titled Juggling, has said that the metaphors we use today also define the contemporary woman, such as “mommy track,” “glass ceiling,” “juggling,” and “life without margins.”
Chronic rushing is familiar to most women. While the contemporary woman is rich in opportunities, she is often impoverished in time. Many women today are experiencing role expansion—not role redefinition. New responsibilities have been added, but few of the old roles have been dropped. During the five-year period from 1979 to 1984, the number of female-headed families in America almost doubled from 5.5 million to an astonishing 9.9 million. The time crunch is especially acute for these single mothers.

Because of an economic downturn, baby busters—and even some baby boomers—cannot expect to be as affluent as their parents, although most are striving for this level of affluence. These two generations will ultimately inherit billions of dollars but not until later in life, due to today's increasing life expectancy.

Women baby boomers are the first generation to have lifelong careers outside the home. By the year 2000, some women will have 25 to 30 years' business experience, qualifying them to be CEOs of large corporations and, hopefully, taking them through the “glass ceiling.” For the contemporary young woman, the right to equal access in every area is more or less assumed, if not taken for granted.

On the other hand, the baby busters or “yiffies” as *Fortune* has named them (because they are young, individualistic, freedom-minded, and few) want job satisfaction without any sacrifice. They want to enjoy their careers and the financial rewards without working 60 to 80 hours a week like their parents did. Baby busters are more interested in their quality of life and may be somewhat cynical and apathetic. Consistent with this trend is the desire for more leisure time, the status symbol for the nineties.

Yet the hours worked for both men and women have been steadily increasing for the last 20 years. And the working time of employed mothers is between 65 and 70 hours a week—sometimes even as much as 80 hours.

It is interesting to note that three-fourths of all women support efforts to “strengthen and change women’s status in society,” while only one-third identify themselves as feminists. Many young women today have a stereotypical view of the label feminist. This may be the result of enjoying the benefits of feminist goals without having had to work to achieve them. Many of the groundbreaking changes that were wrought by their mothers, however, could still be lost or reversed.

Although many women are finding many more doors of opportunity opened today, most African-Americans feel excluded from participation in the American dream. To them, racism is a given. This attitude is found much less frequently, however, among Hispanics or Asians. One result of the disenfranchising of African-Americans is poverty, a condition which is worsened by the absence of fathers in many homes. One out of every five children in America will grow up in poverty. And 75 percent of the poor in the United States today are women and children.

Jesus said, “You will always have the poor with you” (Matt. 26:11). While many women today are becoming agents of change in society, this great harvest field for ministry among the disenfranchised must also be addressed.

**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY ISSUES**

The vast majority of contemporary women believe that they can “have it all,” meaning both a career and family. The 1993 *Janus Report on Sexual Behavior* found that over 90 percent of people of all ages believe the family is still the most important institution in society. And this percentage seems to be increasing. This study documents a return to commitment and mutuality among married as well as single people. The study also reports that only 2.8 percent of Americans describe themselves as gay or lesbian (as compared with 10 percent in the 1950s Kinsey Report). A University of Chicago study also confirms a high level of fidelity in marriage, noting that 83 percent of Americans are faithful to their marriage vows. The divorce rate has dropped slightly, and is now 4.7 per 1,000 people per year. Such studies present a strong case for the apparent end of the “sexual revolution.”

In 1992 *Megatrends for Women* also documented a return to “family values,” but it included “multi-option” families, such as gay partners, single mothers, divorced, and “blended” families. The number of unmarried couples living together in this country continues to rise. Today, over three million unmarried couples live together.

Women today have a greater ability to voice who they want, what they want, and when they want it. Consequently, it is no surprise that a record number of
young women (22 percent of those born between 1956 and 1972) will never have children, as a conscious choice. Among those who become parents, single women sometimes choose artificial insemination, while both men and women occasionally choose to adopt.

More and more single-parent families remain so by choice. About 25 percent of the babies born to unwed mothers, however, are unwanted pregnancies. Since an alarming 70 percent of all criminals come from fatherless homes, single-mother families present another desperately needed area for ministry.

Even though women's professional lives and their increasing ability to help change public policies have never been more important, these are not as important as the issues associated with women's personal family relationships. A 1993 survey done by Roper found that relationships are the most satisfying and important part of women's lives, with the need for money in second place, followed by career.14

Of all relationships, motherhood confers the most highs and lows of human emotions, gives the greatest satisfaction, and is the most fulfilling. Yet it is the most work and is often a great source of stress. Furthermore, it is a lifelong job. So what is seen here is a mixed bag. Mothers all too often experience low self-esteem and depression. Couples raising children have higher levels of depression and agitation and lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction than those without children. On the other hand, older adults without children are less fulfilled and score lower on measures of self-esteem, life satisfaction, happiness, and meaning of life.

Two-thirds of women with preschoolers and three-fourths of women with school-age children are employed. More than half of new mothers return to their jobs before their child's first birthday. So one of the most important issues for moms with careers is child-care. Working mothers are consistently depressed if they have careers but do not have good, affordable child-care and husbands who are partners in parenting.15

These facts highlight the importance of emotional well-being in young mothers, not only for their sakes, but for the positive health and welfare of succeeding generations. We know that whatever is unresolved in one generation will be dealt with more intensely by the next. The message here seems to be that child-rearing is a period of time when the need for support and ministry is especially high.

In the past, many women homemakers had a huge investment in being the "perfect" parent with "perfect" children, since this was their primary identity. Today, however, since women's identities come from various sources, they have less need to be affirmed through the accomplishments of their children. In addition, there is overwhelming evidence which shows that children of working women fare as well or better than those of full-time homemakers,16 even though statistics reveal that children have lost approximately 12 hours of parental time a week over the past 30 years.

Even in their marriage relationships, contemporary couples are evolving different models. The stability of marriages is more a matter of internal cohesion than external coercion, since the option of divorce is much more socially acceptable today. For couples in their thirties and younger, the relationship is likely to be a collaborative one, with more role flexibility, role sharing, and egalitarian decision-making.17 In addition there is a correlation between increased education and greater satisfaction within the marital relationship. Women with more education seem to be more capable of articulating their feelings and understanding their partners.

Among the young women who seem to have special needs are those whose parents were divorced when they were youngsters. Wallerstein's research on these women, as many as 15 years after their parents' divorce, reveals they often experience difficulty establishing a realistic view of men, develop unrealistic expectations, and exercise poor judgment in their choice of partners. This group of women will represent over one-fourth of our future population.18

Another subgroup of women who have special needs are those who have been sexually abused as children. This number is estimated to be 34 million women, 80 percent of whom were abused by someone they knew.19

Violence against women of all ages is another major problem in this country. More than half a million women and girls are raped every year. The long-lasting effects of this violence are tragic and have a pervasive effect on relationships between the sexes as well as between mothers and their children.
PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL CONCERNS

Today's contemporary women possess skills in the outwardly directed areas of their lives as well as in their personal, spiritual selves. It is with a combination of these skills—logic and intuition, emotion and intelligence—that women are equipped to help change the world.20

Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, low self-esteem in women is well documented. The problem begins in elementary and middle school-age girls, in which there is a 23 percent drop in the number of girls with high self-esteem. By the time girls reach high school, only 29 percent say they are happy with themselves. This means that successful women need to take time to mentor, teach, and be positive role models for girls and young women. And this should be taking place within the church context as well as in the home.

Today, women baby boomers are the most health-conscious generation ever. And this awareness will lengthen their life expectancy. These women are expected to break every stereotype of the postmenopausal woman. Menopause transforms women from "childbearers" to "wise women" so, for the vast majority of women, menopause will be seen as a more positive than negative experience.

Sexual activity is a serious health concern in the 1990s. Women are ten times more likely than men to get the HIV virus from heterosexual intercourse.21 At least 150,000 women are HIV positive and 27,500 women have AIDS. Yet only 69 percent of single women say AIDS has affected their dating habits.22 One out of three 16-year-old girls is sexually active. Yet between 1980 and 1987, the abortion rate fell by six percent. Reproductive choice, however, is something many women today take for granted.

For the contemporary woman, religion and faith are often difficult areas. The Janus Report found that 61 percent of their respondents believe religion is an important factor in marriage, but they reject religious control over their personal sexual expression.23 While most women in their twenties express a belief in God, very few attend religious services regularly.24 These busters are looking for five

It is with a combination of logic and intuition, emotion and intelligence, that women are equipped to help change the world.

main characteristics in a community of faith—authenticity, community, an abandonment of dogmatism, a focus on the arts, and diversity—while the "X-ers" want to deal with difficult questions without easy answers, in the context of real relationships.25

Since today's young women do not expect any barriers blocking role or advancement in their jobs, it is no surprise that they will not tolerate barriers to serving in any of the ministries of Christ and his Church. However well-defined theologically, such double standards are unacceptable to the modern woman.

On a slightly different note, the self-centered individualism that is rampant in society is also present in the church. The secularization of society is seen as one of the main reasons for a lack of interest in world missions on the part of Christians today. One of the greatest "idols" in conservative circles is considered to be the family. Saving the respectability of the family is sometimes seen as more important than evangelizing the world for Christ.26

CONCLUSION

There are several areas which unite all women and there are other issues which are more likely to separate and divide them. All women are united by issues having to do with family relationships, violence against women and children, health issues, the wage gap between men and women and, lastly, the "isms,"—especially racism and ageism. Other issues which unite all women are nutrition and fitness, fashion and beauty, and service to others.

Some of the issues that tend to differentiate Christian women from non-Christians are reproductive rights, the definition of the family, sexual expression, and sexual preference. Unfortunately, sexism seems to divide Christians and non-Christians alike.

In addition, the whole subject of power is an interesting consideration. The secular woman feels more empowered on the personal level to express all she believes she can be and to become an agent of change. While this is not necessarily inappropriate for the Christian, Christians have an additional source of power in Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. This spiritual power can be used either to minister at the level of real human need, as Jesus did, or it can be directed in a divisive manner—which ultimately perpetuates the disenchantment already felt by many contemporary women.

Christian women must set aside arrogance and narcissism and have the courage to grapple with the complexities of faith, spirituality, and the outworking of their faith—which is called
Christian women must set aside arrogance and narcissism and have the courage to grapple with the complexities of faith, spirituality, and ministry.

**ENDNOTES**

A Consideration of Biblical Versus Cultural Issues

BY GORDON KIRK

Building bridges in the relationships between men and women is a critical issue. Recognizing that God is the ultimate bridge builder, we need that sense of partnership, of coming together around Christ as men and women in ministry. In the area of building bridges, we must first focus on the chasms or gaps that need to be bridged. I'd like to consider two types of inhibitors that I believe impact all of us.

Every man and woman carries around cultural baggage. Each one of us has traditions that have been a part of our lives. We need to make a distinction between our traditions and what the Word of God says—between which patterns are cultural and which are biblical. The second inhibitors are what I call the ecclesiastical or the sacramental, which deal more with denominational or ordination issues.

Let us consider some of the cultural and traditional inhibitors that we live with on a daily basis. First, let us think about male and female roles. These roles vary from tribal to sophisticated societies. Had we grown up in a tribal community—where women carry the waterpots and work in the fields while the men sit around in tents or in the town squares—we would have very different ideas about the role of women. Apart from the Bible and apart from our culture, we also see major transitional views between rural backgrounds and urban settings. We need to recognize which of our views of male and female relationships are traditional and which are biblical—which are cultural and which are theological.

For example, a number of churches struggle with women ushering, or serving communion, or officiating in roles of leadership. Nowhere in Scripture does God give any direction about ushers or about serving the communion elements. Yet within our culture, some men still open doors for women and still pull out chairs to seat women. I don’t have a problem with this, if it’s in agreement with our cultural views. I don’t even have a problem if people in a church say, Because of our culture, we like to serve women in this particular way. I do have a problem, however, if those in the church say it’s because the Bible wants men to serve in certain leadership roles.

To cite another example from outside the church: Today in the United States, there is a major concern about women in combat. I don’t find anywhere in Scripture that God gives directions about whether women in the military should serve in combat. But this viewpoint is woven into the fabric of our culture. So we must accept the fact that we have cultural biases—cultural lenses through which we see life. We must try to separate what is cultural from what may be biblical.

Another very strong bias within our culture places limitations on those who are single. Yet the single adult home is a viable home in Scripture. In fact, many of our key Christian leaders were single. Jesus Christ himself was single. But how many times do we see churches advertise “family conferences” and “family seminars”—as though that were the ideal. I believe that there should be a partnership between single and married people—a different and distinct dimension, but a partnership, nevertheless. We must ensure that single people enjoy the same cultural acceptance as married people.

For years there has been controversy about husband and wife relationships which centers around the interpretation of the scriptural passage in which God says, “I’ll make a helpmate for (Adam)” (Gen. 2:18-20). The word “helpmate” has been portrayed as someone subordinate, second class, or inferior. The word in the Hebrew text, however, is the same word used for God as our “helper.” It has nothing to do with inferiority, nothing to do with the idea of someone being subordinate. Instead, it has a complementary dimension. The weaknesses of one are strengthened by the helpmate. Thus, it actually portrays an idea of strength, an idea of partnership.

Another controversy centers around the idea of submission. Ephesians 5:22 says, “Wives,
submit yourselves to your husbands." First of all, each culture has a different picture of submission. What does this mean in a tribal culture? In a rural culture? In an urban culture? And in the verse preceding this one, Paul explains that both husband and wife should "submit" to one another. As Christians, we are all to "submit" to each other. So each one of us approaches the Scriptures with our own sense of cultural layering. Thus, we must be able to distinguish between what is cultural and what is scriptural.

The second inhibitors are in areas which I define as sacramental, or ecclesiastical. Within this area is the whole concept of priesthood or ministry. In the Old Testament, there was a select, limited priesthood for the Hebrew people. But the New Testament, since the Day of Pentecost, clearly indicates that we are all priests together. We share as a nation of priests in the household of faith.

Even the distinction between clergy and laity has become an ecclesiastical inhibitor, although the New Testament teaches that we are all ministers together. At our local church, we try not to talk about "laypeople" and "lay ministry." For example, if you walk into a hospital, and announce, "I'm a lay physician. Could I use your surgery room?" They will walk you right out. In many settings, "lay" is a pejorative term. This creates a cultural, ecclesiastical inhibitor, although clergy and laity has become an ecclesiastical inhibitor, although the New Testament, since the Day of Pentecost, clearly indicates that we are all priests together. We share as a nation of priests in the household of faith.

Another ecclesiastical inhibitor is the recognition of the difference between spiritual gifts and leadership roles. The Scripture tells us that each one of us has received a gift—that we are all gifted. The moment a person believes in Jesus Christ, part of the work of the Spirit and of one's baptism into the Church is that sense of the Spirit's indwelling and a recognition of one's gifts to be used for service.

We often confuse the biblical perspective of gifts with roles of leadership. For example, I am often introduced as "Pastor Kirk." Pastoring is a gift. But I don't hear anyone say, "There goes Giver Gordon." "There is Helper Henry." "Here comes Showing-Mercy Mary." Because we have taken certain gifts within the ecclesiastical tradition and elevated them—as though they are more important than other gifts—this becomes another inhibitor to partnering in ministry.

Also, we need to distinguish between gifts and offices in the church, such as deacons or elders or overseers. These offices are elected, or appointed, or affirmed positions of leadership and are not to be confused with spiritual gifts. There are some who equate the gift of pastor-teacher with the office of elder and who say these are one and the same. But when Peter states that elders are to shepherd the flock, to pastor the flock, he doesn't say that they have to have the gift of pastor-teacher. At the same time, a spiritual gift doesn't automatically move one into a particular office or leadership role in the church.

We should also realize that there is no gender distinction within spiritual gifts. In Ephesians 4:8, Paul says that when Christ ascended on high, "he gave gifts to men." The Greek word used in that passage is anthropos, which means "humankind," men and women. Nowhere within the Word of God does it state that spiritual gifts are limited by gender.

We must also recognize that when Paul lists roles of leadership, he does not talk about spiritual gifts as prerequisites, but about character issues. It is very important to make this distinction. A person is to be chosen as a deacon or deaconess, elder or overseer, not because he or she is spiritually gifted, but because that person has spiritual maturity. The lists in First Timothy 3 or Titus 1 discuss personal character issues (i.e., a family person, sexually pure, not given to much wine, not a brawler, etc.).

The Apostle Paul was committed to partnership. In Romans 16, he commends Phoebe, a deacon, and asks the Romans to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she needs. Then, in verses 3 and 4, he adds: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers." There is a sense of respect, of partnership, and an understanding of giftedness in this passage, as Paul writes how they risked their lives for him and for the churches. Paul goes on to mention other coworkers in the Lord, who are "outstanding among the apostles," including "Junias" (a feminine name). Paul had a deep commitment to partnership with women in ministry roles.

There is much bridge building that needs to be done today.

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Paul's Women Coworkers in Ministry

BY DAVID M. SCHOLER

The last chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans mentions 29 persons, one by way of special commendation (16:1-2) and the others in a series of personal greetings (16:3-16). Often such lists of names in the Bible are overlooked or dismissed by some as of little interest or importance. Such lists, however, provide personal, historical, and social details which may well be helpful in understanding or applying the situation covered by the passage. This list in Romans 16 is significant for the information it provides on Paul’s women coworkers in the ministry of the church, for ten of the 29 persons mentioned here are women. Apart from Priscilla, none of these women is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. In addition, six other women associated with Paul and his ministry are known by name: two from Philippians 4:2-3 and four as house church leaders. Although biblical scholars have given increasing attention to this data about Paul and women, the information contained here is still not widely known or appreciated within the church today.

Four women within the Pauline churches are known by name as house church leaders. (It should be mentioned that in Paul’s time the only churches were house churches). Lydia is known only from Acts 16:14-15, 40. Three others are known from Paul’s letters: Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), Nympha (Col. 4:15), and Apphia (Phil. 2:2). Although the “your” in “your house” is singular. Even though these texts indicate nothing explicit about the roles these persons played in the churches involved, the social implications would suggest that as hosts/patrons of the church, they exercised some kind of leadership role.

Three of the ten women greeted in Romans 16:3-16 are mentioned with very little information included. In fact, two of them are not named. Both Nereus’ sister and Julia (16:15) are simply greeted without comment. The mother of Rufus (16:13; Mark 15:21) Paul considers to have been a mother to him, too. In spite of the lack of information about these women, it is reasonably certain that they must have had some importance in the church to be included in this list of greetings.

Four of the women greeted by name in Romans 16:3-16 can appropriately be grouped together: Mary (16:6), Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis (16:12). All of these women are said to have worked very hard “in the Lord.” (The words in the Lord do not appear in 16:6, but otherwise the designation is parallel.) This could appear to be a rather innocent comment by Paul and has often been understood to refer to tasks which are menial and/or distinctively assigned to women.

However, the Greek verb translated “work very hard” was used regularly by Paul to refer to the special work of the gospel ministry. Only twice does Paul use it in a common or secular sense, and in both of these instances, it is used within a proverbial expression (Eph. 4:8; 2 Tim. 2:6). Paul frequently uses the term to describe his own apostolic ministry (1 Cor. 4:12; 15:10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col. 2:29; 1 Tim. 4:10; Acts 20:35). Paul also uses the term to refer to the work of others in the ministry, leaders and persons of authority in each case (1 Cor. 16:15-16; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17). In each of these three cases in which Paul refers to the very hard work of others, his context also stresses the need of respect for and submission to such workers.

It is clear, then, that Paul uses the verb work very hard to refer to persons who are engaged in the authoritative work of ministry within the church. Thus, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis were four women who worked very hard in the church’s ministry. This is made even more clear by the phrase in the Lord used with the verb worked very hard in connection with the latter three. In this connection, attention should also be drawn to Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3), two women whom Paul describes as having “struggled beside me in the work of the gospel” (4:3, NRSV).

In Romans 16:3 Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila, a wife and husband team mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (Acts 18:2; 18:18; 18:26; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19). Not only does their frequent mention indicate their importance in the church, but it is said that believers met in their home, that they traveled with Paul, and that they instructed Apollos, an important early teacher in the church. In his greeting in Romans 16:3-4,
Paul speaks of their deep personal commitment to him and of their recognition throughout all the Gentile churches. It should not be missed that, in spite of the general cultural position of women in the first century A.D. in the Roman Empire—especially married women—Paul names Priscilla first. She is also named first in three of the five other references to her and Aquila in the New Testament (Acts 18:18; 18:26; 2 Tim. 4:19).

Paul designated Priscilla and her husband Aquila as “my coworkers in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 16:3). Paul uses the term “co-worker” (sunergos) regularly for other leaders in the gospel ministry, including Urbanus (Rom. 16:9), Timothy (Rom. 16:21), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Clement (Phil. 4:3), Philemon (Philem. 1), Demas and Luke (Philem. 24), and several others (Col. 4:11). He also considers Apollos and himself God’s coworkers (1 Cor. 3:9). It is in this group who take leadership in the ministry of the gospel that Priscilla, without any distinction related to her sex, is included as well as her husband, Aquila.

Euodia and Syntyche, mentioned earlier and known only from Philippians 4:2-3, are also identified by the context as coworkers (“help these women . . . together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers [sunergoi]” NRSV). Thus, three women are identified by Paul as coworkers in the gospel ministry. Euodia and Syntyche’s importance is also indicated by the fact that Paul addresses them and their situation explicitly in his letter to the believers in Philippi. In fact, it would not be an unreasonable historical speculation to suggest that they might have been among the “bishops” noted in the opening address (Phil. 1:1).

Phoebe, commended by Paul at the beginning of this chapter (16:1-2), is usually assumed to have been the one who carried Paul’s letter to its destination in Rome. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth. Cenchreae, Phoebe’s city, was the eastern seaport of Corinth. Paul asks the Roman church “to welcome her in the Lord as being fitting for the saints and to help her in whatever she may require from you” (16:2, NRSV). In this context of his concern for Phoebe and her reception at Rome, Paul describes Phoebe by two designations: “a servant (NIV)/deacon (NRSV) (diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae” (16:1) and “a benefactor (prostatis) of many” (16:2, NRSV).

Although the designation of Phoebe as diakonos has often been understood to be a reference to the office of deaconesses (e.g., RSV, J.B. Phillips), this option is unlikely. There was no feminine term for “deaconesses” in first century A.D. Greek. Later Christians coined the term for a developing office of women deacons. Those passages in the New Testament which seem most likely to refer to the church office of deacon (1 Tim. 3:8,12; Phil. 1:1) mention the word deacon in conjunction with the word bishop. Although a woman deacon is a possibility (1 Tim. 3:11), it is very dubious that Phoebe would be called a deacon. Paul’s general use of the term diakonos makes another option much more likely.

Apart from the “deacon texts” (1 Tim. 3:8,12; Phil. 1:1)—and two texts which use diakonos in reference to a non-Christian administrator or agent (Rom. 13:4; Gal. 2:17)—Paul uses diakonos to refer to servants or ministers of the gospel. He makes general references to this connection (2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:15,23) and designates certain persons as diakonoi (servants or ministers, variously translated in several passages by the NIV and NRSV): Christ (Rom. 15:8); Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5); Epaphras (Col. 1:7); Timothy (1 Tim. 4:6); Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7) and Paul himself (1 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23,25).

Thus, it would seem that to understand Phoebe’s designation most accurately in Paul’s context would be to understand that Phoebe was a minister or servant of the church in Cenchreae. Helen Barrett Montgomery’s 1924 translation of the New Testament was the first to translate the term “minister”; the Revised English Bible (REB, 1989) also uses that term. The NRSV offers minister in a note as an alternative translation; the 1991 Contemporary English Version uses leader. Several translations have translated the word servant, but it is not usually clear to the English reader that it is the same designation that various leading men “servants” of the gospel have received.

Paul also calls Phoebe a prostatis. Translations of this term vary widely: “good friend” (NEB, TEV), “looked after” (JBP), “helper” (RSV), “great help” (NIV, “benefactor” (NRSV). This is the only occurrence of the term in the New Testament. The masculine form of the noun does not occur in the New Testament either. In the Greek of the New Testament period, the term was a relatively strong term of leadership and was used in both pagan and Jewish religious circles. The verbal form of the term (proistemi) occurs only in Paul’s writings in the New Testament. Apart from two instances (Titus 3:8,14), Paul uses the verb in connection with leadership in the church (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12;
1 Tim. 3:4,5,12). Thus, it is probable that the use of the term prostatitis for Phoebe is meant to indicate her position of leadership within the church. (Helen Barrett Montgomery's translation here is "overseer.")

In the light of the evidence of Paul's own letters concerning his use of language, Phoebe appears clearly as a significant leader in the church, a minister in the Cenchreaen church, and part of Paul's circle of trusted coworkers in the gospel.

The last woman to note among the ten in Romans 16:1-16 has very often been hard to find in most English translations. Her name is Junia (16:7), but in most translations the name has appeared as Junias, a male name (e.g., NIV: "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was"). One possible explanation for the confusion over the gender of the name has to do with its grammatical form as the direct object of the verb "greet." In Greek both Junia and Junias would have exactly the same spelling (Junian) as the direct object of a verb.

However, the issue is not actually that simple or innocent. There is considerable evidence that Junia was a common Latin female name in the Roman Empire. (Andronicus was also a common Latin male name.) There is, however, no evidence that Junias was used as a male name at this time. It is only a hypothesized short form of the attested name Junianus. John Chrysostom (who died in A.D. 407), one of the first Greek fathers to write extensive commentaries on Paul and who was known for his negative view of women, understood that Junia was a woman. He marveled that this woman would be called an apostle. In fact, according to scholar Bernadette Brooten, the first commentator to understand Junia as the male name Junias was Aegidius of Rome (1245-1346). Ever since then, Junias has been the common reading of the name in Romans 16:7, although her identity as a female has been restored in the NRSV and the REB.

The actual problem arose in connection with the clause

**Nearly 20 percent of Paul's coworkers were women!**

This means that nearly 20 percent of Paul's coworkers were women! When the issues of Paul's view of women in the church are addressed (e.g., in reference to such texts as 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:8-15), these women coworkers in the ministry must not be forgotten. They are crucial, determinative evidence for the overall assessment of Paul's view.

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A Historical Overview of Women in Ministry
—from page 7

SELF-FULFILLMENT MODEL: FOCUS ON THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

What has happened in recent decades to dispel the enthusiasm for women's ministries? Since the 1960s we have entered a new era that is characterized by self-help and self-fulfillment—the "Me Generation" as it has been dubbed by the media. This shift away from the women's ministries model is fed by the feminist movement on the left and the traditionalist backlash on the right and is spanned from end to end by the recovery and therapy movement.

Feminism in itself is not the answer for women in ministry, as some Christian women may argue. It is incompatible with Jesus' emphasis on self-denial. Jane Hunter's analysis applies not just to missions, but to the entire span of women's ministries: "For feminism to have gained a foothold among the women's missionary community would have entailed the replacement of the underlying premise of women's mission work, self-denial, with its opposite, self-advocacy." Self-advocacy is a highly touted mode of operation in our contemporary world, but it is not the basis for Christian ministry and outreach.

Traditionalism is equally sterile as a foundation for women's ministries. Too often, it is consumed with telling women what they cannot do rather than encouraging them to use their gifts to serve God more effectively. Neither is the so-called "traditional" family the answer. Women of the nineteenth century moved beyond the Reformation and Puritan focus on the nuclear family and looked outward for ministry.

The recovery movement in some respects has had a more negative influence on women's ministries than either feminism or traditionalism. Women in much larger numbers than men are involved in therapy and recovery groups. And the focus today is primarily on meeting one's personal needs rather than the needs of others. Too often, today's women develop a "victim mentality" that does little to foster servants ministry. Getting in touch with one's "inner child" is a Western leisure-time activity for middle-class and affluent women who at-all-too-often ignore homeless children or the children in need in their own cities and neighborhoods.

It would be wrong to imply that there have been no benefits from feminism, or the traditionalist focus on the family, or the recovery movement. They all have their place—in moderation. But we must be ever watchful of their potential to draw us away from Christ's call to reach out to a needy world in loving ministry.

As Christian women, we must reclaim our extraordinary heritage of public ministry—a model for ministry that is rooted in the teaching of Jesus. He made it very clear that when we serve others, we serve him, as is stated in Matthew 25:34-36.

The Great Commission calls us to teach, preach, disciple, and baptize—a command for all Christians, both men and women. Our ministry is one of servanthood, not position and power, and we must work together as partners as we seek to build bridges of understanding in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

7. Ibid., 272-273.

Defining the Development of Women's Ministries
—from page 12

surveyed the needs of pastors' wives in our denomination. We were not at all surprised at what she found. After she identified their specific needs, she was able to design workshops, forums, counseling, and newsletters to help this target group. That's real ministry.

Pamela Reeves, an effective leader of women's ministries on the West Coast, made a significant statement some years ago that caused me to redefine what I was doing as a leader. She said: "Service for Jesus Christ must be expressed in real ministry to people. Activities, including Bible studies—whether personal or in a small or large group—are wonderful, but they must prepare women to reach out in ministry. Our job is not done when we've taught Bible studies, evangelism classes, or trained leaders. Women must then be taught how to minister."

A Consideration of Biblical Versus Cultural Issues
—from page 19

We all look at women's and men's roles in the church with our particular cultural baggage, which inhibits our ability to discern what is truly biblical from what is cultural. And we are further limited by ecclesiastical inhibitors. But we must begin to bridge these gaps by understanding that we are all gifted. We are priests. We are all ministers together in the work of the Lord.