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## **MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH: *An Understanding of Some Prohibitions***

**Juliana Senavoe**

*"Is the gospel 'good news' for African women?" "Can a woman really understand theology?" "If there is no discrimination in the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, why should there be discrimination for ministry?" In October 1995 a workshop was organised in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, to deal with such questions. Seven leading and articulate women theologians, together with four men, met together for a week of intensive discussion on the subject of "Women's Ministry in the Church." Six introductory presentations were made in order to stimulate discussions.*

*Neither agreement nor definitive statements were the object of the workshop, but an attempt was made to raise and face issues realistically. These papers have been published in a book entitled, Women's Ministry in the Church: An African Perspective. The purpose is to help the believer begin to disentangle some of the issues surrounding this big question and to learn how women may be empowered to make their full contribution in the Kingdom of God.*

*This article by Mrs. Juliana Senavoe is one of the chapters from this book, used by the kind permission of the editor. Though this topic is controversial and leads to many heated disagreements, evangelicals need to interact more and more on this topic so that they can begin understanding the biblical bases for the different positions held. This article is printed with such a purpose in mind, to stimulate thinking and further discussion and study on the subject.*

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## INTRODUCTION

That women are called to work alongside their male counterparts in society is hardly questioned by anybody today. The countries of India, Burundi, Britain, Israel and the Philippines have had women Prime Ministers. Ireland, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Ceylon presently have Prime Ministers who are women. It is becoming increasingly clear that as women are given opportunities in society their gifts are being manifested in various leadership positions in the fields of medicine, finance, industry, politics, education, law, engineering and elsewhere.

Women have carried their fair share of the world's burden of work over the centuries and recent documentation has revealed that in some cases they have outstripped men in working harder and longer.

In the October-December, 1993 edition of *Together*, a journal of World Vision International, the following statements are quoted from UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children*, 1992:

The developing world's women bear and care for its children, fetch and carry its fuel and water, cook its meals and shop for its needs, wash its clothes and clean its homes, and look after its old and its ill. It is less widely known that women also grow and market most of the developing world's food, earn an increasing proportion of its income, and work, on average, twice as many hours a day as men.<sup>1</sup>

In some societies the very word, "woman," is a derogatory word. There are such statements as 'women talk' meaning either gossip or trivial talk, 'women's work', which refers to all the tasks considered menial in that society, 'woman's mind' which means shallow thinking, illogical reasoning or the lack of appreciation of important issues. The world's scorn for women in several societies, in modern as in ancient times, is well-known.

Some of society's assumptions about women may not be intentional slights or conscious malice but the fact that some, if not most, of these assumptions are culturally learned behaviour does not make them any more easily accepted.

## THE WOMAN IN GOD'S IMAGE

In the very first chapter of Genesis is the statement that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen.1:27).

From the beginning, therefore, "man" was 'male' *and* 'female'; not 'male' as against 'female'. Both genders are equal beneficiaries of the divine image. Neither is one inferior or superior to the other in their God-given dignity and worth and in their essential humanity. Woman is not man's slave or

subordinate. She has intrinsic value and worth. The clearest statement of this equality is found in Paul's statement that in Christ "there is neither male nor female" (Gal.3:28).

Equality, however, does not mean 'sameness'. Men and women are different, with complementary roles and functions. Difference in roles does not undermine equality. In our salvation God the Father planned it all and sent the Son who came to die to execute the Father's plan. It is the Holy Spirit who applies the work of the Son to the heart of the individual believer. These differences in the roles of the Persons of the Trinity do not make any of them subordinate to the other. The subordination of the Son was the heresy of the Arians and their present day 'cousins', the Jehovah Witnesses.

This equality in value and status of men and women was however undermined at the Fall. In his condition of alienation from God, Adam turned on Eve and blamed her "for his folly" (Gen.3:12). Conflict, antagonism, exploitation and fear have characterised human relationships, including that between males and females, ever since.

In the male and female relationship exploitation "has been expressed historically in male domination, the use of women for men's selfish ends, denying her essential equality and dignity."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus came to assert the woman's essential dignity and status. He accepted both men and women on equal terms. He healed without discrimination. He taught both men and women, unlike the Rabbis of his day. He had theological discussions with men and women (John 4 & 11) and entrusted spiritual truth to both men and women.

For both men and women who believe in him, their alienation brought about by sin ends with adoption, hostility is replaced by reconciliation, guilt and shame by justification and moral filth by sanctification. The male and female saints are equal sharers in the divine nature, equal recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit, equally "blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ", equally co-heirs with Christ and together constitute "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." In the salvation offered in Christ there is no discrimination on account of a person's nationality, race, tribe, social class or sex. All the barriers along these lines have been levelled in Christ.

Not only is the male and female equal by creation and in salvation, they are also equal in the rulership "over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen.1:28). Their stewardship of God's earth was a shared stewardship from the beginning and any inequalities in the stewardship of the earth between males and females as well as between nations are the result of the out-workings of the fall in human societies.

## IS GOD'S IMAGE MALENESS?

Every year I have an interesting time with a new batch of students in my theology class as they try to work through this question. A few cautious ones are hesitant to offer an opinion, but the majority of them unhesitatingly answer "yes."

One of the basic affirmations of the Christian faith is that God the Creator is not part of His creation. He is Spirit (John 4:24) and therefore has no body or such physical parts as eyes, ears, nose, sexual organ or feet. Maleness and femaleness are biological distinctions which God, the Creator, transcends.

In Scripture God is analogically said to be "The Rock that fathered you" and "The God who gave you birth" (Deut.32:18). He is also symbolically presented as the father who lost a son, as well as a woman who lost a coin (Luke 15:8-10). "An analogy indicates that two things are alike in some respects even though they are otherwise dissimilar."<sup>3</sup> In the language of analogies, if the Bible likens God to both a father and a mother it implies that he is dissimilar, as well as similar to both. Human fatherhood and motherhood presuppose sexual distinction between the female and male and the former can only be a mother and the latter can only be a father. God can be both 'father' and 'give birth' because he transcends the biological distinctions of maleness and femaleness.

To use the pronoun 'He', 'Him', 'His' of God is an affirmation of His self-revelation that He is the living God. He is personal, the One with whom we can have fellowship and into whose presence we come. Similarly, the New Testament uses the personal pronoun 'He' of the Holy Spirit to affirm His personality, although the Greek word for spirit is *πνευμα* (*pneuma*) which is neuter.

## BIBLICAL LANGUAGE

God is a communicating God. In His communication with the prophets of old He spoke to them in their vernaculars. The vernacular of ancient Israel was Hebrew but the vernacular in the Roman Empire during the reign of Octavian Augustus, the Caesar who ordered the first census (Luke 2:1) was *koine* Greek. This was the vernacular in which the New Testament was written. These two major cultures within and from which the biblical writings sprung were highly patriarchal and because 'language is a product of culture', the patriarchal view of reality was reflected in the biblical language.

In an article written by Jack B. Rogers in the June, 1975 edition of *Theology, News and Notes*, he states that "in Hebrew, gender attaches to every word."<sup>4</sup> The Greek language is also gender specific and when referring to a mixed group of men and women the masculine form of the word is

preferred.

The Akan language of Ghana does not share this characteristic of attaching gender to each noun. 'Onipa' (human being) could be male ("Obarima") or female ("Obea"). Further, the English language, in which most of the Christian theologies received on the African continent are done, uses the word 'man' both generically to mean humankind and specifically to mean male. This sometimes creates a theological problem, especially when personal pronouns used of God are understood by people to mean 'male' rather than the generic sense of 'person.'

In the present linguistic usage of English the personal pronoun 'she' could not be predicated of God as the word is never used generically but only specifically. To do so would imply, not only that God is personal, which is biblical, but also that God is female, a biological categorisation which is unbiblical. "I am not man" God declares.

Another observation made in Roger's article is that "every verbal statement (in Hebrew) about God conveyed the idea that he was masculine."<sup>5</sup> Most biblical symbols used of Him in His relationship with humans were thus masculine: King, Father, Kinsman, Judge, Shepherd, Husband. In our theological reflections and preaching, the symbol and reality are not clearly distinguished and we perpetuate the erroneous view of God's 'maleness'. Symbolically He is the Father whose children we are, the Kinsman who redeems us, the Husband who loves to the point of dying to save us, and the Judge who will right all wrongs on that Day. Because God is infinite and we are finite we can only speak about Him "in symbols, analogies and metaphors."<sup>6</sup>

Rogers also brings out a scribal practice identified in the Old Testament that whenever a person or thing attained an unusual or high status either on a temporary or permanent basis, feminine words were put in the masculine plural. This was because value and honour were expressed by the use of the masculine gender. An example of this practice was identified in 1 Samuel, chapter 6 where the two milk cows that were made to carry the cart on which the ark of the covenant was placed were immediately referred to in the masculine as soon as they were put to their task.

As we read the biblical material there is the need for a constant reminder that "all our language about God is relative, human and analogical."<sup>7</sup> This, for me, is nowhere more forcefully stated in modern times than in Madam Efua Kumah's *Jesus Of The Deep Forest*. Jesus is the Crab, the River, the Hunter, the Caterpillar, the Chief, the Doctor of the Sick. She re-symbolises biblical truths about Jesus to suit her cultural context. This is what the Hebrew writers did. Biblical truths about God's nature are unchanging; the symbols may change.

## **WOMAN, A 'HELPMATE'**

Much has been made of the words "helper" and "helpmate", as though they indicate that woman was an afterthought created because the discovery was made by God that in Adam's loneliness no animal would do as his companion. Such an understanding impugns God's omniscience as if woman's creation was an emergency measure to solve a problem which was not foreseen by God. From everlasting to everlasting He is the all-knowing God.

This word, 'helpmate,' is sometimes brandished to buttress arguments prohibiting women's ministry in the church. Our understanding of the word 'helper' is coloured by our cultural "hearing aids" where the concept is usually associated with words like subordinate, apprentice, servant, inferior, second class.

The word in the Hebrew text used of the woman in Genesis 2:18 is never used in the Bible to refer to a subordinate helper but is used in most cases to refer to God. The word has a force of "equal and adequate to." The word has nothing to do with inferiority. Eve was the most appropriate partner to Adam for fellowship, procreation and corporate rulership of the created world.

## **RULERSHIP OF ADAM OVER EVE**

As a result of the fall, God's ideal relationship between husband (Adam) and wife (Eve) was marred as was the relationship between God and both of them.

At one stroke Satan destroyed both relationships. The love and complementarity between husband and wife, which existed in the original created order, were replaced with animosity and the domination of the wife by the husband. God's shattered ideal will be fully restored only at the resurrection. However, in Christ's redeemed society, the husband's domination is replaced by the wife's submission which is the voluntary acceptance of the husband's authority. Subordination and domination speak of a subservient relationship. Submission and humility are Christ-like qualities; subordination is not. Mutual submission of all believers to one another, including couples to each other, is one of the distinctive marks of Christianity. Christ's submission to the Father did not make Him less divine.

Nowhere in Scripture is rulership given to all men over all women or the voluntary acceptance of the authority of all men by all women enjoined. A husband has authority of headship over his own wife, not over all women. Authority should not be confused with authoritarianism. The latter is corrupted authority which functions by the assumption that those under authority do not know what is good for them and must be told what to do and be kept in line if

they deviate.

All human authority is delegated authority given for a specific purpose. God, who alone wields absolute authority, never coerces us nor does He exercise His authority over us by bullying us into action. A bully is not exercising authority but 'naked power' when he compels a weaker person (physically, mentally, economically or socially) to do what he wants. God's absolute authority is graciously expressed and lovingly offered and He loves us into loving Him (1 John 4:19). The husband's headship is a headship of love (Eph.5:25).

## VOWS

Sometimes the instructions regarding the waiving of vows by fathers and husbands in Numbers 30:1-16 are made to become a principle for subordinating women to men and prohibiting the latter from leadership positions.

Vows did not form part of what was required in Israel's cultic practices. They were voluntary promises that individuals made to God to give something to Him or to abstain from something. If an Israelite young daughter still living at home made a vow, her father could annul it. A husband could do the same to his wife's vow. The regulation, however, did not apply to widows or divorced women even if they were living with their parents or grown sons.

Does this mean that amongst women only widows and divorcees could become leaders? Further, there is nothing in these verses to show that the conditions surrounding these vows were meant for all peoples and for all times. In any case they were never renewed in any form in the new "law of Christ."

## CHRIST'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH

The passage in 1 Corinthians 11:3ff is sometimes used to support a rigid hierarchy which implies that all men are one rung or more above all women. This view gives all men an "inalienable" right to give all the commands, with the women generally at the receiving end.

Christ is the Head of the church. In this relationship Christ's power is not used to hold down those under Him, i.e. His flock. Instead, Christ uses His headship to serve rather than to oppress and smother. "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing in order to wash the disciples feet" (Jn.13:3-5). Jesus' knowledge of possessing absolute power was not to hold a club over the heads of His disciples to bring them into line, nor did it prevent Him from doing the most menial task when the need arose. Christ is our model in Christian



relationships. His headship is that of self-giving love instead of "maintaining law and order." The most consistent picture given in the New Testament of Christ's relationship to the Church is that of "laying down his life for the sheep", "giving his life as a ransom", "loving his own unto death", "displaying his unlimited patience." In Christian ministry our model is Jesus Christ.

Although He is known as the Bishop and Shepherd of our souls (1 Pet.2:25), the Teacher (Matt.8:18) who has his disciples, yet He is the same one who dies for the sheep to bring them life, the everlasting Priest whose offering is Himself rather than bulls and goats, and He is the Servant (Rom.15:8; Luke 22:27), known in His serving. Holding up Christ as the standard, the characteristic word of Christian service is *διακονια* (*diakonia*) which has the general idea of 'table waiter' or any lowly service.

Which Christian is fit by race, gender or class for this type of service? We are primarily servants of God (2Cor.6:4) or Christ (Col.1:7; Gal.1:10). We are all ministers of the new covenant of the Spirit (2 Cor.3:6), we are ministers of the gospel (Col.1:23) and of the Church (Col.1:25). Could women become servants of God, of Christ, of the gospel and not of the Church?

The first human testimony given of Christ's resurrection was by a woman to two "pillars of the Church," Peter and John. Was the testimony 'unsound' because it was given by a woman? For cultural reasons she was not believed by the two apostles but their unbelief did not change the veracity of her testimony just as many people reject the incarnation today but this in no way affects its historicity or its theological significance.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP OF BELIEVERS TO EACH OTHER**

From Christ "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph.4:16). Each member in the body is directly related to Christ, the Head. There is no chain of command where some members can receive spiritual nourishment from Christ only through others. Each believer has "confidence to enter the most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body. . ." (Heb.10:19-20). Christ Himself nourishes each part of the body and each little bit is expected to contribute to the growth of the whole by doing its assigned task (Col.2:19).

This picture is further expanded by Paul in his discourse about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14. According to the sovereign will of the triune God each believer is made a part of the body of Christ and is also assigned a spiritual gift which is to be used for the benefit of the whole Church (1 Cor.12:7). There is no hint or indication that any of the spiritual gifts are

assigned on the basis of race, age, gender, tribe, nationality or social standing. God does not discriminate in giving gifts to His people nor in empowering any of His children for effective service. For effectiveness the exercise of each gift is to be characterised by patience, kindness, humility, courtesy, selflessness, forgiveness, faith, hope and perseverance, i.e. the ingredients of love enumerated in 1 Corinthians 13.

Paul further discusses some ways in which the exercise of spiritual gifts were being abused in Corinth. One particular gift was being emphasised as of more importance than others, i.e. the gift of tongues (1 Cor.14:1-25). There was also disorder in public worship in that some Corinthian brethren were showing off the gift of tongues (14:28), while others lacked self-control (14:30) in the exercise of their gifts and there was disruptive behaviour (14:33-35).

For each of these disorders Paul had an injunction to silence by the use of the Greek word, *σιγαω* (*sigao*) "keep silent, be silent, stop talking" (1Cor.14:28,30,34), and each of them is conditional, not absolute.

- i. If there should be speaking in tongues in an assembly, then it should be interpreted for the edification of all present. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God (v.28).
- ii. If a revelation comes to someone sitting down the first speaker should keep silent (v.30) and
- iii. If the wives (Greek: *γυνή*) want to enquire about something from their husbands they should do so at home and not in the assembly (v.34).

Whatever the disruptive, disgraceful behaviour of the wives in the Corinthian congregation was, that does not debar all Christian women from ministering in the church, nor from active participation in the church. All had been given gifts for use in building up the church. In an assembly they could share a hymn, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation (1 Cor.14:26).

Women prophesied with the disciples and others on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Philip's four daughters had a public ministry of prophecy in the church, and it is assumed in 1 Corinthians 11 that the women with this gift would use it as well as pray in the public assembly of believers. Paul's prohibitions were given to the Corinthian church to curb disruptive, disorderly behaviour in their public worship. If similar conditions prevail in our assemblies then we need to hear his cure for such ecclesiastical malaise.

Gifts given by God are to be used in His service, in the context of the whole church. "If (a person's gift) is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; . . . if it is encouraging, let him encourage and if it is leadership, let him govern diligently" (Rom.12:6). When Christ ascended on high He gave gifts to men (Eph.4:8). The Greek word for "men" used in this passage is

ανθρωπος (*anthropos*) which means "human kind," i.e. men and women. Any inflexible fixing of position without regard to God's gifting but solely on the basis of gender is a serious undermining of God's wisdom in His sovereign distribution of gifts.

## THE CHURCH

The word, "church," evokes different pictures and emotions for various people. To some the word is synonymous with pews, hymn books, solemn singing and ministers. To others it is associated with the most beautiful building in town or a place where pretty clothes instead of work-a-day clothes are taken on Sundays. To still others the picture may be that of a place where men and women sit apart and the men do all the talking and women are passive observers. Some younger and urban adherents of the faith on the other hand associate the church with boisterous singing and dancing accompanied by electronic guitars and pianos.

Which mental picture of the church is true? The New Testament concept of the Church is a dynamic and not a static one. Christ is building his Church on every continent, and in a variety of cultures. No one culture is the standard culture for all others (Matt.16:18).

The concept of the Church involves a calling by God (Eph.4:1) from sin and death through the blood of Jesus Christ. It is also a call for covenantal relationship and fellowship with Christ (1 Cor.1:9) as well as a call to belong to God's family - a family in which we are all "brethren", "saints", "disciples" and our unity is expressed as being "one flock", "God's holy nation", "a building of God", "the body of Christ", "a people belonging to God", the "bride of Christ."

Our unity is however not 'sameness'. There is infinite diversity within the family - a diversity on account of role, tribe, spiritual gifts, training, age, gender, culture, etc. The differences do not undermine our essential unity in Christ nor our interdependence.

In this family, both men and women exercise the prophetic and priestly functions (Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Cor.11:5; 1 Pet.2:5,9). The characteristic word for their function or service, which is chosen rather than any other, is *διακονια* (*diakonia*) which, as previously pointed out, has the general idea of 'table waiter' or any kind of lowly service. Any arrogant, self-assertive way of ministering in the body of Christ is at variance with the Spirit of the Lord of the Church. Christian ministry is "unto the Lord", for whatever we do we are to do it as to the Lord and not to man (Col.3:23).

In the same vein sin is basically directed against God. Were women committing sin when they ministered for the edification of the church? Nowhere in Scripture is the public ministry of women in the church included in the sin lists (cf. Col.3:5-11; Gal.5:19-21; 1 Tim.6:3-5; Rev.21:8). Some of the

evidence of women's ministry in the early church includes the fact that some women were leaders of house churches, the only type of Churches in existence at the time of Paul, either alone e.g. Nympha (Col.4:15) or with their husbands e.g. Apphia (Phlm.2).

Priscilla and Aquilla, mentioned several times in the New Testament (Acts 18:2; 18:18,26; 1 Cor.16:19; 2 Tim.4:10) as travelling with Paul, had believers meeting in their home and together instructed Apollos. What is significant is that in spite of the general cultural position of women in the Roman Empire in the first century, especially married women, Priscilla was usually mentioned first before her husband, against the convention of the time.

Phoebe was a *διακονος* (*diakonos*), and since there was no feminine term for 'deaconess' in first century Greek, the word used with reference to Phoebe meant that she was a servant or minister of the church. David M. Scholer has this to say on Phoebe's leadership:

Paul also calls Phoebe a *προστατις*. 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 (*προιστημι*) occurs only in Paul's writings in the N.T. 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). Phoebe was probably a leader in the Church."<sup>8</sup>

In Romans 16:7 the name of Junias is mentioned together with Andronicus. They were said to have been outstanding among the apostles. Because the word is a direct object of the verb 'greet,' the form is the same in Greek whether it is masculine or feminine (*Ἰουνία*). There is no evidence, however, that Junias was ever used as a male name, although Junia was a common Latin female name in the Roman Empire. Andronicus was also found to be a common Latin male name. Scholer quotes Bernadette Brooten in his article that "the first commentator to understand Junia as the male name Junias was Aegidius of Rome (1245-1346)", and since this time Junias as a male form has been the usual translation. The King James Version, the New Revised Standard Version and the REB have restored her identity as a lady apostle.

This is a clear illustration of the fact that translations of the Bible are forms of interpretation, as translators choose between meanings of words and phrases. The Greek word, *γυνή* (*gune*), is used universally to mean a woman of any age whether a virgin, married or widow. Modern renderings will include lady and girl. The word is also used specifically to mean a wife, e.g.

Ephesians 5:22.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, the mention of husbands (whose Greek form, *ανηρ* [*aner*], also means man) would suggest that "wives" instead of "women" should be the preferred translation. This double meaning of the Greek word *γυνη* (*gune*) has very real possibilities for our understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, a passage which Patricia Grundy considers

... the most effective weapon to keep women from active and equal participation in the Church. It has been interpreted to mean everything from 'women cannot speak at all in Church' to 'women cannot teach adult males' to 'women cannot teach their own husbands'. It is cited to bar women from the pastorate and deny them access to the pulpit. All evidence that women did preach and teach in the early Church is ignored to so apply this passage.<sup>9</sup>

Ralph P. Martin stresses the point that "every section of the New Testament must be interpreted in the light of the larger context of the overall purpose and plan of the book of which it forms a part, and according to the purpose for which it was intended."<sup>10</sup> From the first few verses of Paul's first letter to Timothy we gather that the Ephesian church was plagued by false doctrine as well as disorderly conduct. The interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 should therefore be placed within this context. The woman in verse 11 could well be translated a wife, who in agreement with other parts of the New Testament, is to submit to the headship authority of her husband. No commentator is certain about the real meaning of verse 15.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In general discussions on the ministry of women in the church we tend to focus on society and what it thinks and feels, how it reacts to the issue, instead of on Jesus Christ, what He said and did.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God who calls us and redeems us from "the elemental spirits of this world" and gives us a new identity as children of God, bringing us into His family in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" (Gal.3:28). He reverses the curse of the Fall, and our partially lost nobility is restored as He continually works to make us bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In all our activities, Jesus Christ is the Owner whose servants we all become. He gives each one of us gifts that fit us to serve Him in the family, His Church, as well as in society. The basic condition for acceptable service is love for God and others. The power for the task of ministry is from the Holy Spirit who is given as a gift to every believer. The gifts and abilities are not gender-specific.

Christ is the eternal High Priest and all believers together form the "royal priesthood", His own people who bear each other's burden for growth

and ministry. Jesus Christ is the Truth, the source of all good and perfect gifts. Who should be barred from declaring Him in word and deed? The Holy Spirit speaks and acts through each of His children in order to portray Christ. We come to learn, think and speak that truth in love as we become Christ-like.

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, the foundation of all wisdom and knowledge. All other relationships are to be perceived from Christ's lordship. In Christ's new community the old barriers which divided Jew from Gentile, rich from poor, learned from the unlettered, male from female are all broken down. A new relationship of love and mutual submission is established.

Jesus Christ is the Creator, the source of every ability and opportunity. With the gifts He has given us we become His hands, feet, eyes, ears. The hands cannot tell the feet "you are not needed in the body." Such an attitude is an affront to the one who made the "eyes", "ears", "feet", "hands" and all the other parts for the proper functioning of the body. Burying our gifts will meet with His disapprobation.

Jesus Christ is the Healer. He heals our brokenness, He comforts us in our distresses and frustrations and He gives us joy in spite of pain - mental, emotional, social. We share in His sufferings, He who was rejected and despised. In our weaknesses He perfects strength so that much work is accomplished to confound the strong and proud. He is the resurrection whose coming alone will bring complete wholeness - in bodies, relationships and structures. His Holy Spirit births in us "endless patience" in His service as we labour for justice, and righteousness in a broken world.

Christ is the Lamb of God who was slain and by whose blood we have been redeemed. He alone is worthy to receive honour, praise, dominion authority and power, and idolatry is to ascribe any of these to another being or thing.

What does Jesus Christ think of women in the ministry of the Church? He accepts them, He teaches them and He empowers them and sends them out as His witnesses.

### ENDNOTES

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