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# The Fraternal

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# EDITORIAL

To a denomination that professes no theological barrier to the ordination of women for the work of the ministry there may seem to be little to discuss in the matter. Theology, as we know however, is not everything. The notorious 'nontheological factors' can be as formidable as a quotation from the Bible or a passage from the Fathers. Is it easier for a woman to be ordained by the Baptists than actually to exercise a ministry in their churches?

We are grateful to Sarah Maitland, the wife of an Anglican clergyman, for contributing a theological view of womanhood, to Judy Reece who is one of our own ordained women ministers and to Ruth and John Matthews who have exercised a team ministry as husband and wife.

We should be glad to hear from any who would like to extend the discussion that may well be provoked by these articles.

## In the Image of God

"Dear God", reads a seven-year-old girl's letter in Collin's *Children's Letters to God*, "Are boys really better than girls? I know you are one, but try to be fair". And we all laugh. How funny is it?

It will be nice one day to be able to start articles like this with the assumption that everyone likely to read them will be able to accept that there is a "women's question"; that women are discriminated against and disadvantaged in our society; that the current debate is not solely the matter of the hysterical neurotic whinings of some unhinged (un-sexed) young women. When that is the case it will be possible to concentrate on creative solutions.

Sadly, and to be honest, to my continual surprise, it is daily brought home to me that people — of good will and informed conscience — find it very hard to accept the reality of this particular oppression. Feminists are often accused of "going on and on": but what seems not just obvious to us, but clearly proven by the most external and objective facts, is simply not acknowledged by many of the people we try to talk to. At times this incomprehension reaches a point where it is hard not to feel that there is a wilful element in it — that we are talking to people who have ears and *will not* hear. This of course makes the position of women who do not wish to become 'separatists' very difficult. The problems of racism, or world hunger, or political violence, generate a multitude of solutions and analyses — but no-one seriously denies that a problem exists in the first place.

So with apologies to those who have heard, I shall have to begin by presenting a little of the evidence that women *are* discriminated against in our society, and do constitute what can properly be described as an oppressed group and who *therefore* have a special claim on the time and attention of the Christian Churches:

Despite the Equal Pay and Equal Opportunity Acts of Parliament, women remain under-paid in relation to men by almost exactly the same percentage as they did in 1900! (Women in full-time employment earn 68%

of the average male wage.) That is to say that all the anti-discrimination legislation of this century, from the granting of the vote to the Equal Opportunities legislation of the last decade have done effectively nothing to alleviate the financial inequality that women suffer.

Despite the nominal support of all the major political parties sexual inequality is still enshrined in law. Government pensions schemes, taxation laws and social security benefits do not treat women equally with men. Some of these discriminations actually deprive women of basic civil rights: married women do not have the rights to privacy in regard to their income, to establish a legal domicile, to contract certain debts or enter certain legal agreements on their own.

Women are three times more likely than men to receive psychiatric treatment in their lives. Any number of interpretations can be put on this fact (except that women are more unstable than men inherently — “congenital” forms of insanity occur no more frequently in women), but what it is very difficult to deny is that Western society is harder for women to endure.

In a broad range of psychological tests both men and women can be shown to value ‘masculinity’ more highly than ‘femininity’. It is not simply a question of “equal but different”; but a cultural bias in favour of ‘masculine’ attributes.

Women are the victims of a range of crimes that men do not (with unusual exceptions) experience. One quarter (25%) of *all* reported violent crime is domestic violence — wife battering. This does not take into account women who for reasons of fear or shame do not even report their own cases to the police. There is no real equivalent for men to the crime, or the personal experience of rape — let alone the continuous sexual or quasi-sexual abuse that women experience daily on the street. Rape victims come from all classes, ages and styles of life. Moreover the fear of rape and violence inhibits and constrains many women’s freedom of action in a way that is hard for men to imagine. Golda Meir tells a revealing story of her early days in the, otherwise all male, Israeli cabinet, when Tel Aviv was suffering from a serious wave of rape incidents: the Cabinet proposed as a solution that a curfew should be imposed on all women — if they were not on the streets they could not be raped. Mrs Meir suggested that it was wrong to punish the victims of a crime and that it would make more sense to impose a curfew on *all men* — if they were not on the street they could not rape people. Stunned amazement met her proposal — and then her colleagues rose up with one voice to say that this would be an unconstitutional attack on the rights of *individuals*.

I want to be quite clear at this point, or anything else I may say will be easily open to misunderstanding:

I am *not* trying to argue that women are the most oppressed group that I can think of in the world. Though of course when we talk of other such groups (racial groups, the world’s poor, refugees, stateless persons, prisoners of conscience, oppressed classes, the aged, the very young, sexual-preference minorities or any other) it is important to remember that all these groups are probably *more* than 50% women: more because there are simply more women in the world than men, and more because women usually end up at the bottom of the pile, whatever the pile is. In times of

serious famine women are more likely, for instance, to die of starvation than men — partly because of the burdens of pregnancy and lactation, partly because most societies discriminate in preference of men whenever there is a shortage. This point is worth making because we often manage to imply — accidentally I'm sure — that women are not part of these groups, and that women's demands are being made at the expense of these other oppressed groups. The Christian Aid information sheets this year told us that it was important to help the Third World Poor because a failure to do so would create widows and orphans — whereas the reality is that famine will create childless widowers.

I am *not* trying to say that women are powerless, innocent victims of male savagery. Of course women are neither powerless nor necessarily innocent. Our power, guilt and compliance compound the problem. But admitting this does not change the reality of discrimination — it only spreads the responsibility and therefore the hope of changing a situation which at present works to no-one's true advantage.

I am simply saying that there exists a discrimination against women — as women, whoever they may also be — which is both public — legal, social — and personal — absorbed into us as individuals in the form of prejudice, pain and alienation. As an oppressed group women have, like all oppressed groups, a special place in the love of God — and therefore a special claim on all Christians — a claim which in the light of the Gospel is tantamount to an absolute right: a right to be fed when we are hungry (whether physically or spiritually); a right to be clothed when we are naked and exposed and vulnerable (not stripped for men's amusement, or by moralistic fervour); a right to be freed when we are captive — not just in iron bars, but in the conventions and bondage of society (just as the Israelites in Egypt were not kept in prisons, but were made to do the least attractive jobs for less than the going rates, had their cultural integrity destroyed and were denied the Civil Rights enjoyed by others around them).

The Christian record towards those oppressed groups "outside" themselves has (despite the accusations of the world) been pretty impressive and the record of the post-reformation non-conformist churches has been particularly so.....of course there have been horrible errors and omissions for which we should be — and I think increasingly are — penitent. But over several centuries Christians have demanded justice in the name of the oppressed — whether slaves; uneducated; sweat-shop workers; or orphans. And not just demanded justice, but gone and done justly. But equally it has to be said that all the denominational churches have been less ready to respond to their own members who demand justice *for themselves* from *their* church. To admit to these claims is to enter into a painful and humiliating self-examination — far harder than to accuse other people of injustice and challenge them to put their houses in order. But this self-examination and repentance is precisely what Jesus made a pre-requisite for receiving the Gospel. The beam in our own eye is the real challenge.

Women stand right in the centre of the western Christian Community demanding that the church live up to its own claims. They cannot be avoided like the starving human being or the black human being — who can

be reduced to a massive corporate problem. Everyone of us was born from a woman and comes into daily contact with women, and with being women. If we cannot love/act justly towards our neighbour whom we have seen .....This means that women's demands for justice, both inside the christian community and in the world outside have a particular dynamic and present a wider and more important challenge than at first appears. What is it then that women are asking of the Christian Churches?

We are asking that the god-image made flesh in the creation be recognised for what it is. Divine and fully human.

We are asking first and foremost that everyone of goodwill should face the facts — that women do not participate equally in the good things that have been prepared for us all. If all of us, women as well as men, opened our eyes and ears not to some historical error, but to ongoing injustice (from the fact that a woman has just been sent to prison for providing services to eminent men, while the court protects *them* from even being named; through to the horror of genital mutilation practised in many countries while the so-called 'Liberal West' talks smugly of not-interfering-with-local-customs-and-culture): injustice moreover in which we are all implicated (by the language we use and the jokes we tell if nothing else) then it might be possible to generate the will to change.

We are asking, though, for more than compassionate sympathy: we are asking for action, from our churches. For support and encouragement in the demands we have to make of governments and systems. But even more for action in putting our own house in order. These demands go, I think, deeper than is realised. The demand that women should have better access to the full ministry of word and sacrament is a fairly simple matter if it is treated just as an employment issue, (though this too is not unimportant). But really it is theological demand for a visible declaration that when God created humanity, we were created male and female in God's image; which is to say — to spell it out — that God has a female image. Where the churches do not declare that they are declaring less than the fullness of truth as revealed to us in the scriptures.

So we are demanding full, visible presence of the female image of God in our communities at every level. This is not just a question of permitting women to exercise previously male ministries; but still more of affirming and exploring female ministries. In the course of research for a book I am writing I conducted a small scale survey among practising Christian lay-women; one question asked what experience the respondents had had of "women's ministry" — although over 60% were mothers and 100% were daughters *no one* perceived mothering as a ministry; only three individuals in 250 mentioned as ministry the tea-ladies and church-cleaners — although these are precisely the ministries of service on which Jesus was so insistent. Women's work is never done — the old saying goes; it is never even noticed in the christian community.

Likewise we are asking for a language that does more to express the inclusion of women — both in humanity and in the God-head. This again is not just about making a few women feel better (although that seems an important Christian thing to do in itself), it is about telling the truth. God

says, for instance, “I will pant and cry out like a woman in labour”, but pregnancy is regarded still as less than holy. People have said to me, ‘I wouldn’t mind having a woman minister, but supposing she got pregnant’. The proper response to this can only be ‘She will then resemble an aspect of God which we have allowed to get lost’.

We are asking to be allowed to give to the churches something that we all badly need. And to give it in partnership with men, in order to create something better. Women are accused, just now, of being greedy for power; and instructed to model ourselves on Jesus’ humility and self-denial. (Sometimes we are even told that we are ‘holier’ than men because we are more self-sacrificing). But it seems to me abundantly clear that Jesus *never* asks anyone to give up something they have not already got. He tells the *rich* young man to give all his goods to the poor; but when he is confronted with 5,000 hungry people he does not speak of self denial, he gives them food. He declares that people who will not give up their families cannot hope to be worthy of the Kingdom, but to Jairus, and to Martha and Mary, who have lost an important part of their family Jesus does not preach resignation and self-immolation — he restores their dead to them. To the disciples he preaches the gospel of service — serve one another, wash one another’s feet (a woman’s job incidentally in his society) he who would be first must be the servant of all; but to Martha — that accomplished server — he says that enough is enough, “Mary has chosen the better part” by seeking her own self-fulfillment. It cannot be accidental that the only person whom Jesus ever reprimands for an excess of humble service is a woman.

Most centrally we are asking that the Churches observe and act on a very curious fact: in the incarnation God chose very conspicuously to reveal what was going on *first* to precisely those who were least ‘useful’ in a worldly sense for the furthering of divine intention. (Women were not, in Jewish law, regarded as legally competent to ‘bear witness’). A woman, Mary, was the first person to hear of God’s intended intervention; another woman, Elizabeth, was the first to recognize what was happening; a woman of loose morals at the well at Samaria was the first to declare Jesus as the Messiah; to Martha Jesus revealed that “I am the resurrection and the life”; and to Mary of Magdala he gave both the first sight of that life and the first responsibility for proclaiming it. In no-body’s terms can this be described as efficient (interestingly the disciples do not believe Mary of Magdala — they cannot assent to the resurrection until Jesus appears to Peter); but the pattern is so consistent that there has to be a reason for it. There is no particular evidence that these women were markedly ‘holier’ more spiritually aware or better in any way than the men who were around. That idea is certainly contradicted by our own experience of the people around us. I believe that at this crucial moment in history God makes clear once again that precisely the aspects of humanity that we want to project as lesser, more sinful, less valuable, more destructive, less important, less Godly are the chosen channels for bringing forward the New Creation.

In the Old Testament tradition the prophets occupied a special space — they were members of the Israelite community who stood outside that community to judge it. That special position seems to be where women

stand in relation to the rich, white West. They live within the community, and yet they are separate from it; I do feel that they are thus — through historical development, not personal private sanctification — peculiarly called to prophesy at this time to the dangers of dualism in western christianity. Not hearing what the prophets had to say inevitably led to less than ideal consequences. We are asking the churches to listen.

It is, finally important to realise that 'we' in this context does not mean a tiny group of hysterical 'women's libbers'. I mentioned earlier the survey I did among lay women. The survey was small and not authoratative, but the figures are perhaps interesting. the ones given below are for the Baptist women only:

75% of the sample agreed that the Women's Liberation Movement is making important and valuable points about our society.

77% *disagreed* with the statement "Of course God is male: that is one of the things that made Christianity different from primitive religions and cannot be changed."

30% agreed that "whether it meant to or not Christianity oppresses women."

42% felt that the language we use about God was too masculine and more neutral and feminine language should be used.

23% felt that "the constant use of words like 'men', 'brothers' and 'he' in prayers, hymns and worship" makes them feel as though they were not fully members of their congregations.

These figures do suggest that there is more than a simple justice issue to be dealt with. Within the churches themselves women are feeling an alienation and disappointment that their contribution to the fullness of Christian life is being neglected. The "woman question" is a real and serious one, not about "our rights" but about who we think God is and how that God can be declared to a world that clearly stands in very grave need of the gospel of justice, freedom and love.

Sara Maitland

*The author is a Christian (Anglican); and a feminist. She is a writer and journalist - her first novel Daughter of Jerusalem (Blond and Briggs, 1978), which combines biblical and feminist themes, won the Somerset Maugham award in 1979. She is now working on a book for Collins about the contemporary position of women in Christianity, which will be published in 1981. She is married, with one daughter and lives in London.*



## THE WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

409, Barking Road, Plaistow, E13 8AL

My dear Fellow Minister,

Public spending cuts, like the rain, fall on the just and the unjust without discrimination. I will leave it to you to classify the West Ham Central Mission under whichever heading you feel to be appropriate!

Seriously though, it has not been possible for the Mission to escape the effects of the Government's economic policies, nor should we expect to. All this has meant, however, that a great deal of re-thinking has had to be done in the matter of the sources of our financial support. A very considerable proportion of our income has, in the past, come through local government sponsorship of our guests in Rest-a-While, at Greenwoods and, until recently, at Orchard House. It is no longer possible to rely upon this source of income. We have, therefore, been giving urgent consideration to the services we offer at Greenwoods and The Parsonage. We feel that the emphasis is likely to be upon short stay arrangements, and that more and more of our guests will be financed either by their own families and friends or, perhaps, by local churches. We feel that this would contribute to our financial survival and, on a more positive note, would offer the kind of service that we ought to be offering to our friends throughout the denomination and beyond.

Another implication of the financial cut backs is, of course, that we shall require even more generous support by way of voluntary donations from churches and individuals. I hope that you will feel able to commend our cause to your people as opportunities present themselves.

You may have noticed in the Baptist Times that we have been advertising for key personnel in our proposed Family Centre at Stock. I know that you will pray for us in our planning of the work we hope to do there. There is a tremendous need for Christian counselling and education in marriage and family matters, and we feel that we have something to offer in this sphere.

Finally brethren and sisters, may I commend to you the possibility of using Orchard House for weekend or possibly longer church or young people's conferences. We can accommodate around 30 guests. If you feel that you might be interested, please write to Mrs D. Richards at Greenwoods and she will provide you with further information.

May the Lord bless you in your Manse and in your ministry.

Yours sincerely,  
Trevor W. Davis

Superintendent

# Women in the Ministry — a Personal View

It is an insurmountable task to write on Women in the Ministry. Not the least of the problems being that, although it may surprise some, women vary as much in their view of the ministry and theology as their less novel and more accepted male colleagues. It is similarly difficult in that such an article must be written from a personal point of view. Therefore, I can share only my own feelings and views, and hope that at least some of them will echo the feelings and experiences of other women. Essentially though, each person's ministry will be the result of their own training, background and personality, and most importantly their own theology and individual faith.

At the outset of this article I should like to explore three basic assumptions that are made about women in the 'Ministry'. The first is rather important, in that it asks an essential question — are we now accepted?

Here I find a real difficulty in that I was fortunate enough to leave college, and to settle quite quickly into a team ministry in which I felt both accepted, and also I hope, acceptable; perhaps as with any Minister the ultimate verdict lies with the churches to whom we minister. I must point out also, that at present, I am not in the Pastoral Ministry, but nearing the end of a three year course leading to registration as a Psychiatric Nurse, hence I feel to some extent out of touch with this question of acceptance, from both church and ministerial points of view. I shall be interested to see any changes when I do return to some form of Ministry, as I do so intend. However, I am not yet convinced that women are accepted as Ministers in many communities, both geographically and theologically speaking. Perhaps the fault lies with the women as much as the communities. However, it cannot be denied surely, or can it? that women as ministers are still regarded as special, rather than as exercising a ministry that may have a slightly different emphasis. Somehow I feel the crux of the problem lies not with the consideration of women ministers as a special entity, but rather with the problems faced with the single person in the Ministry, and the problem of their acceptance in the churches and the communities to which they minister. This is a point that I should like to return to later in this article.

The next point that I should like to explore is the problem, of just how different it is when the question of the settlement of women ministers is discussed in that most secret of all Baptist Institutions "The Superintendents' Board".

I fear that women are still a special problem to settle, as I gather Churches are still asked "Would you accept a woman?," before even a single name on the Superintendents' list is contemplated. Clearly we have not yet arrived at the idea of having Ministers who happen to be women, in spite of there being nearly a century since the first women were ordained by the denomination. I should love to think that in this respect we are no longer 'special' women ministers but ordinary people called of God to minister, and who because we are women, may bring different gifts and emphases to the Ministry.

This leads, I hope, to the next assumption. Do women have a special role in the Ministry? This I am sure needs further exploration not only with regard to Ministry, but also with regard to the question of the ongoing role of women in the church, and indeed in the community. The role of women in the church is not as clear as it might once have been. We may as women have taken on a role in the church that we feel is the right one to adopt at the present time, whether Society outside the church, has decided on the role of women in its community. I think that few women now in the Ministry feel themselves to be campaigners for the rights of women. I feel sure that most women feel that they are called of God to minister not called to preach revolution in the anti-feminist circles of church life. I can only speak personally, and use the words of Paul in Phil 3:8-11 when speaking of my own role in the Ministry, words which also describe my feelings, having felt a strong call to the Ministry.

Moving from a very brief outline of the role of women in church and ministry, I should like to consider the possibility that other Ministers might consider a change of viewpoint when looking at women in the Ministry. Perhaps, to use some ideas of Norman Autton when speaking of chaplains, we should adopt a more “functional” view of women Ministers and cease the endless “paternalism” that pervades some of the discussions of women in the Ministry. In some of the Fraternal discussions in which I have shared the male ministers have on occasions, if not totally accepting of the women, taken on this rather paternalising attitude towards their junior female colleagues. This has been rather more prominent in my experience in ecumenical fraternals, rather than our own Baptist fraternals (by the way, when are we going to change the title??). We are not a strange new breed to be taken aside and carefully nurtured before being sent out on a poor and unsuspecting community.

Women are not the same as men, and we do not wish to be the same, but rather we all need to accept that our femininity does give us a different function, and therefore possibly a different ministry. This Ministry must include Laity as well as clergy, for we are after all, all “Ambassadors under Christ” (Eph 6:18-20). It is possible that women do have a particular ‘function’ as part of the ongoing ministry of the Church, but this must be determined not simply from a role given, but as a result of the living out of their own particular interests, experiences and backgrounds, and in this respect they are not special in any respect from their male counterparts. It is to this more personal account of Ministry that I now turn.

I have always been very interested in the relationship between Religion and Medicine; so I suppose it is no surprise to me that I have ended up studying further in this area. Along with this interest has come a personal concern with the Pastoral Ministry, which perhaps I see as the crux around which all Ministry centres. This Pastoral attitude comes I feel from a willingness to listen — firstly to God, and then to others. Bonhoeffer summarizes this perfectly with his words, “Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But He who can no longer listen to his brother no longer listens to God either: he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too”.

This attitude of listening to God and knowing God through listening to others leads I feel to a deeper and more meaningful expressions of prayer, and can therefore lead to a deeper more meaningful expression of prayer within the whole Christian Community. Although I place a greater emphasis on the pastoral aspects of the Ministry it is not to say that the conduct of worship is of lesser importance, rather that for me it takes on a different meaning.

From this total attitude of listening grows the true 'caring' that must characterize all Ministry be it the ministry of male or female. This total caring makes ultimate demands on us and in its turn forces us to look to God as the one on whom we ultimately depend. It is a problem of the single person in the Ministry that God is often the *only* one to whom one can turn after a deeply demanding session of Pastoral Counselling. It is this lack of another human being in the Manse that can gradually wear down the reserves of the single Minister who lives alone, and I venture to suggest that the majority of women in pastoral charge are in this very situation.

However, this very aloneness in my case led to a real bond of friendship and support with those church members who were forced to be alone because of divorce, death, or shyness in making relationships. This led to many very meaningful pastoral conversations that helped me immensely, and I hope also helped the person in need.

Heije Faber speaks of this element of conversation in his book on *Pastoral care in the Modern Hospital*, "Much of the minister's work consists of conversations. In these his first task is to enter as fully as he may into the other man's world, to accompany him on an inner exploration. It will hold surprises not only for the Minister, but also for the other, before they finally stand together in the light of the Gospel".

I would venture to suggest that there are situations where the woman can enter this world more fully than the man. I feel this is a long accepted premise, for one only has to look at the amount of "Pastoral Work" done by the Minister's wife. There are of course situations where the opposite is true, and I think that the woman can never force a situation in order to prove a personal point. What I think I am saying is that there is room for men and women in this essential area of Pastoral Care.

Perhaps these conversations will be on the telephone, or at the side of a Hospital Bed where the Ministerial function is to sit and hold a hand, say nothing verbally, but say by that act 'I care, and God cares'. Although the woman holding a man's hand might be less suspicious than a man doing the same thing.

Perhaps we can now explore the problems that I experienced as a 'woman in the Ministry'. I must add that there were, and I hope will be many joys, and many humorous situations as well, but there are problems and these cannot be avoided.

Firstly, there can be no doubt that worship is still very much the area of greatest contention. Somehow churches cannot accept, (and where it is out of genuine theological conviction we must respect them) women as equally capable of leading the worship of the church. Indeed I was surprised at my own reaction, when attending a church, that had a woman leading its

worship for the day. My own immediate reaction was 'Oh No'. It challenged my own emotional response at the time, but ultimately did not in the least detract from the actual worship experience. I feel it is tragic that many a woman's potential ministry is rejected by a church, because they are not prepared to look beyond these immediate subjective feelings.

I have noticed that the nature of the objection to women ministers varies between denominations. It did not trouble my local Anglican priest that I should preach at his church, but the thought that I also exercised a 'Sacramental' role troubled him a lot more.

There are difficulties that stem from what I can only call problems of job description. I will never forget the horrified expression that came from a church member when she discovered that I planned to baptize my first candidate myself and not leave it to my male colleague in the team. After the service we talked together, and it transpired that the problem was not my female status but rather my youth that had made her query my intention. It was interesting that not only was the candidate initiated into the church, but my initiation into the Church's ministry was completed at that point, for never again was my ministerial function questioned.

To many people outside the church this job description centred on whether I could perform weddings and funerals "like the men". Again it took time for this acceptance to take place in my local situation.

I still smile when I remember an incident that occurred at a wedding I conducted. We were all in the vestry signing the registers, when one of the mothers remarked, in a whisper that was meant to be heard, to another guest "Why hasn't the registrar come, surely she (meaning me) can't do this!" It seemed as if the legal requirements were totally divorced from the church function, to the mother the problem was not what I did within the Church, but how I fitted into the legal requirements.

The next problem concerns not so much the woman, but the single minister. The fundamental problem of 'aleness' cannot be swept under the proverbial carpet.

There are times when to return to an empty manse at 11.00pm after a long day was almost destructive to any ideas of ministry. I felt I suppose that I was hurt that anyone could share problems with me, but who was I to share with?

We all need to relax with our own families and friends and to an extent 'turn off'. Many members were aware of this and tried to help, but they could never be there at the real times of need.

One of the problems to arise from this was that members became rather jealous of each other and vied with each other to offer meals, time etc. Yet to me they were all 'Members', even though they were very good friends to me, and as such, I felt at the last moment reluctant to treat them as friends, and ended up cultivating friendships that were right outside the church. It was to these people that I could explode without losing face, on reflection a very subjective feeling.

Deacons are on occasions in my experience, not always sure how they should relate to their female minister. I sometimes felt that they wanted to relate in a blunt forthright manner on a man to man basis, but I was aware that they tempered their real feelings because I was a woman. This of course

made difficulties, but it also had certain compensations. Perhaps on both sides we sat down and thought about what we were saying before we blurted it out with more anger and less Christian love as might have been the situation. Actually the real problem I felt was not with the Deacons who were marvellous, but with their wives. I was never quite sure how they felt about their husband being involved with a woman minister, if 'involved' is the right word.

My Deacons were very understanding, and made very sure that I had time off to do all the normal tasks done by the minister's wife, as well as ensuring that I had a regular 'day off'. This is a situation that I am sure does not always exist. I am not convinced that all Diaconates are as helpful in ensuring that their single Minister has his/her day off. I was fortunate in that my colleague set about educating the deacons right from the beginning.

What of the benefits? Again this a purely subjective viewpoint. I do feel that some sort of team ministry does have a very real contribution to make to the life of our churches! This team needs to include both lay and ordained people, as well as men and women. All of these must be able to exercise their ministry in their own distinctive manner. Each member needs to minister using the gifts that they believe are God given. This situation must surely enhance the whole ministry of the church.

I personally did not, unless specifically asked to do, attempt to sort out serious marital problems, because I felt that as a single person I had little experience in that situation, and not because I was a woman. Similarly I felt more able to empathize with the woman who was mourning her loss of role in family or society after a hysterectomy, a stillbirth or an abortion, again sometimes it worked out and sometimes it did not.

What then do I see for the future? I should like to pose a question here. Are the Free Churches moving towards a concept of specialist ministries which up to now have been lacking? if this is so, is there here an opportunity for an expanded role for the women ministers in our various denominations?

At the same time it seems that there are far more ecumenical situations developing into which a woman may quite easily fit in; whether this is a correct supposition, or whether it is the right way forward only time will tell.

After nearly three years in the Hospital situation, I can see in the future a very real need for those who are willing at all times to listen. They need to be people who listen with real concern and who listen in a non-judgmental manner.

It has been very clear to me that although many of the people I now work with stand outside the accepted church, they still want a lead from it, and in their own way express a similar need of God. In the area of medical ethics some have stated to me quite openly their confusion at not being able to see from many sources a guideline which they might follow or reject, but which they feel ought to be there.

Finally I should like to point out that Paul was the first Supplementary Minister in that he was not dependent financially on a small group of Christians, and I am sure this very real independence can give a sense of freedom within the Ministry.

I personally feel that my future lies in such a ministry, it may not, but at least I have now a certain financial independence, and also a contact with other non Christians who I might not otherwise have met.

I have it seems come full circle in this very inadequate discussion of women in the Ministry. The Ministry is very wide ranging in both its theology and practice. Women and men do differ in their viewpoints, and I do feel these differences need to be utilised and not alienated from each other. It is good to feel now that this situation is just beginning to happen, that we are now moving towards a real sense of diversity in the ongoing Ministry of the Church: for however diverse we are from one another, we are when it comes to the crux of the situation equal before God, if we are not before the congregations.

Judy Reece

## **A Husband and Wife Partnership**

Let us state our theme immediately. We are not sure what a 'husband and wife ministerial team' is. To us it seems very similar to any other ministerial team. We have never regarded ourselves as a single ministerial unit and apart from a brief period have never acted as such. We were called to the ministry separately and we had each completed our training and Ruth was ordained before the start of the friendship that led to our marriage. After fourteen years of working together we have now decided that for each of us to find fulfilment our professional lives must diverge. Two we were and two we remain. "Let there be spaces in your togetherness and let the winds of the heavens dance between you."

The chronological facts are these: we were independently called, interviewed by separate associations in 1961 and admitted for training in 1962. Ruth completed her course in 1964 and was ordained to an assistantship in Salisbury. John completed his course in 1965 and was ordained to an assistantship in Oxford. Subsequently we became engaged and were married in 1966.

This opportunity of widening the scope of the Oxford team ministry was encouraged by Eric Sharpe and Ruth took responsibility for Eynsham and shared in chaplaincy work to students. John remained responsible for Botley and became secretary of the Oxford Council of Churches. Eric was senior minister and treated us as separate colleagues each with specific areas of responsibility. We were paid separately and admitted to the ministerial list in successive years. When (three years later) there were changes in the ministerial team Ruth continued to have separate responsibility although by this time working honorarily prior to having our first child.

In 1970 we were invited to be joint ministers of Swindon Baptist Tabernacle. Hugh was born in November of that year and so our induction took place in March 1971. In the subsequent two years we did act as a single unit taking services and meetings alternately and the church accepted that either of us could act in any capacity. We were each half-time minister and half-time parent.

In 1973 Ruth took leave of absence for six months to have our second child, Peter, and at the same time our ecumenical experiment (which was developing earlier) took formal shape. By the time Ruth returned to work it was becoming normal for members of the ministerial team to take responsibility for specific areas of the work. Consequently each of us developed our own areas of responsibility within the whole team. Although being paid only one stipend and each only working half-time there was in fact no more working together between the two of us than there was between each of us and the rest of the team. (For a further account of how this worked see Ruth's chapter in Kenneth Wilson's collection of essays *Experience of Ordination* Epworth 1979).

As both children started school obviously the domestic side of our life became less pressing. We were aware, however, of the danger of the church becoming dependent on two ministers when there would only be money to replace one. Therefore we have tried to work only our proper share of work within Central Church and to use up surplus energy on work outside. To illustrate how this worked out it is best to offer a simple list of our commitments at the end of 1979. This will show how we were distinctive in our roles and how we tried to balance internal and external work. In addition we each shared care of home and family. (It must also be remembered that our colleagues in the team had similar work loads since none of us works full-time within Central church - between us we have care of five other churches).

**Ruth:** internal: worship, junior family church, pastoral care of 100 families and five groups, ministerial members of Family Life group, chairman of church council.

external: member of Toothill ministerial team, chairman of Borough working party on Community Affairs, member of Area Main churches committee, BCC Board of Division of Ecumenical Affairs, BCC working party on Human Sexuality.

**John:** internal: administration, law and finance (concerned with formal establishment of our project), liaison with town planners and architect concerning new building, adult education, pastoral care of 100 families and five groups, ministerial member of Politics and World Church groups.

external: Chairman of working party on local ecumenical episcopacy, council of churches, Eastcott Community Council. Evening Class lecturing and occasional broadcasting.

As part of a process of review of staffing policy in 1979 it became clear that the pioneers in our project needed to plan an ordered hand-over to the next generation of staff. At the same time both of us had felt the need to develop our ministerial lives apart from the other. After two false starts the final plan is this. Ruth will move to a new pastorate this summer and John will not be



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*A short history of Seventy-Five years 1905 - 1980* by Mr Colvin is interesting reading and I will be pleased to send a copy on request.

Yours sincerely  
M. E. PURVER  
General Manager

active in that pastorate except as a church member. He will take full charge of home and family and in his spare time will experiment in developing as a freelance writer.

That is what has happened in the last fourteen years. We can now consider what that has meant both in our own reflections upon it and in lessons that others might learn.

First, and what controls everything else, is our assumption that within a marriage both partners have equal rights to personal growth and fulfilment. It may well be that while the children are small one of the partners gives up work for several years. We did not have to make that choice because the Swindon church was happy to have us each half-time. Now it seems right to us that Ruth should continue in the full-time pastorate and John should have primary responsibility for the home. It seems natural to us that this should be so and we are sometimes surprised to discover that others find it odd.

Consequently, in our opinion church and college authorities should not presume that in cases like ours Partner A must wait for ordination until Partner B is ready. If suitable openings are not available for both at the same place and time then one must choose to allow the other to proceed. Equally later on it may not be possible for both to work in the pastoral ministry; another choice may have to be made. What should control those choices is not the sex of Partner A or B but the Gifts that either has to offer at that place and time. To argue the contrary is to deny what we believe about the call of God. As far as we can see the only problem in our case is what to do about the superannuation. Ruth had to resign from the scheme when we married (Yes! in the Later Middle Ages such were the rules) and so all payments have been made in John's name. He now ceases to function so what is to be done? It's a small point in the total scene.

This leads naturally to the second point which is that husbands and wives should not be thought of as a single unit. It is too often assumed that ministerial wives will be regarded as adjuncts to ministerial husbands. At least one document from the Baptist Union encourages that view and more than one senior minister has suggested that women ministers are only doing what ministers' wives have done in past years.

In a generation when this issue is being examined more than previously it is essential to establish principles and not lurch from pragmatic solutions into chaos. Each partner receives the call to the ministry and that call must be tested at each stage independently of the other. Committees, colleges and churches will only get into subjective (and emotional) wrangles unless this principle is affirmed and acted on.

Several practical things flow from a combination of these two points. On a financial level payment should be made for the work people are employed to do. It does no cause any good if two people are expected to do two full-time or even one-and-a-half jobs on a single salary. The morality of allowing that to happen needs examining by any who are involved. We have been paid strictly on the basis of what we were employed to do. If we worked harder than we were paid to then that was our responsibility and choice. But it was grace and not law. No couple should be forced into this situation for the

sake of working together. After all churches employing both a husband and a wife already save on one Manse.

On an entirely different level churches should not assume that if a woman works full time she will have her mind on domestic affairs and therefore not give full attention to her work. We now have enough experience in society from different kinds of marriages to know that the traditional husband and wife roles are on the decline. It is now common for domestic roles to happen according to ability and preference especially in families where both partners need or choose to work. Certainly our home could be left in charge of either of us without anyone suffering either from malnutrition, vermin or lack of affection. It is important that Christians who have a specific call in Scripture to affirm that in Christ 'there is neither male nor female' should face up to facts. It does the Christian cause no good (and causes personal distress) when people persist in assuming that men are work-centred and women hearth-centred. It can be personality rather than sex which determines how gifts are called to be used.

In turning to three wider issues we hope to broaden the basis of discussion within the denomination. As far as we know no consideration has been given to what churches who have experienced a dual ministry feel about that experience. We also need to listen to the experience of other denominations or of Christians in other countries. There is then a major question about the picture of God that is projected in a church with a male dominated ministry and leadership.

It would be interesting if the Swindon church had been asked to write this article! We think people would have testified both to the strengths and the strains of a dual ministry. The strengths are not just those that flow from having two trained people instead of one. They include the distinctive initiatives and responses that each could make. But that is equally true of any team ministry. The practical strength of having both men and women in a ministerial team comes from how the congregation and the local community think of them and use them. People now have a choice. They can choose to consult a minister of the church of either sex because of their own perception of how they will be helped. Our experience is that this has unlocked doors that otherwise would have remained closed.

We must emphasise that we are not making a simple point that 'womens' problems' now have a woman minister to listen to them. On the contrary the responses to this choice have been much more mixed than that. Men have consulted Ruth about family problems knowing that she was married and a mother and brought that experience as well as theological and pastoral insights to their problems. John has not been regarded as outside questions of child-rearing, nurturing and domesticity since he is seen and known to be involved in them. But the central strength is not in such allocations but in the sheer image of ministry that is conveyed within the congregation. It is that which is the key to releasing these more mixed responses. In leaving Swindon we are pleased to feel that men and women are still on the team. As far as we know the church also welcomes this style and would not easily revert to an all-male ministry.

However, there have been stresses as well. Some of these are those that

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come from having a team ministry but others are specifically because we are a husband and wife. In the early years it was a strain on the congregation to relate formally to two ministers all the time: it was a strain not knowing who would preach or preside or turn up at a meeting. It was a strain to provide the distinctive nurture and support to the ministers' family especially when the children were toddlers. It was sometimes a strain to respond to us as a couple - did you respond to a marriage partnership or to two professional colleagues? Those who have been closest to us in this experience would testify, however, that just to have borne those strains has been a creative influence in the life of church. It has certainly educated the church out of stereotyped expectations. Those less close to us might put it less strongly but no-one has ever suggested that they now wish it had happened differently.

Our Baptist churches need to be closer in touch and more open to inter-denominational and international experience. We are in touch ourselves with ministerial couples from other churches and through the World Council of Churches in receipt of information from other parts of the world. The current study of "The Community of Women and Men in the Church" is producing a lot of material that will enrich us all, if we are open to receive it. Like many other areas of the church's life we need to see what happens in those countries where the pressures on the church are greatest. It is often in Africa, Asia and Latin America that new patterns of ministry are emerging and we need to know what they are. There is also a lot of experience now of ministerial couples in the USA and Canada and in our own country in the URC and the Methodist Church. It is important to pool all that information and experience. Too often, it seems to us, Baptists in this country act as if they were starting from scratch. We are not alone in that, of course, but we could take the initiative in drawing together all this material.

For us the most important lesson we have learned is that a woman and a man together in a ministerial team - whether married to each other or not - convey a truth about the character and image of God. In our Baptist tradition we claim a great deal about the power of words. In our exegesis we try to make sure our words are chosen carefully. In Catholic tradition the power of symbol is also important as a means of conveying truth. What image of God, then, do we convey if all our language in worship and prayer is masculine and authoritative and all our representative symbols are male? It is difficult to evade the conclusion that by these means we convey an incomplete picture of God. (Again Ruth's article in *Experience of Ordination* develops this point further).

We cannot tell precisely what the effects will be of joint female/male ministry but there are possibilities that can be mentioned. If, for instance, the presiding minister at the Eucharist is sometimes a man and sometimes a woman then it becomes easier to see both male and female as being involved at the central moment of faith and therefore to have a more complete understanding of the *imago dei*. The same is true of receiving and giving pastoral care and of holding any picture of ministry before the church. In the end it is by such images that people form their theological attitudes.



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# BOOK REVIEW

**Praise God**, a Collection of Resource Material for Christian Worship, compiled by Alec Gilmore, Edward Smalley and Michael Walker, published by The Baptist Union, 176 pages — Price £3.95.

Ours is a tradition that has always had a healthy wariness of set forms of worship. Nevertheless, we have gradually come to see the value of having access to a suggested framework to worship that can enrich, deepen and enlarge the ordering of our services. For the last twenty years we have been well served in this respect by the Manual compiled by the late Rev. Dr E.A. Payne and the Rev. Stephen F. Winward. Now comes *Praise God*, different in style and format, to serve the present age, and there should be no minister, lay preacher or theological student without his or her copy, because it is a valuable aid in the task to which we are called.

It used to be said that you could find out a lot about a denomination by reading its hymn book! The same claim could be made, though more so, for its recommended service books. *Praise God* is, therefore, to be welcomed in that it now brings to us as Baptists many of the benefits of the liturgical movement of the 60's. In his address, "Opening our doors to God" at the Mainstream Conference in Swanwick earlier this year, Dr B.R. White rightly drew attention to the fact that, "Our churches were hardly touched by the liturgical movement, Payne and Winward notwithstanding. So what happened was that the charismatic movement did not come to a structured worship, it came to an untheological crumble sandwich. Is it surprising that all you have now is untheological crumbs? Hence we have, therefore, got to think very hard about the structures of the worship of the people of God."

I therefore appreciate the emphasis in *Praise God* on recognising and exploring the progression of The Christian year from Advent to All Saints Day, and I particularly appreciate the terse but excellent introductory paragraphs leading into each of these sections, as well as the suggestions for holding an Easter Vigil. No less significant either is its emphasis, following Acts 2:42, on the Word *and* Sacrament as "the norm of Christian worship on the first day of the week." The inclusion of readings from sources in addition to Scripture is also stimulating and an incentive to branch out on one's own, supplementing what is given from one's own general reading.

From the list at the end of the book, the compilers show they have ranged wide in their selection, but I must admit I had been hoping for a better selection of original material, though I take Alec Gilmore's point in the Introduction that "attempts to find contemporary prayer written by Baptists were disappointing." Perhaps the answer to that one is, therefore, in our own hands!

I appreciate the reasons for wanting to keep the book to a manageable size, with large easy to read print, but I should like to invite the compilers to



consider, when it comes to issuing subsequent editions, including a specific alternative order of service for non-Communion worship; stating the legal requirements for the conduct of Christian Marriage services; and printing the New Lectionary.

This is a book that deserves to be put to the test over a whole year's use in all our churches, and the compilers deserve our appreciation for having put at our disposal some very good resource material selected with imagination and sensitivity.

Gethin Abraham-Williams

**Evangelicals and Social Ethics**, by Klaus Bockmuehl, The Paternoster Press, Exeter. Price £1.20

**Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture**. by Bruce J. Nicholls, The Paternoster Press, Exeter, £1.50.

These two Monographs are part of a series entitled "Outreach and Identity" published by the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission. They comprise a theological follow up to some of the concerns adumbrated at the Lausanne Congress. They are inter-related in the sense that appropriate Christian social action is conditioned by the overall cultural milieu in which the Gospel is being proclaimed in any given situation. And also by reason of the fact the relationship between the Church and the immediate cultural setting, of which it is necessarily a part, affects for good or ill its social insights, or the lack of them. The method deployed by Klaus Bockmuehl is a strictly expository one. He takes the text of Article 5 of the Lausanne Covenant and subjects it phrase by phrase to an examination both on biblical and more general theological grounds. Speaking presumably from a conservative and evangelical point of view, he is very strong on the biblical emphases that lead towards human justice and dignity. But he also takes to task the Lausanne covenanters for their occasional basic departure from well-grounded biblical notions in favour of jumping on the contemporary band waggons, e.g. their failure to disentangle what is truly biblical as over against what is political/humanistic in liberation theology. Within the compass of 45 pages this book gives a fine exposition of a social ethic well and truly grounded in biblical doctrines of creation and grace and man.

Bruce Nicholls' book on contextual theology is equally valuable. Clearly those who are associated with what might be called the "Lausanne point of view" are breaking new ground within the broadly evangelical dimension of the Church and this book is surely a further example of it. It helps to give the lie to the shibboleth that given a Bible in one's hands and the zeal of the Lord in one's heart one can communicate the gospel credibly and effectively in any situation without taking account of the total sociological and cultural context within which one is operating. There are again interesting pages on the relationship between Church growth and cultural sensitivity and also

deep insights into the way in which the transcendental is in a sense part of the total life of man whether in Ancient Israel or Communist Russia. In an age when many evangelicals see no problem about importing evangelists from one part of the world to preach the Gospel in another part of the world, Bruce Nicholls' insights on contextualization need to be heard. In a way they are a commentary in our parlance on the parable of our Lord about the necessary correlation between the seed and the soil underlying the fact that if it goes without saying that there is a need for an abiding study on the Word there is also need for a no less rigorous understanding of the world of human assumptions, activities, institutions and relationships to which the Word is addressed. I would commend each of these books as a very valuable contribution to the theological infrastructure that is the support of the Church's contemporary mission.

T. Kerr Spiers.

**Biblical Ethics. The Changing Continuity of Christian Ethics. Vol. 1.**  
R.E.O. White, The Paternoster Press, 256 pp. £4.80.

How to be both relevant and Christian is said by the author to be the challenge which perpetually confronts Christian ethics. The secret lies in the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the imitation of Christ. In reaching this conclusion R.E.O. White takes us through a consideration of the ethical issues in the Old Testament and considers the influence which these issues had on the teaching of Jesus. There follow two chapters on the positive instruction given by our Lord, though it is recognised that Jesus formulated no system which could be committed to memory. That leads on to the ethical teaching of Paul, Peter and John, and of the remaining New Testament writings. Finally, there is reflection on the distinctive character of biblical ethics with its religious roots, its moral nature, its social context, its focus upon Christ, and its capacity for development. It is acknowledged that the New Testament canon closed with many queries unanswered, and with many new ethical problems to be faced such as industrial morality, contraception, nuclear warfare and genetic engineering. Residual attitudes and conventional pieties must be left behind. The canon of Christian ethics is never closed.

As might be expected, the author presents an excellent summary of the moral teaching of scripture, and points to numerous issues which merit more detailed study.

The book abounds with sermon ideas such as 'The moral indispensables of Jesus', 'The ethics of mission', 'The moral value of prayer', 'What *not* to pray for'. Ministers who read this volume will be encouraged to proclaim the ethical content of the Christian Faith, and they will eagerly await the second volume which deals with the development of Christian ethics through the centuries.

J.J. Brown

## **Moral Issues**

What possible reasons can there be for the Roman Catholic Church to remain outside the membership of the British Council of Churches? One could be the fact that from time to time the BCC makes public statements on moral issues and these may not accord with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Would they then be compromised? For that matter, would any member denomination be compromised?

This issue has been discussed by a working party set up by the BCC/RC Liaison Committee. The working party was required to examine the issues involved in the preparation and presentation of statements on moral and ethical issues and the degree of authority attached to such statements. The report of the working party has been published recently.

The report outlines the procedures, methods and form of moral statements made by the Church of England and the Free Churches. It clearly sets out the experience of the BCC in this field and shows how statements made by the BCC relate to the denominations. One full section is given over to a description of the issuing of official statements on moral issues in the Roman Catholic Church. Special attention is to be given to the variety of statements made and recognition is paid to the relatively new tendency to translate the theoretical possibility of critical examination of all statements of the Magisterium into normal practice.

After careful examination, the working party concludes that differences on the question of authority need not constitute a serious obstacle to co-operation between the churches on moral issues. It is also argued that much co-operative work would enrich and be enriched by the distinctive moral tradition of the Roman Catholic Church.

This report would be well worth discussing in Baptist and ecumenical fraternals. It is entitled *Public Statements on Moral Issues* and may be obtained from the BCC, 2 Eaton Gate, London, SW1W 9BL, price 50p.

## **The Care of the Bereaved**

The telephone rings: one of those early morning or very late evening calls that has both an urgent and an ominous tone about it because it is 'out of normal office hours' at a time when people call only with the most pressing needs. In many cases we are being called to the bedside of someone who is sick, but often it is to say that a death has occurred and we are asked to call on the family. In such circumstances we leave home with a prayer in our hearts that we might be given the right words and attitude of mind.

For me, there is always considerable tension when I call at a home where a death has occurred. However strong the faith of those who remain they are going to need support and counsel. The loss of a life partner, a father or a mother leaves nothing quite the same again. As a minister of the gospel I am aware that people expect comfort and it is therefore necessary to be sensitive to their needs.

In the absence of professional training in psychology or an understanding psychiatric practice most of us take the situations we encounter a step at a time, seeking whatever specific guidance we need for the situation in hand. I had felt the need, for some time, of training in dealing with the problems raised by bereavement. I am happy to say that there is now a course available to ministers and others in the caring professions who are dealing with those problems.

In January of this year, I started the course, which is run by the CRUSE organisation. They are particularly concerned with the needs of the bereaved and their families, providing help through counselling centres and local groups. CRUSE began twenty years ago because of the growing concern of Margaret Torrie for widows in her home-town of Richmond, Surrey. Listening to their individual and corporate needs it became clear that something needed to be done and, with the encouragement of her husband and some professional contacts, she founded the organization we know today.

Part of the work of CRUSE is the provision of courses such as the one I attended. Over a ten-week period we met once a week at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead and benefited from lectures by experts such as Dr. Colin Murray-Parks, Dr. Laurence Goldie, Dr. Emanuel Lewis and Dr. Dora Black. They spoke on a variety of subjects relating to the needs of the bereaved, such as working with dying patients and their families, coping with the death of a baby, the needs of the elderly in relation to dying and bereavement, counselling bereaved children and the general theory of 'loss'. Along with a number of other lectures we were given a very good introduction to the whole field of pastoral counselling in bereavement. Anyone who has felt the need to be equipped more fully to meet the needs of those who have suffered loss will find this course worth-while. Apart from the lectures, a great deal of benefit was derived from the seminars which followed them when, in groups of about fifteen, we considered the lecture and its practical implications.

One regret which several people voiced was the absence of any religious content to the course. The matter was raised with Derek Nuttall, CRUSE Director who has promised to bear it in mind when the next course is being planned.

I would commend this course to anyone who is seeking to help those who have been bereaved. There are about forty-five branches of CRUSE throughout the country with several new ones about to open. If you would like further information about the course you should write to CRUSE, 126, Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR.

R.A. Frost