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"SOME OF THE WOMEN AMAZED US":
DISCOVERIES THROUGH DIALOGUE REGARDING
WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

by

BARBARA BURKETT MC KENZIE

B. A., Baylor University, 1971
M.R.E., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977

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ABSTRACT

During my years in Christian education, I became fascinated by the fact that few women participated in levels of visible leadership especially in light of the women's movement in the broader society. Women had always been active in church life, perhaps, more so than men. If societal barriers were falling for women, why were women not in visible leadership positions in the church? This study uses a series of in-depth interviews based on a phenomenological approach to determine what specific factors in the lives of women who serve as Christian leaders either helped or hindered them in their pilgrimage. Eight women were interviewed to discover their life experiences and three men to discern their perspectives. As the eleven interviews were reviewed and analyzed, I read secular and Christian literature to find supportive or corroborative information related to the emerging themes.

The thesis is presented in two parts: first, an academic preface articulating the process of research and analysis; and second, a study guide developed for women and men in my field of practice, Christian education. Because I am committed to Christian education, I have chosen to develop a study guide to be used for individual or group study. The method, the discoveries, and the presentation share a common theme: the importance of dialogue.

Key observations in the study indicate that the factors that helped some women are the same factors that hindered others and that each individual woman's ability to lead is influenced by a complexity of factors. As the study guide develops, each of the factors is discussed as one which helped or hindered the participants. Following the presentations of themes are suggestions for changes, or transformation, with recommendations for further study and possible action by individuals or local churches.

Among the participants, the Bible is considered the authoritative word of God and each looked to the Bible for principles and guidelines regarding women in leadership. Based on their respective interpretations of the Bible, some were led by hermeneutic processes to believe that women are to lead alongside men as equal partners; others, however, hold the view that women are not to assume the highest leadership positions. The cultural settings of the participants influenced their leadership. Two factors, patriarchy and feminism, are examined to identify aspects of each which help women in leadership in some cases and

hinder in others. Pivotal in the discussion is that each woman's sense of personhood affects her own ability to assume leadership. A woman's identity is seen in view of her relationships to her family, herself, and her God. For many women, pain emerged as a theme growing out of frustrated efforts to pursue leadership faced with institutional opposition. Women are encouraged to lead in many venues of the church, including education and missions. For some women, leadership has been helped by existing policies; for other women, leadership opportunities have been restricted and hindered.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
ACADEMIC PREFACE	1
Christianity and the “Modern Woman:” The Debate from 1950 to Present.....	2
Overview.....	6
Purpose	7
A Working Definition of Christian Leadership	7
Significance	9
Background and Rationale.....	10
Conceptualizing the Study	12
Research Methods.....	22
Methodology.....	23
Selection Criteria	23
Participants	24
Data Collection and Analysis	25
Data Analysis.....	31
Limitations and Delimitations	35
Presentation of the Data, Observations and Analysis.....	36
Structure of the Study Guide	37
Summary.....	38
Implications for Practice and Policy.....	39
Additional Inquiry	42
Personal Reflections	45
"SOME OF THE WOMEN AMAZED US":	49
INTRODUCTION TO THE READER	50
My Personal Discovery Through Dialogue	51
Your Part in the Dialogue	54
How to Use this Study Guide	54
An Overview of Themes Discovered through Dialogue	56
Introducing the Participants.....	57
CHAPTER ONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE	62
Dialogue as Motif and Method	63
Dialogue as Remedy	66
The Bible: A Gift of Dialogue	67
Hermeneutics: Making Meaning Through Dialogue.....	69
A Definition	69
A Process	71
Hermeneutics and Communal Dialogue	75
The Current Dialogue of Women in Christian Leadership.....	77

My voice in the Dialogue	79
Participants' voices.....	82
CHAPTER TWO: CULTURAL FACTORS.....	86
Culture as Context	86
Crossroads: Where Christianity and Culture Meet.....	91
Can Christians learn from modern thought?.....	94
Transforming culture	95
The Question of Culture: Which Way Do I Go From Here?.....	97
Encountering the Crossroads: The Participants Speak	98
CHAPTER THREE: PATRIARCHY—ROOTS AND INFLUENCE.....	107
Patriarchy: A Cultural Reality	108
What is Patriarchy?.....	110
Patriarchy: A Christian Perspective.....	112
Our Patriarchal Past	117
Patriarchy: Reversed in the New Covenant	120
What does this mean for today?.....	124
CHAPTER FOUR: FEMINISM—A RECURRING REALITY.....	129
What is feminism?	130
The Women Speak: Setting the Stage for Feminism.....	133
Roberta: Avoiding the Feminist Label	134
Frieda: Difficulty Relating to Feminism.....	135
My Observations.....	137
The Men Speak: Analyzing Feminism	138
Louis: Realizing Contributions of Feminism	138
David: Questioning Feminism's View of Authority	140
Carl: Recognizing Feminism's Challenge to Hierarchy.....	141
My Observations.....	142
Feminism: A Response.....	143
The Bible as Paramount Influence.....	144
The question of Authority.....	145
God's Gifting and Calling	151
Resolving Inner Conflict.....	153
Relationship to the Broader Community	154
Where Do We Go From Here?	154
CHAPTER FIVE: A SENSE OF PERSONHOOD AS PIVOTAL.....	157
Definition of <i>Person</i>	158
Risk, Responsibility and Respect	161
The transformed person.	166
Sense of Person in the Lives of the Participants.....	166
Frieda: Reflections on Growing Up.....	167
Teresa: A Pioneering Personality	168
Charity: Caught in the Backlash	169
Patricia: Personhood Enriched Through Prayer	170
Personhood: Revealed in the Imago Dei	172
The Image of God: Relational	174
The Holy Spirit	177

The Image of God as Non-hierarchical.....	179
The Image of God: Spiritual and Non-sexual.....	182
Implications of the Image of God for the Church.....	186
Sex, Gender and Roles.....	187
The Potential Danger of Gendering God.....	190
Conclusion.....	191
CHAPTER SIX: FAMILY.....	194
The Formative Years: Of Grandparents, Parents, and Siblings.....	196
Marriage: a Great Mystery.....	202
Roberta: Hierarchy or Partnership in Marriage?.....	203
The Notion of Chain-of-Command.....	205
Candy: Relationship or Career?.....	208
Roberta, Esther, and Patricia: Marriage Holds Two People.....	211
The Helper and the Head.....	214
Some Benefits of Singleness.....	215
Married, with Children: Providing a Model of Ministry.....	217
Children in Traditional and Feminist Thought.....	220
What Do the Men Have to Say?.....	222
Family as a Metaphor for the Church.....	225
Conclusion.....	228
CHAPTER SEVEN: TWO UNDERLYING THEMES—PAIN AND POLICY.....	230
Pain: A Place to Start.....	231
Pain: A Common Symptom.....	232
Pain: Signal in the Church Body.....	235
Pain and Institutional Policy.....	238
The Organized Church and the Process of Institutionalization.....	239
Institutionalization, Hierarchy and Women: Why Women Repeatedly Re-emerge.....	242
The Larger Sphere of Church Organization: Denominations.....	244
A Personal Observation of Institutionalization.....	246
Ordination, Authority, and Priesthood.....	250
A Lingering Question.....	255
Spiritual Warfare?.....	256
CHAPTER EIGHT: EDUCATION, MISSIONS, AND THE LOCAL CHURCH.....	257
Christian Education: It Began At Jesus' Feet.....	258
Education Among the Participants.....	258
The Women Speak: Remembering Student Days.....	258
Educators' Observations.....	266
Women in Christian Education: A Brief Historical Perspective.....	267
Women in the World of Missions.....	270
Women's Leadership in the Local Church: "It Is No Minor Matter".....	273
Frieda: An Encouraged, Traditional Leader.....	275
Teresa: Experienced Colliding Realities.....	276
Esther: Trained Up as a Child into Leadership.....	278
Candy: Discovers Contrasts Between Impressions and Reality.....	280
Roberta: Don't Obliterate the Differences Between Men and Women.....	281
Patricia: Leadership by Survey or Scripture?.....	283

Women as Leaders.....	284
Interjecting Dialogue	285
Calling, Ordination, and Dialogue.....	286
CHAPTER NINE: TOWARD TRANSFORMATION	292
Transformation as Change.....	292
Personal, Relational and Corporate Transformation.	294
Transformation from Chaos to Order	298
Transformational Themes	300
Dialogue: An Invitation to Transformation Through Mutual Understanding.....	301
Culture in Transition: Standing at the Crossroads	305
Transformed Personhood: Bearing the Image of God	307
Transforming Family: Persons-in-Relationship	310
Pain and Institutional Policy.....	313
Education, Missions, and the Local Church: in a Trajectory of Grace.....	316
"She Smiles at the Future"	320
Final Encouragement	321
REFERENCES	323
APPENDIX A.....	333
APPENDIX B.....	334
APPENDIX C.....	335

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1	"Varieties of Feminist Thought"	155
Figure 1	Chain-of-Command Model	205
Figure 2	Partnership Model	206
Figure 3	Comparison model	206

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ACADEMIC PREFACE

This study is about women in Christian leadership; more specifically, the study investigates factors that help or hinder women as they work in evangelical churches and ministries. This thesis is in two parts, reflecting the nature of the Ed.D. program as integrally connecting theory and practice. The academic preface addresses the academic requirements including the process of research and analysis; the study guide contains the results of the study and is designed for practice.

While the “woman question” has been considered in many denominations, the issue of women in leadership is far from settled. The past three decades have brought long and wide conversations about women's various involvements in the church. Women continue to make tremendous contributions to the church, including holding many positions of leadership. However, among evangelicals the question of women leaders has caused polarization (Grenz, 1995, p. 19). Why are women able to lead in some Christian situations and not in others? What is it about certain leadership posts that make them contentious?

To understand the unique set of relationships in the present debate concerning women in Christian leadership requires historical as well as contemporary interpretation of these issues. The conditions that gave rise to the debate must be considered, as well as the factors that support and maintain it as a contentious and unresolved issue, particularly in evangelical Christianity. In what follows, therefore, I briefly describe the context in which the current debate originally developed—the late 1950s.

Christianity and the "Modern Woman:" The Debate from 1950 to Present

In her provocative book *Christ and the Modern Woman*, Briggs (1958) argues that the era of the modern woman began with the ministry of Jesus who saw woman "wholly as a *person*," yet simultaneously acknowledges that women of her generation are "bewildered before [their] new freedom" (p. 5). Briggs points out a generally accepted double standard regarding leadership positions in the church. Christian women at the time were welcomed as workers in the church, but excluded from holding certain leadership positions. When they attempted to seek change, they were counselled to accept the status quo. Briggs poses the question, "Why can't they [the church] accept a woman's ideas as they do a man's?" (p. 97). While Briggs acknowledged existing power differentials in the church, she cautioned against directly challenging the status quo:

The wise woman will evaluate the reality of her position and act in accordance with its truth. A demanding aggressiveness on the part of a woman church member, be it ever so worthy, usually produces an indifference or an antagonism in Christian men. (p. 97-98)

Over forty years ago, Briggs advised Christian women that they must use wise caution as they assert their leadership to serve others for the sake of the gospel. She expected the next generation in the church would see "healing for her *daughter*" (p. 99). Perhaps she was too optimistic in hoping for healing in a single generation. Perhaps she did not anticipate the turmoil of the decade to come, for she says, "Tomorrow's woman will find herself strong and able to serve well and without conflict in this greatly important area of her life, her church" (p. 99). Women today may be stronger; but women are still dealing with conflict in the church. With the benefit of hindsight, women in Christian leadership can now evaluate the strategy for the present based on actions of women and men in the recent past.

By the mid-1960s the “second wave of feminism” (Van Leeuwen, Knoppers, Koch, Schuurman & Sterk, 1995) had begun raising public consciousness of gender inequalities in the broader society. Betty Friedan (1961) exposed *The Feminine Mystique* and captured the attention of a continent. Women in the church, already sensitized to the essential equality of persons through the gospel, were influenced by the public discussion of women's concerns. Friedan dared to say that the role of suburban housewife was insufficient. This message soon found its way to women in the church. Stackhouse (1999) reports that societal changes influenced the evangelical church “dramatically after the 1960s” as women began to “reconsider the inherited notions of gender roles” (p. 202). Speaking specifically of Canadian society, Stackhouse argues that:

The opening up of evangelical scholarship to new ways of understanding the Bible and theology, especially after the 1960s, meant that evangelicals could maintain their traditional allegiance to the authority of the Bible while revising the interpretations and applications of that Bible to gender issues. (p. 203)

These developments took place as Canadian society redefined women's roles after the Second World War.

Theological studies in the 1970s included the work of Paul Jewett (1975) who challenged Bible believers to reckon with the complementary nature of *Man as male and female*. Rather than allowing women to remain *other* (Briggs, 1958), Jewett urged his readers to grapple with the creation account in Genesis from a fresh perspective. Later in the decade, Evelyn and Frank Stagg (1978) suggested that we try to “understand the intention of Jesus for woman, in which light the past performance of the church may be tested and directions for today may be sought” (p. 9).

The question of women in leadership was not restricted to the church. The roles of Christian women in every area of their lives were examined. By the late 1970s women began

to challenge this scrutiny of their individual lives. In her book *Disciplines of the Beautiful Woman*, Anne Ortlund (1977) challenged women to order their lives according to three priorities: God first; the spiritual family second; and the needy people of the world third (pp. 23-35). Ortlund reaffirmed the essential involvement of women in church life and surprised those readers who had shifted their primary focus from the church to the family. Reminiscent of Briggs' work concentrating on the individual woman and not the church nor the issue of leadership, Ortlund was able to herald the "important key" women hold in relation to the church, noting that when the Apostle Paul first travelled to Philippi, he "found his way to a group of key women [holding] a prayer meeting" (p. 129).

Before the close of the decade, the debate about women in leadership crystallized. Susan Foh (1979), responding to the works of Jewett (1975) and others, articulated her theological position by addressing "the woman question" (p. 1), and declaring that the "most crucial question the biblical feminists have raised is how to interpret the Bible" (p. 2). By the end of the book, Foh identifies the question that has "elicited the biblical feminists' deepest concern," whether women should be allowed in the pulpit, or the "top" office in the church (p. 232). The debate over the general roles of women continues to be the most contentious discussion centering on the level of leadership allowed in the church as understood from biblical principles.

The 1980s witnessed a proliferation of Christian authors addressing the issues of the roles of women, specifically in terms of church leadership. Early in the decade Malcolm (1982) identified the crossroads at which women found themselves dealing with cultural and biblical questions. Hull (1987) declared in her title *Equal to Serve* that women in the church are to work together with men. While the trend was toward the increasing involvement and

the acceptance of women in leadership, there was by no means agreement on how this should be accomplished. As the voices of biblical feminists grew louder and more numerous, resistance to such interpretation also increased. As the 1980s ended, the debate developed into four decided and divided views: (1) a traditional view (let your women keep silence); (2) a male leadership view (the head of the woman is the man); (3) a plural ministry view (your sons and your daughters shall prophesy); and (4) an egalitarian view (there is neither male nor female in Christ) (Clouse & Clouse, 1989).

By the beginning of the 1990s, Christian scholars could draw on thirty years of dialogue. Among them, Van Leeuwen (1990) acknowledged that "Christian feminism" had been regarded in the 1970s as "a contradiction in terms," but now despite such pronouncements, many authors, including herself, identified themselves as "biblical feminists" (p. 9). Her study was not limited to women in church or to women in leadership; rather, she addressed the roles of women and men in a changing world and called for an extension of grace in dealing with issues of gender. Taking a different stance than Foh (1979), Van Leeuwen and others claim their position was grounded in the Bible. The "battle of the sexes" had become very much related to the "battle over the Bible."

The new millennium has seen renewed calls for action on this debate. Recently, in an open letter to his church conference, Mennonite Brethren in Canada, Peters (2001) questions whether the church is "afraid to broach the issue once again" (p. 8). He calls for a renewed effort to reach a consensus on the role of women in leadership:

Let us put the issue of women in leadership back on the table. Let us pray about it, read Scripture together and discuss the issue in our seminary, our university, our colleges and our churches. Let our current church leadership develop a strategy and a timeline for addressing this issue effectively and courageously. Let this be our agenda now, and let us audit our progress on it from convention to convention.

Peters' timely letter reinforces the need identified in this study for the issue of women in Christian leadership to be put "back on the table." If such conversations do not take place in an atmosphere of openness and reconciliation, Christians in other denominations may find themselves in a position similar to that of former United States President Jimmy Carter. Disturbed by the dissension in the convention, he found himself in an untenable situation with the leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) over several issues, including their interpretation of the role of women. He initiated a discussion and invited two dozen Baptist leaders to The Carter Center in an effort to "overcome differences that were impeding our common mission" (2000). The meeting did not resolve the conflict, and eventually Carter withdrew from the SBC, with which he had been affiliated for 65 years, sadly declaring in an open letter:

I have been disappointed and feel excluded by the adoption of policies and an increasingly rigid SBC creed, including some provisions that violate the basic premises of my Christian faith. I have finally decided that, after 65 years, I can no longer be associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. What am I to do? I'll certainly continue in my role as a deacon and Sunday School teacher at Maranatha Baptist Church In addition to our fellow church members, Rosalynn and I have been trying to identify other traditional Baptists who share such beliefs as separation of church and state, servanthood of pastors, priesthood of believers, a free religious press, and equality of women.

The calls for dialogue by Peters, Carter, and others (Hancock, 1999; Lutz, 1997) invite us all to participate. Some have given up (Bridges, 1998). But many others are willing to keep the dialogue open. This study is an effort to participate in that dialogue.

Overview

In embarking on this study, I am entering a long-standing and on-going conversation of women in leadership. I focus specifically on Christian women in positions of leadership within some evangelical churches and church-related ministries. During my research I found

books and articles, both in secular and Christian studies, which examined women's issues. I have found, however, that although many people are involved in such a discussion at some levels, the conversation about women in Christian leadership has stalled in some denominations and churches.

Purpose

The intention of this study and the creation of a study guide is to move the conversation about women in Christian leadership from the floors of theological classrooms to the arena of the local church. The underlying assumption is that women as Christian believers are ministers of the gospel who sometimes lead. The purpose of this study is to understand what factors help or hinder women in Christian leadership in evangelical churches. To assist in this understanding, I attempt to *discover* what experiences and events in the lives of women have helped them become leaders in evangelical Christian organizations; to *discern* what experiences or events have hindered or prevented women from becoming leaders in those Christian organizations; to *engage* women and men in local churches to continue, and, in many cases, re-engage in the exploration of this question; and to *stimulate* personal reflection and examination of their positions, challenging them to consider an egalitarian understanding of women in leadership. What factors have helped and hindered women in Christian leadership? This central question was posed to the respondents of the study during in-depth interviews. Their varied replies furnished rich text for analysis.

A Working Definition of Christian Leadership

Developing an acceptable definition of leadership for this study proved difficult. The nature of leadership is enigmatic (Grint, 1997, p. 1). There is "no universally accepted definition of leadership" (Barna, 1997, p. 21). While many writers have put forward their

attempts at definitions or descriptions of leadership, Barna (1997) reviewed research by contemporary authors including Bennis and Nanus (1985); Burns (1978); Packard (1962); Peters (1987); Sanders (1976); and Wills (1994), each of whom he cited in *Leaders on Leadership* (1997, pp.21-22). Barna eventually settled on a preferred definition offered by Gary Wills: "Leadership is mobilizing others toward a goal shared by the leader and followers" (p. 22). From this Barna provides the following working definition:

A leader is one who mobilizes; one whose focus is influencing people; a person who is goal driven; someone who has an orientation in common with those who rely upon him for leadership; and someone who has people willing to follow them. (p. 23)

Beyond this explanation, Barna adds three distinct but related qualities of a Christian leader: being called by God; having Christlike character; and possessing functional leadership competencies (often referred to as spiritual gifts) (pp. 24-25). The result is a refined definition:

A Christian leader is someone who is called by God to lead; leads with and through Christlike character; and demonstrates the functional competencies that permit effective leadership to take place. (p. 25)

This is the working definition of Christian leadership that I have adopted for this study. Nothing in this definition precludes women from serving as leaders. Yet, many evangelicals are still hesitant to recognize women in certain levels of leadership, particularly in ordained or pastoral positions. In churches, leadership takes many forms. For the purposes of this study, the term leadership is used in an expansive sense to include women in recognized positions of leadership ranging from volunteers who lead church and conference programs to paid workers who hold various church and denominational staff positions.

To pursue a deeper understanding of women in Christian leadership, I propose to find out through interviews of eight women in various positions of leadership, ranging from

pastoral to volunteer, what factors contributed to their ability to lead and what obstacles they encountered. Women's roles in North America have been affected by decades of transition. Did the experiences of women in the church parallel women in society in terms of increased leadership opportunities? Did the teachings of the church encourage or restrict women in leadership? By understanding women's experiences, the evangelical community can discover how to provide a climate that accepts, encourages, and strengthens women's leadership skills in a manner consistent with Biblical principles.

This study is organized as a tool to facilitate and inform dialogue in local churches prompting women and men to explore this on-going concern. The product of my research, a study guide on women in Christian leadership, has been designed to generate further conversation within the evangelical community and prompt reconsideration of women being called to serve and to lead together with men. In these days of social and institutional transition and transformation, many in the church are calling for a new day for women in leadership. The dialogue can only benefit by additional research.

Significance

The significance of this project is that it is designed to make both a theoretical and a practical contribution to the evangelical community. Situating the study in scholarly research and developing a guide accessible to lay church members will serve a broad spectrum of the community. Academics participating in this on-going debate will be interested in the academic preface as well as in the contents of the study guide. Lay members of the church will find the study guide useful in a variety of settings as they develop the dialogue that is essential to recognizing and reconciling the divergent positions. Each chapter presents a different focus for examination and evaluation. As themes were discovered throughout the study,

people in the church will have opportunity to participate in personal reflection and group interaction. Individual women may come to recognize themselves as reluctant to lead or as having been hindered. Men may recognize their participation in helping or hindering women in leadership. Perhaps as conversations develop, churches and denominations will reconsider their own policies and practice concerning women in leadership.

Background and Rationale

As a Christian educator, I have been involved more than twenty years in volunteer and professional leadership in local churches, Christian schools, associational and regional ministries, and national convention and conference level boards and agencies. Grateful for the privilege of serving through leading, I was also learning about organizations from the inside. Over a period of years some troubling events occurred. The Christian groups with which I was affiliated seemed to operate at some points askew of biblical principles. What, I wondered, was the conflict between what we said and what we did? This question prompted me to enter an extended time of reflection and study through the Ed. D. program rather than to attend a theological college. One feature of the Ed.D. program that attracted me was that it allowed me to continue my practice as a Christian educator while at the same time entering extended academic research and personal reflection. Because of the nature of the questions prompting my study, I chose to separate myself from a theological environment with its unique emphasis and place myself in a doctoral program in a traditional academic setting.

During this academic pilgrimage, my reflection came to focus on a more personal aspect of Christian leadership, that of my sex. As a woman, I had often been aware that I was one of very few women at a table or on a committee. In my younger years, I assumed the obvious, from my perspective, that most women my age were married with young children

and had family obligations that prevented them from participating. Later, however, after my own children were born, my husband and I arranged our schedules so that he could care for our children while I attended ministry functions. What of other families? Over the years, it became evident that while generally women were encouraged to participate significantly in church life, seldom were they encouraged or expected to participate in higher levels of visible leadership.

During my years in the Ed. D. program, I continued my work as a teacher in a Christian high school and my volunteer efforts in my local church and on the board of a Christian post-secondary school. At one point, I was invited to participate in a large information-gathering meeting to consider a seminary's long-range strategy. One hundred and ten leaders were asked to participate in the session—ten were women. Of those ten, six were wives of men also invited. The remaining four were recognized as women in Christian leadership in their own right. I was one of the four, and I was astonished. Where were the women? How did a woman come to be recognized as a leader?

Having become cognizant of the gender gap in Christian leadership, I began to ask questions of others and myself. As I gave serious consideration to women in leadership, I wondered how my experience was different from others. What was the relationship between gender and leadership in evangelical Christianity? Gradually I became conscious of the existing conversation in my fields of practice regarding the roles of women. I began to understand that for many Christians gender determined the roles of men and women in church leadership.

These questions led directly to this study. I wanted to know how other women in evangelical churches understood their roles. How did women decide whether to pursue or

accept positions of leadership? What factors helped or hindered women in Christian leadership?

During the past few years, and in part as a result of this spiritual and academic journey, I have become convinced that many evangelical Christians, including me, have misunderstood God's intention for women. I recognized I was living out of a traditional view built on hierarchical notions that men were superior to women and anointed exclusively for leadership. However, as this study progressed it became increasingly clear to me that my understanding of the biblical role of women was limited at best and a restrictive lie at worst. I now believe God is propelling us forward into an egalitarian approach to women in leadership (Grenz, 1995). I agree with Van Leeuwen (1990, p. 36) that women and men alike are created, gifted, and called by God into leadership in kingdom work.

Conceptualizing the Study

This study sought to discover why women are able to lead in churches in some circumstances and not in others by investigating what factors help or hinder them in their individual situations. From the outset, the research conclusions were intended for the “people in the pew” rather than for students in a classroom. The research focused on scholarly works accessible to women and men in local congregations. The review of the literature proved to be much more extensive and expansive than originally imagined. While the literature was consulted to discover the current climate regarding women in Christian leadership, the research interviews provided themes and sub-themes, which in turn prompted further reading. While drawing on scholarly works, the research focus was to be the lived experiences of women in the church.

Based on my own prior knowledge and self-reflection, (Creswell, 1998, p. 122), the study begins with the premise that while the issue of women in leadership has been raised and studied in many evangelical churches, the issue has been left unresolved in the minds of many. By conducting in-depth interviews with women in various positions of leadership, I could explore and describe the meaning of this experience (Creswell, p.123). Limiting the focus of the study to evangelicals in North America, the research concentrates on a group of individuals purposefully selected (Creswell, p.112, 123; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27) consisting of women and men to determine their experiences and perspectives. To ascertain the desired information, the research question and sub-questions were integrated into an in-depth interview format (Creswell, p. 122). (See Appendix A for interview questions.)

Initially, the study was conceived as a study of women in leadership positions in the church and, therefore, designed to include only women. Because of the nature of the church as a community of women and men, and because men hold the overwhelming majority of leadership positions, it seemed essential to include their experience. Consultation with an original member of my committee, the late Dr. Murray Elliott, helped to clarify the confusion. Partially as a result of his perspective and encouragement, along with conversations with other committee members, I designed a series of questions for men. The specific questions to be considered were carefully crafted. An initial set of questions was presented to my committee who helped to refine them to a workable sequence. From there, the questions were submitted with the research application to the ethical review process.

The questions for the women ranged from ascertaining their perception of themselves as leaders to the disproportionate numbers of women in Christian leadership. The men were asked whether they view themselves as supportive of women in leadership. In addition, they

were asked to provide their perspective of women in leadership. The question, “How do you assess the current involvement of women in Christian leadership?” was left intentionally vague to allow each participant to respond to the various understandings of “assessment,” ranging from how effective women are as leaders, whether there should be more women in leadership, and what roles they consider appropriate for women.

As the study progressed, participant responses and emerging themes prompted additional reading. As a result, the interviews became contextualized by secondary sources. The design of this study determined which literature was explored. Ranging from questions of ethics and moral reasoning to organization theory, and from feminism and gender studies to policy-making procedures in an evangelical Christian setting, the literature is both wide-ranging and deep.

Frankena's (1980) notion of moral reasoning helped me clarify issues around respect (p. 104) as contrasted with deference. When persons are treated as mere cogs in the machinery of an organization, their value as individuals is diminished. The significance of persons and particularly relationships is addressed by Arendt (1958) who affirmed the involvement of persons in relationship in “word and deed” by which we “assert ourselves into the human world” (p. 176-77). The primacy of relationships is at the heart of the Christian faith. Tournier (1957; 1964) discusses the importance of a sense of person, asserting that “since men have suppressed God they have lost the concept of personhood” (1964, p. 36). Later, Tournier (1981) identifies the particular gifts of women and calls for them to be recognized and used by the Christian community. Jewett (1975), drawing on the earlier work of Buber (1966), declares that humankind finds expression in male and female, and that neither gender alone adequately reflects the Creator's essence. Grenz (2000) takes this notion

still further to suggest that the nature of God revealed in male and female finds its fullest expression in community.

For the institutional church, relationships find meaning in purposeful activity. From this realization it was a short step to link the ideas of organizational theory to Morgan (1997) who provided insightful information about the essentials of how organizations work. Beginning with a metaphor of machines, Morgan asserts, "Increasingly, we have learned to use the machine as a metaphor for ourselves and our society and to mould our world in accordance with mechanical principles. This is nowhere more evident than in the modern organization" (p. 12). But, fortunately, Morgan does not stop here. His *Images of Organization* (1997) presents other metaphors, helping me to revision the church through metaphors such as the brain, building "the 'whole' into all the 'parts,'" (p. 102); political systems, with his insight into interests, conflict, and power (p. 153); psychic prisons (p. 215); and cultures, which have often been "dominated and shaped by male value systems" (p. 135). Morgan's discussion of the community and the notion of the psychic prison were particularly applicable. In many cases women were permitted to participate in leadership but were reluctant to do so because of their own personal or psychological reasons. Further, Morgan comments that patriarchal organizations tend to keep persons in the organization immature and dependent (p. 227).

Pugh (1990) presented a sense of the historical shifts in organizations from Weber's (1924) notion of bureaucracy with its "exercise of control on the basis of knowledge" (p. 14) to that of Burns (1963), who admonishes that unless we "realize that industrial organization is still in the process of development, we are liable to be trapped into trying to use out-of-date organizational systems for coping with entirely new situations" (p. 64). Institutions develop

over time, reflecting contemporary social realities. The church, as an institution, is not immune from such change although many in the church claim that its structures are formed in and mandated solely by scripture.

The treatments by Morgan (1997) and Pugh (1990) helped to lay an adequate foundation for me to understand at least partially the contextual development of church growth and its institutionalization (Handy, 1976; Moberg, 1962). As an institution, the church and its many organizations will find ways to perpetuate its very existence. Church leaders perennially face the challenge of walking a delicate balance between looking to current organizational models in other institutions and looking to the principles of the Bible for church structural patterns. Writers have observed the cycle of institutionalization (Grenz, 1995; Moberg, 1984) with its movement from early days of spontaneous activity to more ordered structures designed for cultural acceptance. This movement has historically tended to exclude women. Women have not only been excluded by policies developed over time, but also excised (Bridges, 1998) from the historical records that would report their earlier involvement. Institutionalization, unless renewed, will spiral toward death (Moberg, 1984). Perhaps the church is in a pivotal time in history where another renewal, incorporating the gifts of women (Tournier, 1981) will spark growth and relevance for a new generation.

Morgan's (1997) research introduced me to the concept of chaos theory, which Wheatley's (1994) work carried into a practical application for allowing restructuring to emerge. Suggesting that chaos, when given time, naturally creates an order of new design, chaos theory provides an alternative way of viewing the church today, which some say is in chaos. It is also reminiscent of the introductory lines of the Bible which supply an "eye-witness account" (Lotz, 1997) of a "chaotic storm churning over the primordial dark and

mysterious abyss of infinite and formless waters. Out from this God summons order” (Laymon, 1971, p. 3). Christian leaders are continually challenged to create order from chaos, and this generation faces the challenge of leadership in transition from transactional to transformational leadership (Grint, 1997). Because women lead more naturally through webs of relationship or webs of inclusion (Helgesen, 1995), some argue that the church will be made healthier if women join men in leadership (Grenz, 1995).

One crucial ingredient in organizations is their leadership. In the past forty years countless studies have been done both in the area of leadership and in terms of women in leadership. Grint (1997), while presenting a historical overview of issues related to leadership, provides discussions of the current trends in leadership. His section on Modern Leadership included an article by Bass and Avolio (1994), titled "Shatter the Glass Ceiling: Women May Make Better Managers," who claim, among other observations, that “the new generation of women managers are characterized as being more open with colleagues and are consensus builders who encourage wider participation in decision-making” (p. 201). Further, Bass and Avolio argue that women are leading the way in “transformational leadership” (p. 202) in part because of what they claim are the “tendencies of women to be more nurturing, interested in others, and more socially sensitive” (p. 207). This observation contains application for the leadership in the church because of the importance of building strong relationships. Tournier (1981) made the case for this in *The Gift of Feeling*:

The mission for women of which I am speaking...[is] the reinstatement of the primacy of person over things. It is in public life and in the cultural sector that this primacy is disregarded most. Hence the importance of women breaking into those sectors, and having their authority in them respected. (p. 127)

Centuries old arguments against women in Christian leadership have been submitted to scrutiny and careful scholarship. Secular writers addressed political dimensions of women

beginning in the sixties (Friedan, 1961) and stirred what has been called the "gender wars" (French, 1992). Researchers began analyzing the gender gap.

Women were no longer willing to allow men to articulate their masculine norms as normal for all human beings (Gilligan, 1982). Specific studies examined implications of this gap in terms of "ways of knowing," (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and in terms of leadership (Grint, 1997).

Christian authors were also turning their attention to gender issues. As Christian women began joining the increasing conversation, the issue of women in leadership inevitably echoed themes of the cultural debate. This rich dialogue produced discussion on the effect of the role of women in the world and in the church (Tournier, 1981); its relationships to leadership (Lutz, 1997) and its relationship to the work of the church, based on biblical study (Foh, 1979; Grenz, 1995; Kroeger & Kroeger, 1992).

If women's equality became a political human rights issue in the democratic societies of North America based on such foundational documents as the Constitution of the United States, women's equality became a theological issue based on biblical interpretations in evangelical churches (Hull, 1987). Just as the first wave of feminism was led by Christian women (Lutz, 1997), the theological debate grew, fragmented, then polarized as various voices were heard calling each woman to recognize her responsibility "not to stand behind her man, but to be before her God in the accountability for her own sin" (Briggs, 1958, p. 104). Early voices, like Briggs, seemed consistent with evangelical teaching that individuals stand responsible before God (Romans 3:22-23). Briggs' argument was not based in political or biblical feminism; rather, hers was a plea for women she viewed as "bewildered before [their] new freedom" in the late 1950s each to become aware of her standing in Christ as "*a person*"

(p. 5). In the next twenty years, however, the theological debate became political (Leonard, 1990) as men and women in evangelical churches declared their differing understandings of the biblical story. Writers began to uncover uncomfortable history in the church, exposing “the bastion of male arrogance and power, and the men [who] were most reluctant to share control and ministry with the women” (Lutz, 1997, p. 35), allowing others to assert that the women’s absence in leadership was not biblical in nature, but political. Careful study proved that women had not only been excluded but also excised (Bridges, 1998) from leadership.

For evangelical Christians, the only resolution of the argument was biblical. Thus, the stage was set for a biblical battle. Not surprisingly, theologians supported their various positions with interpretations of the Bible. The question then became how to interpret scripture. What is the role of culture in our understanding of the text, or how shall we read? (Hancock, 1999, Sept.-Oct.). With increasing numbers of women turning to serious sociological and theological study, the literature grew to include and reflect women’s perspectives among male and female scholars. Questions were raised related to the creation of humankind as male and female (Jewett, 1975) and the role of women in the world of Jesus (Stagg & Stagg, 1978). As some Christian voices spoke of liberation for women theologically (Russell, 1974) others argued that women were intended by creation to be subservient to men even while acknowledging that “male power corrupts and absolute male power corrupts absolutely” (Smith, 1989, p. 89). This perspective seemed to cause the pendulum to swing from the direction of freedom for women as expressed in leadership toward a backlash causing women to withdraw (Malcolm, 1982). Studies continued, drawing new or recovered understandings of scripture and encouraging women toward continued response to the call of God in their lives (Hull, 1987; Kroeger & Kroeger, 1992; Van Leeuwen et al., 1993). Men

were challenged to think about the scriptures from a new perspective, and consider that shared leadership involving male and female participation would be valuable for the cause of the gospel (Grenz, 2000; Groothuis, 1994; Hancock, 1999).

As Christian literature focused on women in leadership, many of the same issues emerged as had appeared in earlier secular literature. Issues of gender equality (Van Leeuwen, 1990); patriarchy (Hull, 1987); women in leadership (Lutz, 1997); the feminist movement (Malcolm, 1982); and sexual and family abuse (Kroeger & Beck, 1998) became topics for personal exploration and conversation in the church.

At the same time, organizational issues that I found in secular literature (Weber in Pugh, 1990) raised structural issues that are being addressed in the contemporary church (Fee, 2000). Historically traditional patterns of bureaucracy and hierarchy (Morgan, 1997; Wheatley, 1994) are giving way to flatter structures and team leadership (Bennis 1989; Barna, 1997). The nature of the church as an organism of living people is being reclaimed from its image as an institution of effective machinery. Emphasis is once again on the people of God, a community (Grenz, 2000). Women are an essential, vibrant part of this process. Simply stated,

Women need the Church, and the Church needs women. Our role now is to lead on in a new reformation of church structure, religious imagination and expression, so that the community of faith can continue to find meaning in the next millennium. (Bridges, 1998, p. 16)

Denominations sent mixed messages to women in terms of endorsing them for leadership on the one hand and limiting the scope of their practice on the other (Geddart, 1992; Grenz, 1995) asserting that the difficulties are “more sociological than theological” (Geddart, p. 3). Canadian evangelicals formally opened the discussion during their first

national conference on the issue, and “virtually all the advertised speakers held to an egalitarian view,” even though this “did not represent the views of the majority of its member denominations” (Stackhouse, 1999, p. 203). One denomination in the United States amended its statement of faith to articulate its traditional interpretation of women (SBC Statement of Faith, 1998). Among the broad spectrum of Christians in the evangelical community, the role of women in leadership continues to be variously understood. In the midst of this gulf, many Christian scholars are calling for consideration of gender reconciliation (Hancock, 1999, Sept.-Oct.; Van Leeuwen et al., 1993).

During all the discussion and debate, language itself continues to present one notable problem. Barna (1997), a researcher and editor, finds difficulty expressing the gender inclusive views of authors, blaming the English language for its pronoun limitations while speaking on behalf of a team of writers who insist emphatically “that both men and women may provide leadership in various situations and through different styles of leadership” (p. 15). Readers of such books are left to wonder whether indeed women are included in the inclusive pronoun “he.” The very fact that Barna addresses the question in his introductory remarks testifies to the impact of research into the question of women in Christian leadership. Evangelical spokesmen warn that “much of this controversy smells of sexism” (Stackhouse, 1997). Cooper (1998) faces the issue of language head-on in his study, admitting initially it “is largely a critical response to inclusive languages for God” while seeking “an honest encounter” (p. 17). The issue is, of course, still active.

Finally comes the literature focusing on the Bible. While a researcher must use caution in deferring to an authority, this project stands affirming the authenticity and authority of the Bible as the Word of God. All participants in the study were chosen as Christian

leaders who affirm their individual faith in the Christ of the Bible. The literature used in the study guide is largely Christian because of the nature of the audience intended to receive the study guide. Recognizing contemporary cultural issues, the literature considers the development in Christian thought as influenced down the centuries, specifically in the past thirty years. Bible study tools were consulted (Ladd, 1974; Laymon, 1971; Mickelsen, 1963) as well as extensive reading of the biblical text. Scholars who have examined relevant texts shed valuable light on the research (Cooper, 1998; Fee, 2000; Kroeger & Kroeger, 1992; Stagg & Stagg, 1978).

A theme that emerged from both the literature and the interviews is the importance of and need for examining one's actions. Encouraged to be reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983), professionals in many fields were beginning to examine their lives. Christians, not new to reflection and renewal, were also challenged to consider their ways, basing their lives on the Bible (Gire, 1998). This study is intended to encourage such reflection among Christians regarding women in Christian leadership.

Research Methods

My initial consideration of a research project focused on the organized church in its institutional forms and apparent incongruity with policies and actions of some leaders. Over time, the issue proved too large, unwieldy, and impersonal. Its value is that it provided a "starting point from which to launch" this study (Krall, 1988, p. 469). Preliminary research on this first, large topic, led to the realization that women had been excluded in many Christian organizations in visible positions of leadership. A closer examination of this issue led to the observation that many women were indeed serving in leadership positions. Why were some

organizations recognizing women in predominant roles and others not? Why were some women pursuing or accepting such positions, while others clearly were not? The cultural and political climates were such that women were increasingly visible and vocal in most avenues of society. What was happening in my practice, that of evangelical Christian education? Eventually, the research question for this project became: What factors help or hinder women in Christian leadership?

Methodology

As I prepared to enter the research phase of my project, I considered several options for research. I decided on an approach involving in-depth interviews with women in leadership as the most effective and efficient means to discover the real meaning of various encouragers and inhibitors of women in Christian leadership. By exploring the lived experiences of selected women in Christian leadership, I hoped to find themes pointing toward factors that have helped women fulfill their leadership roles or which may have hindered them. The research was primarily from a female perspective in that both the researcher and most of the subjects are female. Key male leaders were included in the study to ascertain their perspectives on women in leadership positions. I had an impression going in to the study that many male leaders supported the notion of maintaining the apparent status quo of predominantly male leadership in the church. I wanted to find out if that were so and if current attitudes and resulting policies might be changing. The men interviewed were candid, thoughtful, and open-minded in their responses.

Selection Criteria

In designing this study, I set up certain criteria. First, I determined what constituted a leader. Leadership, broadly defined, could include any person in any setting with a follower.

In this sense, practically every woman would qualify as a leader. However, this study was conducted with a specific understanding of leadership based on the definition presented earlier: a women in Christian leadership is one who is recognized in part because of the position she holds within an evangelical Christian organizational context, paid or volunteer. The women in the study all hold or have held such positions. Within this view, however, a level of leadership was discovered that seemed set apart, that of pastor. Its unique position in the church calls for special consideration because of differing interpretations of biblical qualifications for that office. The men considered for the study were also to be recognized Christian leaders.

As I thoughtfully considered whom to interview, my mind ranged in time and space to the hundreds of men and women I had worked with and known about over the thirty-plus years of my Christian leadership. Narrowing was difficult indeed. Eventually I identified criteria that would be useful in my practice. Participants include a cross-section of ages, ranging from approximately 30 to 65; come from a variety of evangelical denominations; have roots or significant experience working either in Canada or the United States; and encompass a spectrum of leadership roles, either paid or volunteer, within the evangelical community.

Participants

The selected group of participants included eight women and three men. While the criteria were specified early, the identity of the specific participants developed over a period of weeks. Beginning with an initial short list of contacts based on personal contact and references, I evaluated the list against the criteria. Once satisfied that they met the standards, I sent an initial letter of contact to each prospective participant. In the letter I indicated that I

would contact them by phone to discuss their willingness to be involved in such a study. (See Contact Letter in Appendix B). Eventually, six women and three men were contacted and confirmed. A seventh woman volunteered to participate during the study. I was the eleventh participant, interviewed with the same questions by a trusted friend who followed the interview questions and format.

Recognizing the reality of our mobile society and to ensure a broad cross-section of experience, women were selected who had a variety of cultural experiences. Access to interviews was somewhat limited, but time and technology allowed for women to be interviewed who work in the Southern United States, Western Canada and in a Middle Eastern country. While the women come from three countries of birth, their lived experiences touch five provinces in Canada, including both coasts and the Prairies, nine of the United States, and eight countries. The men were born in the United States or Canada, and reflect lived experiences in both countries (at least three states and three provinces), with study and ministry experience in other countries. While the ages and experiences are diverse, the cultural, socio-economic range is not. All of those interviewed are middle-class Caucasians, a fact that reflects the current leadership in my three fields of practice: a local church; a Christian secondary school; and a post-secondary Bible college. A brief introduction to each participant appears in the Introduction to the Reader.

Data Collection and Analysis

Early in the process I began to articulate and record my views not only for personal clarity, but also since I was in the role of a researcher. I recognized the need to set aside my preconceptions (Creswell, 1998, p. 54). I discovered I tended toward the traditional view that men are to assume the highest levels of leadership, while at the same time recognizing that

something about this seemed wrong based on my understanding of the scripture. This process of setting aside my own notions proved to be easier said than done as the continued information provided through interviews and literature provoked increasing personal reflection and reassessment. By the end of the study, I became convinced that we as a church are moving in a direction of spiritual freedom for women intended long before social liberation became popular. As a researcher, my shifting perspective was a by-product of my research. I was mindful of this process.

During the confirmation phone call, each participant was asked to specify a particular time and place for the interview. Two participants (one male and one female) requested that the interview be conducted over the telephone. In the man's case, he expressed support for the subject and desire to be involved but added that a telephone interview would take less time than a personal interview in his home. The woman was not living in the Vancouver area and travel schedules and finances restricted our being able to meet elsewhere. By using an adapter for the tape recorder, I was able to conduct and record the interviews over the telephone. All other interviews were conducted in person.

Participants were asked questions designed either for women or for men. Individual interviews varied depending on the characteristics of the personalities involved. In some cases, where a prior relationship with a participant existed, the introductory time included familiar conversations. Once the formal interview began, however, the tape recorder was turned on and we spoke "on the record." Not surprisingly, each participant answered each question differently and those responses served as springboards for follow-up or probing questions. Furthermore, I often found myself thinking of previous interviews while conducting subsequent interviews. The process became iterative, as I used the observations

of one person to frame a follow up or sub-question for another participant. Perspectives and passions varied from person to person. The eventual themes reflect those passions.

The order of the interviews was influenced by the availability of the participants and my travel schedule. The interviews spanned a period of approximately six months. A total of fifteen to seventeen hours were spent conducting interviews. The first two interviews were conducted with the two women currently living and working in the southern United States. The first woman, one of several ministers serving in a multiple-staff church, was recommended to me by a friend. I was planning a trip to a near-by city and was able to arrange for an interview in her office. She, in turn, asked if she could invite another woman to participate in the interview. These are the women I call Candy and Charity. When I learned the qualifications and something of the experiences of her somewhat younger friend, I was pleased with the opportunity presented. This contact, as a referral, did not follow the letter-first approach; however, I explained the interview process and gave her a copy of the letter of consent. She signed with no hesitation and expressed excitement and gratitude for the opportunity of being part of this research. I interviewed these two women together in a quiet meeting room in the church that employed the first woman. We sat together around a conference table, recorder running, while I conducted the interview and took notes. They graciously supplied cold drinks and requested that the secretary hold all calls. This extended interview lasted just over two and a half hours. It was the longest.

The third interview was a telephone interview with a woman who lives overseas. Teresa, as she is called, was in Canada visiting friends and family, and we arranged an appointment for the interview. Over a year later, she returned to Canada, this time visiting the

Vancouver area. We met over coffee, and I shared portions of the transcript as well as sections of the project with her. Her feedback was positive.

The fourth interview was with a woman I have known for some years who lives in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. We met in her home and again shared the interview experience over refreshments. Since the interview, this woman identified as Frieda, has read her transcript and an early draft of the work. She has been encouraging to me personally in the process.

Next came my own interview (number five), held in the home of a friend who conducted the interview. She had reviewed all the questions and asked surprisingly insightful follow up questions to my initial responses. In the study guide, I become Esther. Because the entire project is written from my perspective, I find I rarely use excerpts from this interview.

Two men were next in the interview queue—a pastor and an educator (interviews six and seven). The pastor, called David in this study, has been an acquaintance of mine for some time. We were both aware of the concern among evangelicals over women in leadership. Of all the interviews I conducted, this is the one that came closest to becoming a discussion rather than a formula interview. Several times I found myself being drawn in by a question from David. It took concerted effort to work my way through the interview/research questions.

Meeting Carl (his fictitious identity), the first of two male educators interviewed, was a serendipity in this process. I had heard of this man by reputation, but had never had the occasion to meet him. His name was given to me by Louis, the third man I interviewed, who suggested that Carl would be eager to participate in the study. In fact, he was. He requested a telephone interview, so I interviewed him without a face-to-face meeting. In the months that followed we met quite by accident at an event we both attended.

Interview number eight was with the woman called Patricia. Another acquaintance, she has experienced several transitions in leadership moving from lay involvement in the local church, to a volunteer position in a national ministry, to retaining that position while serving in a paid staff position in another local church. We met in her home.

Next I interviewed the youngest woman among the participants, whom I name Alicia. I had known Alicia some years earlier. When I considered the criteria of the research and realized I needed to interview a younger woman, she came to mind. The ninth to be interviewed, Alicia was a graduate student involved in leadership at the college she attended. Single, she had given much thought to the roles of women in marriage and ministry. Once again, the interview was conducted in her Vancouver area home.

The last woman, interview ten, was Roberta as she is called. She came highly recommended by a woman in my church. After receiving the recommendation, I heard Roberta speak on one occasion. Impressed by her various qualifications, I pursued her participation. Our eventual interview was conducted in her church office.

Finally, I interviewed the man given the name Louis, another educator. A man I have known several years, he is a widely respected Christian scholar. We spoke in his office. When I arrived, he greeted me with several books he had secured and a few articles photocopied to assist with me research.

Having collected the phenomenological data through note-taking and audio tape-recorded interviews, the task of transcribing remained. Transcriptions of the interviews were completed intermittently during the interview process. I transcribed eight of the eleven interviews in part to re-live the experience and in part to save money (although certainly not time). More demanding than anticipated, the energy required in this process consumed hour

upon hour. I hired a trusted friend to transcribe three remaining interviews, which included my own. The eventual result was 173 pages of single-spaced transcriptions.

Each participant had read and signed the agreement of confidentiality (Appendix C) and understood the nature of his or her involvement in this project. In several cases we discussed the possibility of a book for publication. In a few cases, the participant initiated the notion and encouraged me to pursue it. I have had informal follow-up conversations with several of the participants. Three of them are currently not resident in Canada and have blessed me with complete trust in the use of their interviews. Some of the participants asked for a copy of the final document; I plan to send a copy to each of the ten upon its completion. I am grateful to all participants for their willing, even enthusiastic, participation and the trust they have invested in me.

There were many “ah-ha” moments along the way, both for the participants and for me. While I was conscious of my focused objective, more than once I found myself deep in conversation, pursuing the participant about some bit of personal history or experiential learning and had to remind myself to stay “on topic.”

Because my research called for me to identify factors in the lives of others that helped or hindered women in ministry, I found I was on something of a treasure hunt. It was more usual than not that we began the interview with a formal statement of purpose, and perhaps the first official question, and then launched into wonderful discussions. Frequently during the interviews I found myself saying, “Let me check to see if we’ve covered all the questions,” or in at least three situations (all of the participants had received sample questions prior to the interview) the narrator referred to prepared notes to remind them of something they particularly wanted to include. I found them helping to conduct the interview. It was

amazingly fluid. These people wanted to discuss this issue, and I was grateful for their input and preparation. In other cases, the participants, while interested in the topic, and having distinct experiences to share, made statements such as “I really haven’t thought much about this,” or “I haven’t determined my position.” Far from being discouraging, these comments sometimes led to spontaneous recall of events which in turn led to fresh emotion in the retelling of events ranging from fond memory to surprising flashes of anger.

Data Analysis

As I began the process of reflecting on the interviews, I searched the transcripts and my memory for common threads or themes. I wanted to identify and understand the various influences on each person’s experiences. Gradually, I discovered themes they shared in common (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I further investigated those influences. The themes growing from the interviews shed light on topics for further reading. As a result, I researched Christian literature to consider comparisons and contrasts with contemporary cultural and political discussions and to identify distinctly Christian contributions.

This complex process of identifying themes took several physical forms. Initially I listed the names of each of the participants on a single piece of paper. Beside their names I drafted a list of major themes growing out of our interviews. Then, I reread each interview, searching for additional, forgotten or unnoticed themes. As Walker points out, “qualitative methods yield large volumes of exceedingly rich data obtained from a limited number of individuals” and its analysis is “more explicitly interpretive, creative and personal than in quantitative analysis, which is not to say that it should not be equally systematic and careful” (Walker, 1985, p. 3). Indeed the interviews were rich.

As themes emerged, they were added to the list. Rapidly the list became a rough chart. The next step was to find repetition within the themes and identify patterns arising from the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Once those themes were identified, they were clustered into larger themes. The names of the participants who discussed each theme were charted with the theme, along with the nature of their observations.

As I attempted to evaluate the process, myself as interviewer and the responses of those interviewed, I found a helpful guide in a chapter entitled "Learning to Listen." (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Trained as a journalist in university, I had earlier developed useful skills in interviewing. Now, I found that my experience as a research interviewer echoed that of Anderson and Jack:

For the narrator, the interview provides the opportunity to tell her own story in her own terms. For researchers, taped interviews preserve a living interchange for present and future use; we can rummage through interviews as we do through an old attic—probing, comparing, checking insights, finding new treasures. . . then arranging and carefully documenting our results. (p. 11)

I was reminded of my presuppositions as I read their caution: "In order to learn to listen, we need to attend more to the narrator than to our own agendas" (p. 12). I had to ask myself repeatedly the two questions, "What is the participant's story?" and "What is my agenda?" As the researcher, I was mindful of my own perspective, presuppositions, and experiences. While these have inevitably been part of my research, I have endeavoured to remain mindful of these notions, in the interview process itself as well as in the analysis, so they do not unduly cloud the research.

Surprisingly, there was an anticipated topic that did not emerge as a consistent theme—finances. While women were aware of the disparity between paid and unpaid positions of ministry, only one woman recounted meaningful incidents in which salaries had

been at issue. In her case, she was perturbed because, according to the decision-makers in her association of churches, as a woman she was not required to earn a living wage, while the male counterpart in ministry was. In point of fact, she was the sole wage earner of her family at the time, and the man whose salary was significantly higher had a working wife. Because only one woman raised this issue, money was not considered a major theme.

What themes did emerge? What did they mean? Were these themes helps or hindrances to women in leadership? It came as a surprise to discover that the very factors that helped some women hindered others.

Initially, the themes grew from the interviews themselves as mentioned earlier. As the process of research, reflection and further research continued, however, additional themes emerged. In the end, the role of dialogue proved to be the cohesion to hold everything together and personhood emerged as the pivotal center, resting on the fulcrum of God's creativity. The themes were reviewed in light of the literature. Connections between the interviews and the literature became evident, as earlier discussed.

The nature of the research and the process of developing this study were intended to promote dialogue from its inception. However, it was in conversation with my research committee that one of the members observed that dialogue in itself is part and parcel of both the problem and the solution of this study. Reconciliation between women and men regarding leadership roles may be encouraged as we continue the dialogue.

The purpose of the interviews was to listen to women and men and find from their experiences what factors helped or hindered women in Christian leadership. As a Christian woman in leadership, and as the researcher, I had to face and address issues of what is referred to as the "insider/outsider" relationship (Acker, 2001; Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee,

Ntseane, and Muhamad, 2001). As a Christian, I was an insider in every interview. As a woman, I related as an insider with seven of the interviews; in one case, the occasion of my interview by another, I was in an autobiographical situation. With the three men, I was considered an outsider to them from the perspective of gender and an insider in terms of my Christian leadership. The insider/outsider relationship provided both benefits and also constraints. Similar background and experiences offered a certain familiarity with the participants allowing us to share specific vocabulary and understandings. For example, the term "evangelical Christian" never needed an explanation. In contrast, however, the men could only comment as "outsiders" and onlookers to the experience of women in leadership. As an outsider, I could not relate to the male perspective which views a man as standing in the appointed place of leadership, bearing the full weight of responsibility that implies, both in church and family. The discipline required in attempting to consider the insider/outsider role provided a helpful perspective in this study, particularly as I encouraged men to recognize that they read the Bible through a male lens, as women do through a female perspective.

I found, especially in reviewing the transcriptions, that I had both missed and taken advantage of opportunities to follow-up on leading statements. As I read the interviews, I found myself asking, "What did (s)he mean here?" Sometimes, my next words were a clarifying question. Other times, however, one topic was left unfinished to pursue something else. In a few instances, follow-up conversations clarified issues. But for the most part, the transcripts stand as originally made.

After completing and compiling the interviews, I followed the steps recommended by Creswell for phenomenological data analysis (1998, p. 54-55) as they served the purposes of my in-depth interview research. The interviews yielded significant statements and meanings

and the development of descriptions to arrive at the essences or true meanings of the experiences of women in Christian leadership (Creswell, p. 236).

It was helpful for me to remember that “with qualitative research, data gathering and analysis are very often neither in time nor logic distinct” (Walker, 1985, p. 180). There were times during analysis and writing that I felt they were unmanageable. But, the pieces, though often rearranged, deleted, re-admitted, and edited, eventually fell into a patterned whole. As Walker points out, “Qualitative material cannot be adequately summarised. Instead a report must be selective” (p. 180). What I present in this study is selective; yet it contains the broad sweep of conversations conducted with all of the participants. Because of my personal desires and the nature of the Ed.D. program, my research was intended from the beginning to go from practice to theory and return to inform practice. I presented my research project in the hopes that it will be valuable not only to the academic community, but primarily to others in the evangelical Christian community.

Limitations and Delimitations

Having enrolled in what was to have been a three-year degree program, I anticipated little more than one year to conduct my research and develop the results. As a full-time secondary teacher, my time was limited to weekends and holiday periods. Both research and reflection require blocks of time for concentration, and little was available. Three years slowly stretched into more than four. The participants in the study were selected based on the criteria of the study; some were chosen because of their local availability. I simply had easier access to people who live in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia than to others in more distant locales. Finding qualified, purposeful subjects was critical for the success of the study;

therefore, two women in the Southern United States and one who lives overseas were included in the study.

Interviewing eleven people by no means provides an exhaustive study. By seeking out a cross-section of professional and non-professional women leaders, I hope to have gleaned insights consistent with observations of other leaders across North America.

The study recognizes certain delimitations. The first and perhaps most obvious is that this study concerns women in Christian leadership, paid and volunteer, in evangelical Christianity. The men included in the study were in the minority and are all professional ministers. Together, the women and men come from seven Christian denominations. The geographic region is limited to North America in that all of the participants, except one, were born here. The singular exception is a woman who has studied and served in North America for many years. All of the participants are between 30 and 65 years of age. It needs to be said that while Vancouver, my home, is multi-cultural in population, the participants of this study are all Caucasian as do the majority of leaders in evangelical churches in my field of practice. An ethnic mixture certainly would have cast a different light on some issues.

Presentation of the Data, Observations and Analysis

While researching this topic, I observed that while secular and theological academic communities are discussing women in leadership, in many local churches, the topic remains outside much of the week-in-week-out work and conversation. In some cases, the discussion has simply not made it to the top of the agenda. In other instances, the question of women in leadership has been considered and rejected. In order to bring the discussion of women in leadership to the local church, I have decided to use a study guide format. The style of the study guide is intentionally accessible for the non-academic church member. The information

presented here has not yet been considered in many local church settings. This may be sufficient motivation to present it to the mainstream conversation.

Structure of the Study Guide

During the process of research, I discovered the dynamic of dialogue as it relates to the development of women and men as persons and as leaders. Dialogue became not only a means by which research could be accomplished, but it also became the medium through which the results could be communicated. The study guide is organized by themes which emerged from interviews conducted with women and men. These themes in turn are woven together with research based on related readings resulting from those emerging themes and an examination of some relevant portions of the Bible. Because the intended audience is the evangelical Christian community, a consideration of the Bible is crucial to the study.

The guide, written in an informal, conversational tone, establishes in the first chapter the centrality of dialogue as it relates to the study and examines the role of the Bible and of hermeneutic practices. Chapter two examines the cultural setting of the participants in the study. Chapter three discusses a biblical perspective of the significance of patriarchy and describes how it has shaped the church and its way of thinking. In juxtaposition, chapter four considers the way biblical feminism has challenged traditional views in the church. Chapter five focuses on personhood, what influences have shaped the development of women as persons, and considers how each individual is created in the image of God. Chapter six explores the ways family has both helped and hindered women in developing into leaders. Chapter seven looks at the pain women have endured as a result of the institutionalization of the church. Chapter eight presents a look at education, missions and the local church. Chapter nine considers a path “toward transformation,” concluding the study guide.

Designed to promote internal and group dialogue, the study guide provides the reader with opportunities to consider their own perspectives and positions. Throughout the study, readers are encouraged to “pause for reflection,” taking time to journal their thoughts personally and share their ideas with a friend or a study group member. Each reader encounters the information on his or her own and then through the viewpoint of others.

This section, the academic preface, presents the research component of the project. By delineating the process of research and analysis, personal involvement and project development, this preface serves to illuminate the nature of the study guide as partial fulfillment of the Ed.D. requirement.

Summary

When I embarked on this study I was pursuing insights into the nature of the institutional church and the perceived inconsistencies between theology or theory and practice or church policy. I was eventually able to narrow the scope of the larger question to one that was manageable for a doctoral program and asked, “What factors help or hinder women in Christian leadership?” Now, nearing completion of the study I find other questions, some more personal in nature and others broader in scope, occupy my mind. Two dominant questions are (1) what did I learn from the academic experience? and (2) how did this study affect my understanding of Christianity?

I began this study with a large question about the nature of the institutional church and perceived inconsistencies between theology or theory and practice or church policy. Eventually, I narrowed the scope of the question to ask, “What factors help or hinder women in Christian leadership?” The study was designed to provide a more complete understanding of the role of women in Christian leadership and investigate the factors that assisted or

hindered their attempts to achieve leadership positions in evangelical Christian organizations; it explored women's experiences of leadership and men's perceptions of the roles of women in leadership in the church, and focused on those factors that affected women's attempts to lead.

I conducted formal interviews with eight women and three men. My interviews were in-depth, focusing on the individuals' experience of leadership in Christian organizations. My purpose was to understand how women achieve their aspirations to lead and how men's perceptions of the traditional and egalitarian roles of women in Christian leadership can be used to either support or prevent women from achieving leadership positions in the church.

The observations of my research include the paradox that the same factors that help some women hinder others. For example, I found that some of the families of origin encouraged the participants to pursue leadership while other families taught women, implicitly and explicitly, that women's roles should be restricted. Christian education, while valuable to all church members, seems to stream young men toward leadership and young women toward more supportive roles. Christian organizations provide women with many opportunities for service; yet, the process of institutionalization has often eliminated women, causing them frustration and pain. Because the study makes explicit the experiences of women in evangelical leadership positions, it also has implications for practice and policy.

Implications for Practice and Policy

When this study finds its way into the evangelical dialogue about women in leadership my primary goal will have been met. As Howe (1963) argues, dialogue can restore life. The issue of women in leadership has been stalled in many evangelical circles, and it needs to be restored and re-examined. Individual men and women should consider the question in light of

this study, taking the time to carefully consider the many questions raised. Ideally, the guide would be used by small groups in which women and men could wrestle with their own and others' perspectives. Many Christians need to talk through issues with others to discover what they believe. Once our views have met with scrutiny, first our own then others', they may be evaluated and even changed if necessary. In any setting, this guide should be accompanied by Bible study with a concordance close at hand. The voice of God can be heard most clearly through his written word. Anything the Holy Spirit says, while unique to time and place, will be consistent with the eternal word.

This study has proved contentious and difficult. Groups using the study guide should expect disagreement, be willing to hear varying viewpoints, and then analyze issues. The church as spiritual family (Clapp, 1993; Ortlund, 1977) will need to weather difficulties just as physical families do.

It would not be surprising to find some disagreement in the church, but many churches may discover that members are ready to move forward encouraging women in leadership and are in situations where policy and practice lag behind belief. Carl, one of the participants, argues that the theological battle has been won, but the hesitation to include women as equal partners in church leadership is sociological. This study demonstrates that a consensus over this point has not been reached.

One church may begin its course of action by researching the existing policies of their church and of the larger conference or denomination with which they affiliate. One church may recommend examination of policies regarding committee leadership or gender-specific elder qualifications. Another church may decide to include women in their pastoral search or on their pastoral team. Still another may suggest inviting women in the congregation to serve

in visible positions. Another may invite women as guest preachers to experience first-hand the ministry of a woman in the pulpit. Another possible action is for a church to inventory the roles of women at present and recognize these women publicly for their various contributions to the church.

Conferences on leadership, and women in leadership, are emerging across North America. Churches may be sensitized to find out about these conferences and make them available to women and men in the congregation, supporting their participation personally and financially. After persons have attended such conferences, they can prepare a report for the congregation about the main features or teaching points of the conference.

Further study in churches is also necessary. Christian education is a vital aspect of ministry in any congregation. A Bible study focusing on the contributions of women will not only provide female role models for girls and women, but also will extend awareness within the congregation of what God has done through women. Depending on the study, the church will also become aware of the ways people have mistreated women. Such a study may lead the congregation to see the various roles of women through a different lens, and allow men to read the scriptures more carefully. Such a move may call men to greater awareness and responsibility. A study of the Bible as a whole would also provide the sweeping overview of God's activity and interaction with humankind. Such a bird's-eye view puts our contemporary setting in context with the linear history of God's story, and locates us in the in-between-times of post-resurrection/ascension and the second coming of Christ. Getting a larger perspective on the issue of women in leadership has the potential added benefit of seeing our place in history on a universal global scale, pushing back the limits of our restrictive cultural view.

During this study I have learned to recognize the limits of policies that inhibit and exclude persons who may be equally equipped in a technical sense. In the case of women in Christian leadership, professionalism in ministry has led to policies restricting, excluding, or excising women from leadership. Policies, by nature, are fluid and need to be evaluated, revisited and revised. Churches and church-related organizations need to re-evaluate their policies regarding the roles of women today. A keen sense of stewardship and responsibility sweeps me periodically. I wonder, for myself and for other North American women in Christian leadership, what does this mean for the future?

Additional Inquiry

In addition to recommendations for practice and policy, this study also points to a need for further research in a number of areas related to the role of women in Christian leadership. Several topics come to mind that are beyond the scope of this study, but that would benefit from further research. First, additional research is necessary to determine if the conclusions of this study would be similar to qualitative research involving participants from other denominations. Observations derived from a single study of women in Christian leadership may be unique to that particular context. Future studies might pursue the topic of factors affecting women in Christian leadership from more diverse venues. This study was limited to North America, with interviews conducted with leaders in the United States and Canada. The participants had experience in other cultures, but their perspectives were largely shaped by their North American experience. In addition, all participants in this study were Caucasian. Future research should be conducted using multi-ethnic groups, specific ethnic groups in North America, ethnic groups in other countries, and among people of different socio-economic class. The variety and uniqueness of each study could provide helpful

additions to our knowledge of women in Christian leadership. Data collected from other denominations or religious organizations could provide additional evidence to observations and interpretations reported here.

Second, further study is required to tease apart the notion of “theoretical” and “theological” arguments when dealing with issues such as leadership. During this study I have become mindful that as Christians we often frame our opinions in theological terms. Theology has to do with the study of God. Theory is the broader term reserved for ideas. A careful examination of some of the ways in which Christians discuss issues may prove timely and useful, helping people identify the uniqueness and limitation of each term. A possible methodology for research would be to interview a group of purposefully selected Christian theologians and educators. Their understandings of the terms and their use would be a valuable starting point for understanding how they make sense of these often-confused terms.

Third, we need a detailed study of the contexts in which women are allowed to exercise leadership. This study has shown that some evangelical communities endorse women in all levels of leadership; others do not. To research the communities in which women lead successfully and without opposition would prove beneficial to our understanding of the roles and benefits of women in Christian leadership positions. This study suggests that new movements, church plants and mission fields for instance, initially welcome the leadership of women but later exclude them. For continual and sustained involvement by women alongside men, organizations would, it seems, have to institute exceptional policies. Determining the climate of those organizations and suggesting guidelines for development could help change entrenched policies.

Fourth, research is needed to explore the long-term impact of women in Christian leadership. A study should begin by recognizing that women have led Christian organizations, including pastoring, in certain churches for some time. The study would draw on the work of secular writers (Grint, 1997; Helgesen, 1995) that have identified valued contributions and unique characteristics of women in leadership. Areas of investigation could include women's tendency to network, coordinate, and encourage webs of inclusion. It could seek answers to the following questions: What does this style of leadership look like in the church? How have these qualities influenced and benefited the church? A study of several Christian organizations and churches and their women leaders could provide valuable insights into the impact of leadership style on the development of the organization.

Fifth, as discussed above, the results of this study indicate that the church has long recognized the vital role of women in the life of the church, while traditionally crediting men with the "success" of leadership. We are in an era of shared leadership, in which teams are becoming more evident in church as well as secular organizations (Barna, 1997). What difference does it make if a man or a woman is the "leader" of the team? What are the results of including women on a team of leaders? How are the team members affected when women lead? How does the ministry or the work of the organization change? Case studies of several churches and organizations could shed light on this topic.

Sixth, there is a need to investigate the experiences of Christian women who change perspectives from traditional to egalitarian, or the other way around. This study identified a current polarization of views of women in leadership among evangelicals between two groups: traditionalists, with men in roles of primary leadership; and egalitarians, calling for women to share leadership with men. This study included women born as early as 1940 and as

late as 1970. As time passes, young women (born after 1970) are growing up in the afterglow or aftermath of the second wave of feminism. Some have experienced what was identified in this study as a backlash to secular feminism and are seeing it as a “return” to genuine Christianity. It would be interesting and enlightening to investigate the experiences of women who have grown up with one mindset and changed to the other. That might be an appropriate study for the up-and-coming leaders of our churches to consider.

Finally, many Christian organizations are today appealing for leaders; yet many overlook the gifted men and women among their own congregations. As Barna (1997) asserts, leadership is learned behavior. How much of the current “leadership crisis” is a result of the Christian community’s failure to recognize the competencies and gifts of the people in their own congregations? To what degree have we yielded to professionalism and institutionalization, thereby limiting the contributions of those persons in our midst? To what degree has the church lost leaders to secular pursuits because of its lack of opportunity for leaders? In Canada, there is an ongoing debate concerning what has become known as a “brain drain,” which refers to capable leaders of business moving elsewhere to explore opportunities. Has the Christian church experienced a drain of leaders? A biblical notion of spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4) could be weighed against contemporary and cultural calls for credentials.

Personal Reflections

The reflective life is a life that is attentive, receptive, and responsive to what God is doing in us and around us. It's a life that asks God to reach into our heart, allowing Him to touch us there, regardless of the pleasure it excites or the pain it inflicts....The words He speaks are words of life. That is why we must reach for them...Those words are how our relationship with God grows. Living reflectively is how we receive them. (Gire, 1998, p. 11-12)

Gire refers to intentional reflection, "regardless of the pleasure it excites or the pain it inflicts" (1998, p. 11). Undertaking this study proved both pleasurable and painful. In the introduction to the Study Guide there are references to "the pleasure of research" combined with "the hope of discovery" and "the excitement of wrestling with a difficult problem; the pleasure of understanding something one did not understand before, of knowing what one did not know; the pleasure of the puzzle and its solution" (Tournier, 1965, p. 236). On a personal level, I have been stretched in ways unimaginable. Thrilling moments of discovery or invigorating moments of insight provided deep joy. Chilling moments of recognition or prolonged hours of isolation caused deep pain.

More than forty years ago, Briggs (1958) spoke to Christian women of "conflict in mind and emotion," attributing to her encounter with Jesus Christ "the compulsion toward a widening awareness, toward a development of her own transcendent qualities of mind" and of her "responsibility to *think*" (p. 108). Many Christian women have responded to that divine encounter with varying degrees of encouragement, including the experiences of some reflected in this study guide.

This academic pursuit offered me the rare privilege of pulling away from some of the routine press of my life and encountering the lives of others. Only by withdrawing from some commitments was I able to fully engage in the commitment required by this undertaking.

By undertaking this study as part of the Ed.D. program, I learned a great deal about academic research. The demands of doctoral research are rigorous. This project taught me the value of studying in a cohort, and gave the strength that comes from diversity and mutual encouragement. Professors led--sometimes pointedly, sometimes vaguely--toward directions that stretched personal horizons and provided both intellectual stimulation and challenge and

also personal support. The process also challenged me to deep introspection and demanded days of sustained isolation and concentration, something innately difficult for me as an extrovert.

Many times I had to identify and articulate my perspective, and evaluate it in light of interaction with new information. I found my ideas being refined. To state the obvious, by learning more about women in Christian leadership I began to recognize my understanding as limited by time, experience, and culture as research led me to consider a longer view of women in the biblical story and throughout church history. Throughout this project, I moved from practice through theory and back into practice not only in my educational fields of practice, but also in my personal and family life. As a result, I developed as a critical thinker, without allowing an unduly critical spirit to take root.

Having chosen to study in a secular university rather than in a seminary, I anticipated that my faith in God would be challenged and tested. I longed not only for knowledge (Prov. 1:7), but also for wisdom and understanding (Prov. 2:2), and trusted the Lord to provide. I recognized that my previous formal educational experiences were in Christian settings, both in university and in seminary. Hoping to broaden my perspective and expose myself to current academic research that would benefit my practice in Christian education, I explored study in a secular setting. The University of British Columbia welcomed me with my specific focus to engage in advanced study that included both secular and Christian literature. Before entering the Ed.D. program, and many times during research, I heard the still, small voice of God reassuring me, "This is the way. Walk in it" (Is. 30:21). Having now reached the end of the program I find that my understanding of God has been confirmed and enlarged. My

growing conviction is that as we know Christ and study the Bible we will move toward gender reconciliation and shared leadership in the church.

I also have a renewed sense of patience for the people of God. Having enlarged my view of church history from a relatively limited perspective to a considerably longer one. I am encouraged by God's patience with us (2 Peter 2:9). During the days preceding civil war in the United States, Christians used the Bible to defend slavery. Perhaps we overlooked the urging of Paul, "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so" (I Cor. 7:21). I don't believe women in evangelical churches want a civil war, a war between genders; I believe many want freedom in Christ—freedom to respond individually to the call of God to serve by leading.

What follows is the study guide that constitutes the major portion of my dissertation.

"SOME OF THE WOMEN AMAZED US":

DISCOVERIES THROUGH DIALOGUE

REGARDING WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

A Study Guide for Individuals and Groups
in the Christian Community

Developed as a major portion of my dissertation research
for the degree of
Doctor of Education

INTRODUCTION TO THE READER

Faith . . . awakens in us . . . The pleasure of research, of success, of study; the pleasure of discovery, or rather of the hope of discovery, of the excitement of wrestling with a difficult problem; the pleasure of understanding something one did not understand before, of knowing what one did not know; the pleasure of the puzzle and its solution. (Paul Tournier, 1965, p. 236)

This study guide is designed with a dual purpose: first, to find out from the experiences of contemporary Christian women and men what has helped and what has hindered women in becoming leaders and to share those observations with you; and second, to suggest that now is the time for women and men to lead together in such a way as to demonstrate God's image fully to the church and the world. In the process of working through this guide, I challenge you to examine the layers of dialogue that have helped shape your perspective on women in leadership. As a result, I hope to help remove some remaining obstacles out of the way of women following the call of God in their lives.

I invite you to join me on a journey of discovery through dialogue. The preceding quote from Paul Tournier captures well the sense of adventure that accompanies our journey of faith. As Christians, we¹ acknowledge our finite understanding and perspective in the presence of an infinite and omniscient God. We often unconsciously allude to that gap of knowing (ours limited; his unlimited) in the questions we ask and the puzzles we live. What are we hoping to discover? I invite you to listen to the accounts of conversations with eleven women and men as they discuss their own understanding of women in leadership. In the

¹ As one who identifies with evangelical Christians in North America, I choose to include myself in the discussion by using the first person plural, "we," while acknowledging that certain readers may not share that perspective.

process. I evaluate my own understanding. Interacting with the participants of the interviews in dialogue. I have enlarged my understanding and changed my perspective. During your reading, I hope you will find many opportunities to engage in the on-going dialogue concerning women in Christian leadership.

The quest you are encountering involves the particular puzzle causing the evangelical community of Christians in North America to ask about the role of women in the church while seeing women take increasingly public roles of leadership in society. The cultural examination of the role of women in leadership has caused many of us in the church to evaluate the role of women in leadership in the church. How are we as evangelical Christians to discern what the Spirit of God is saying to his church today, at this point in history?

My Personal Discovery Through Dialogue

What you hold in your hands is the result of more than a decade of intentional search for understanding, and over twenty years of a personal adventure. Initially, I noticed a growing discomfort in the lives of many people with the institutional church and wondered what was at the root of the problem. Over time, I realized that institutions take on lives of their own and are more concerned about the institution than about the people within. While that may be acceptable in some institutions, it certainly is neither acceptable nor excusable in the church because the primary calling of the church is to minister to people.

As a Christian, Bible student, and Bible teacher, I have often been thrilled with the way God chooses to bring me to the place of new understanding. Most often the thrill comes at the end of some arduous venture. Sometime the thrills are moments of joy when the Holy Spirit has broken through to my mind in a moment of illumination. Suddenly I see something I had not seen before, like the fleck of a colour on a puzzle piece that causes me to see a new

connection to the whole. On this particular journey, I became aware of "lopsided leadership." God created men and women to live in, and lead, families and cultures together. Why, then, were there so few women in the decision-making levels of the churches and church-related organizations with whom I had been associated?

When I began to ask questions of others, I was forced to examine my own position. I realized I held what is currently identified as a very traditional perspective of women in leadership, that is, that leadership is hierarchical and men are always to be in the highest positions. That was my basic, unconscious presupposition.

During the past few years of academic learning, intense reading, intentional conversations, and much prayer and Bible study, I uncovered the layers that have shaped my thinking. In time my perspective changed toward one called egalitarian. Along the way I realized my reluctance to speak out in leadership settings, the reluctance of other women to accept leadership positions when offered, and the hesitation of men to include women in leadership once women's gifts and calling were recognized. In effect, in many cases, women's voices have been silenced. It is my desire that women join the dialogue in a meaningful way that allows them to use the gifts God has given them to participate in furthering his kingdom.

I entered the study believing that God calls whom he wills into whatever capacity of service best suits the needs of his people and his purpose.² As a woman, I have also encountered attitudes that reflect what is being called "the glass ceiling" (Grint, 1997, p. 152; Morgan, 1997, p.193). I was perplexed by the apparent contradiction between being both "free in Christ" (Gal. 3:28) and "just a woman" (Malcolm, 1982, p. 42). My search did not begin with "the woman question." As mentioned earlier, it began with a gnawing sense that

something was not quite right in the practice of Christianity, specifically in institutionalized forms. A closer examination of that first question led me to believe that at some point the *task* overtook the *person*. Along the way I began to realize that in the church and the kingdom of God, people *are* the task, and when we lose sight of that, things go sideways. I also became aware that many men tend to be oriented toward *things* while most women tend to be oriented toward *persons* (Maher, 1996, p. 151; Tournier, 1981, p.13). When men and women work together, things and persons tend to stay in balance. When either one is excluded, the balance is jeopardized.

The most recent part of my journey has taken me through graduate studies at the University of British Columbia. My final research project was designed to discover in the life experiences of women in Christian leadership, and of some Christian men, which factors helped women to become leaders and which factors actually hindered them. This study guide is organized according to the themes discovered during my research.

I first conducted interviews with eight women and then looked for patterns evident in their lives. As the patterns emerged, I organized my observations and began doing additional reading in each of those areas. At each point I continued my personal Bible study to discern what the scriptures had to say about each theme or factor. In time, I interviewed three men. A brief sketch of the eleven participants is provided at the end of this chapter. Their perspectives proved valuable as they told me of their current understanding and how they had reached their conclusions. Let me mention here that I am one of the eleven being interviewed. My voice speaks in the narration, as the interviewer, and in one case, as the participant. That

² By using the male pronoun, I am not implying that God is ontologically male. Although we know God is Spirit (John 4:24a), we also know God is a person rather than inanimate. As such, a personal pronoun is appropriate.

experience, in part, is what encourages me to urge you to both keep a journal and discuss your views with others. Self discovery is a by-product of dialogue.

Your Part in the Dialogue

I don't know you or your personal journey. I do not know the layers of dialogue in your life. The apostle Paul instructs believers to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12 NAS). What does that mean for each of us? I believe that in part Paul is encouraging us to seek God wholeheartedly as he leads us through our particular life experiences, to know him, and to follow him. Don't be surprised if you begin to see things differently as you proceed through this study guide.

For whatever reason, this guide has found its way into your journey. My prayer is that as you read it you will interact with what you find in its pages. Think about your own response as you read. You may catch yourself thinking, "Well, of course!" or "How could anybody possibly think such a thing?" In those moments, stop to think. What is it that you have found that prompts your response? In seeking to identify and clarify your response, you may begin to dig deeper into your understanding of yourself, others, and God. At this point, you are beginning to identify the layers of dialogue which have informed and shaped your life.

How to Use this Study Guide

I encourage you to enter the study thoughtfully and prayerfully. The study guide is designed for you to consciously enter the dialogue. You will want to have your Bible, a pen or pencil, and a notebook close at hand. There will be times that I ask you to "Pause for Reflection." The boxes marked with this title may pose questions, lead you to particular Bible

passages, or recommend other books for further study. Often I will suggest that you take some time to record your thoughts in a personal journal. While these activities are certainly optional, your journey will be richer if you record your inner dialogue as you go. As you discover particular issues that seem to be stirring within you, take the necessary time to record your thoughts and prayers in your journal. Look up the scripture references. Follow any leads you find as you cross-reference your own Bible study. The Lord will use his word to speak to you in unique ways. As you progress through this study guide, it can become an interactive tool for your growth.

You may be reading this on your own. Or, you may be part of a small or large group study. If you are a group leader, you will want to read ahead of the group to determine appropriate stopping points for each session. It is unlikely that you will complete a chapter in a single session. The interactive boxes provide convenient discussion opportunities. Encourage each person in the group to work through the box individually, and to bring the responses to the group for discussion. If you are in a group containing only women or only men, be sensitive to ask members to consider how people of the other sex might respond. Ask them to think about a sibling or a spouse. Think about people they know well in addition to people they know only casually or from a distance. If your group has both men and women, be careful to balance the interaction, allowing each member to speak.

The guide can be used as the basis of a large group study. The primary leader will want to read and summarize the main points for presentation. Be careful to design your sessions to allow for interaction among participants. As you move through the study, call on individuals to ask questions and share responses and observations. Participants can be enlisted prior to the study to prepare specific themes. In any large group, a few people will

venture to speak out. Many others will remain quiet. To ensure fuller participation, consider dividing the large group into smaller discussion groups near the end of each session.

I trust that as you read and interact with this study guide, your own sense of discovery will be awakened.

An Overview of Themes Discovered through Dialogue

We begin by examining the nature of dialogue and how it both underlies and connects the themes of the book. Through dialogue, we will first consider the role culture plays. Culture serves the dual role of providing context for the participants' lives and experiences and also as a filter through which each views the world. How do we dialogue with culture? How do we discover what is biblical and what is cultural in our thinking and practice? In the next chapters we examine two large cultural issues: patriarchy and feminism. In chapter three, we will consider how a biblical history rooted in a patriarchal culture has contributed positively to our Christian understanding of God as Father and has also limited our understanding of God. In the next chapter, feminism, both secular and Christian varieties, calls us to consider carefully the nature of women and a biblical perspective of women.

Moving to more individual concerns, we proceed to discuss personhood. Chapter five asks, what does it mean to be a *person*? How does one develop into a mature person? What is God, the person, like? What does it mean to be a person made in the image of God? How does the image of God relate to women in leadership?

Once we have considered the person, we turn our attention in chapter six to participants' views on their relationships with some of the most influential persons in their lives: their family members. What influences have encouraged or discouraged women from

hearing, understanding, and pursuing God's call? How does leadership in the family relate to women in leadership roles in other Christian settings?

Beyond the family, of course, are the organizational structures of the church. As we move from the personal to more corporate factors, two influences emerge. Chapter seven identifies pain and institutionalization in the lives of women and in the life of the church as factors related to women in ministry. We then focus in chapter eight on Christian educational institutions, missions, and the local church, considering how each structure has either hindered or helped women in their growth as Christians and in fulfilling their calling.

Chapter nine considers transformation. Change. While transformation has become a familiar word in secular society, for Christians it has a unique meaning. What does it mean for us to be transformed in our thinking and acting about women in Christian leadership? We identify some obstacles that have been uncovered in this study. We consider some implications for further study. Finally, chapter ten contains summary observations and points to questions for research that may grow out of this study.

Introducing the Participants

Confidentiality requires that each participant be identified by a pseudonym. In one sense this is unnecessary because each was eager to participate; yet, in another sense it is necessary and beneficial. The benefit is felt in both the specific content of the interviews and the nature of the conversations. Because those interviewed knew their identities would be kept secret, they expressed themselves more candidly than they might have otherwise. In the time that has lapsed between the interviews and this writing, some of the details of their lives have changed. I present their sketches as they represent each life situation at the time of the

interview. I have on occasion made minor changes for the sake of ensured anonymity of the participants.

I was amazed during the interview process, which occurred over a period of eight months, to discover how deeply felt were the experiences of each participant. Though the intensity of the conversations varied, the fervour of their convictions permeated each interview. The interviews were occasionally seasoned with "ah-ha" moments that revealed a poignant moment of personal discovery in the life of the participant. I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to each of these women and men for sharing their commitment to the Lord and their passion in following him with me, and in turn with you. I present them here by their fictitious names in alphabetical order.

Alicia recently crossed the threshold of the twenties into her thirties. She has crossed other thresholds, having lived in three countries and studied in two. Although she has worked in business and education, Alicia is currently a theology student. Open to ministry, she is committed to knowing God and following him in whatever direction he leads. Single, she is also open to marriage.

Candy is a wife, mother, and minister on a church staff. She currently resides in the Southern United States. She has lived and worked in several states and two countries. A seminary graduate, she has never been ordained. Candy has not experienced lack of ordination as an obstacle to her being able to do the work to which she has been called by God, but believes women should be ordained alongside men. Candy is in her mid-forties, and looks forward to years of active service ahead. Her husband is also involved in ministry, but is not currently serving on a church staff.

Carl has come to the studied theological conclusion that men and women are equal before God and capable of serving in any leadership capacity. He honours women as co-labourers. He has worked alongside his wife of many years, and they share a marriage that models equality. Their children still live at home. Having earned a doctorate, he currently is on the teaching faculty of a theological college in Western Canada.

Charity is "thirty-something." Having entered her third career, she finds being a chaplain the culmination of years of obedience to and preparation for her calling by God. She has worked in business, and has been a teacher and a social worker. A seminary graduate, she is ordained to the pastoral ministry. Charity feels called to minister to people, but not to lead a local congregation. Single, Charity has lived in many parts of the United States, including the midwest, northeast, south and southwest. She currently resides in a southern state.

David accepts a traditional stance on women in ministry, yet says he is giving the issue a fresh examination. A committed husband of more than twenty years and father of three young adult children, he enjoys time at home. Involved in local church and denominational activities, David is now serving in a pastoral capacity. He has both an undergraduate and a master's degree from a Christian institution.

Esther (the author) lives with her husband in what she describes as "a partnership relationship." They have managed their careers so that both parents have been actively involved in the lives of their two teenaged children. She has completed her masters degree and has worked in a variety of Christian organizations. While she has served on church staffs, Esther is currently working in an educational setting.

Frieda calls Western Canada home. Although she has traveled extensively, she prefers home to just about anywhere on earth. Married with two grown children, she and her

husband have been active in ministry during the span of their marriage of more than twenty-five years. While she has no aspirations to be a professional church worker, Frieda, a homemaker, attended Bible school and has participated actively in a variety of ministries in which she is recognized as a leader.

Louis combines pastoral and educational perspectives. He has attended both Christian and secular post-secondary schools, earning masters and doctoral degrees. His work has spanned several decades. His respect for people has given him the ability to listen carefully to people of wide-ranging views. His understanding of a biblical position regarding women has changed over his career. Approaching retirement age, he and his wife look forward to enjoying traveling and spending time with their adult children and their grandchildren. Louis will continue to serve in ministry as a volunteer in his post-retirement years.

Patricia never thought she would become a minister and has not attended a post-secondary Christian institution. She became a Christian as an adult after she began attending church through the invitation of a friend. Desiring to teach her children something of God, Patricia soon found herself open to the gospel of Christ. Many years later, she finds herself very active in many levels of church life and has recently accepted a paid staff position in a local church. She, too, lives in Western Canada.

Roberta has come full circle in her understanding of women's roles in leadership. She was taught early in her church experience that women were not to assume any position of teaching or authority over men. Quite to her surprise, God led her into theological studies and subsequently pastoral ministry. She has served in pastoral roles with several congregations, a

few different denominations, and in more than one country. Currently she and her husband are embarking a new ministry together. Their children are grown.

Teresa has traveled extensively. Leaving home after high school to attend Bible college, she has lived in several Canadian provinces. Her pursuits have included missions, education, administration and she enjoys a wide variety of creative hobbies. At present she is living in a Muslim country. She has never married.

Taken together, their perspectives result from a complex composite of variables, including gender, education, and ministry experience. Each contribution provided a unique piece to this project.

As you, the reader, embark in this study, consider the question with which the study begins: what factors help or hinder women in evangelical Christian leadership? Reflect on your experience and perspective as you wind your way through these chapters. Be prepared, as Louis encourages, to see the Word of God "in new ways, [with] new applications."

CHAPTER ONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue is to love what blood is to the body. When the flow of blood stops, the body dies. When dialogue stops, love dies and resentment and hate are born. But dialogue can restore a dead relationship. Indeed, this is the miracle of dialogue: it can bring relationship into being, and it can bring into being once again a relationship that has died. (Howe, 1963, p.3)

Dialogue. What an amazing word. Dialogue serves a crucial function in shaping our lives. More than mere conversation between two people, dialogue is much broader, signifying an interaction between a person and other persons and interaction with the events that affect that person's life at some deep, visceral level. As Howe (1963) suggests, dialogue touches all areas of our lives, is needed in all relationships and is miraculous (p. 152). Genuine dialogue, then, connotes the work of God.

During the past thirty years, women's voices have been heard in increasing numbers in various arenas, including the church. In the church today, however, women are drawing our attention to the fact that they have often been left out of the dialogue. As men listened, they, like the disciples on resurrection morn, were amazed at what they heard the women say (Luke 24:22).

In this chapter we will consider dialogue as both motif and method for this study. Beginning with a definition and brief discussion of dialogue, we then move to see how dialogue is the central thread that runs through the interviews and connects the themes of the interviews. Next, we discover how the Bible, the common source of authority for faith and practice among evangelical Christians, is a tool of dialogue between God and his people and between and among Christians. Finally, we consider how we come to our understanding of

the Bible through a process called hermeneutics, specifically as we make meaning of our focus, women in Christian leadership.

Dialogue as Motif and Method

When I first started this study, I was unaware of the layers of dialogue that shape our thinking and response to the issue of women in Christian leadership. I had been operating with the assumption that dialogue is limited to the conversation that occurs between two people. While it includes that critical dimension, I have discovered dialogue is much broader: dialogue includes the influence of multiple factors that inform our thinking, being, and, by extension, determine our actions. Howe suggests that dialogue is the

serious address and response between two or more persons, in which the being and truth of each is confronted by the being and truth of the other. Dialogue, therefore, is not easy and comfortable to achieve, a fact which may explain why it occurs so rarely. And its rare occurrence accounts for the frequent absence of its benefits in our communications with one another...communication means life or death to persons. (1963, p. 4)

During each of the eleven interviews conducted, I recognized the importance of dialogue in the individual's personal growth and development. Each person acknowledged that his or her life had been shaped through personal dialogue with God and others. Beyond personal conversations, however, each participant had engaged in a larger dialogue through involvement in church and other Christian organizations within the context of a particular culture. Those encounters further shaped their thinking and their actions even though the participants may not have been aware of the influence. I realized I had witnessed two types of dialogue: one was intentional and conscious; the other more subtle and subconscious. When I began to reflect on the combination of common threads that surfaced during the interviews, I saw that not only was dialogue significant in each, dialogue was indeed the connection between the themes. Dialogue, then, has become the motif of this guide.

Dialogue touches all areas of our lives and is needed in all relationships, "individual and social, educational and religious, economic and political, national and international" (Howe, 1963, p. 152). Howe declares the results of such encounters miraculous: "By dialogue we can let God into our world because in dialogue we open ourselves to one another, and in so doing, we open ourselves to God" (p. 152). As we face the question of women in Christian leadership, the need for continuing, expanding dialogue is obvious. We need to hear from one another, women and men alike, in order to understand more fully what God is saying to the church today.

Dialogue in the church, however, has been stunted. Both secular and biblical feminists have called to our attention that women have effectively been silenced in our society (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Pipher, 1994) and in our churches (Van Leeuwen, 1993). This is certainly no historic anomaly, but it seems we must repeat history to learn from it. When women are excluded from the dialogue, not only do we "die," but also the body of Christ, the church, suffers (I Cor. 12:26). Furthermore, if we content ourselves with silence, we may soon find ourselves in a "psychic prison" (Morgan, 1997, p. 219) confining us to limited, even dangerous, ways of thinking and acting, and the inability to consider new ideas.

Being silenced is not the same thing as being silent. Women are instructed to learn in quietness and submission (I Tim. 2:11), and told that we would do well to have a gentle, quiet spirit (I Peter 3:4). These verses speak of self-control, not external control or exclusion, and are referenced in the context of learning the things of God. In their extensive study of the I Timothy passage, Kroeger and Kroeger (1992) make the strong case that women are not prevented from learning, as some would argue, but are in fact encouraged to learn (p. 75-76).

The Kroegers report that both men and women were to learn in silence, as a characteristic of the biblical instructions to keep silence before the Lord (Isa. 41:1; Hab. 2:20; Zech. 2:13; Ps 46:10). In fact, they add a question from Rabbi Isaac, "'What should be a man's pursuit in this world? He should be silent. Perhaps he should be so with regard to the words of the Torah?' Silence, then, was the duty of the learner" (p. 75). I am reminded that for all of us there is "a time to be silent, and a time to speak" (Ecc. 3:7b). Now is the time for women to speak.

Dialogue is also the method I have chosen through which to communicate what I have learned. This study, based on research, interviews with the participants, and reflection has been filtered through my personal lens. I chose to conduct my research through a series of in-depth interviews, through which I wanted to understand the lived experiences of the participants. After listening carefully to these eleven interviews, I distilled the common threads that ran as themes through the various dialogues. These themes have become the springboard through which I examine the topic of this study, women in Christian leadership. While the participants' experiences were the starting point for my own thinking, their stories have been "filtered" through my own lens which in turn is shaped and shaded by additional reading I have done and by my experiences. In some cases, I disagree with the position evidenced by the participants. In every case, however, I honour and respect both the persons and their views. My discovery is that dialogue shapes the journey of life and the development of the person. So, while I have reached conclusions different from some of the participants, I recognize they themselves spoke from different developing positions.

I am inviting you to participate in the on-going dialogue with me. You may want to engage simply by reading or by following some of the suggestions presented in the introduction. You may be accustomed to reading a book and interacting with the author by

mentally agreeing or disagreeing. As you read this one, consciously reflect as you go, allowing yourself to enter the dialogue about women in leadership.

Dialogue as Remedy

For many women in the church today, lack of participation in the dialogue has resulted in misunderstanding their relationship to the church and a general sense of frustration about their inability to be involved in the work they believe they have been called of God to do. Paul Tournier (1981), Swiss physician and psychologist, says, "It seems to me that generally speaking men do not listen to women as seriously as women listen to men...It is as if women had an innate tendency to recognize the authority of men" (p. 96). In this study, the role of women in the church naturally requires conversation among men, among women, and between men and women. If the dialogue is imbalanced from start to finish, the contribution of women is diminished. Tournier's conclusion indicates that imbalance is the reality. He observes, "We ought at least to recognize that men take what women say less seriously than women take what men say" (1981, p. 97). Secular studies verify this assertion, concluding that in mixed-sex groupings

men talk more than women; men talk for longer periods of time and take more turns at speaking; men exert more control over the conversation; men interrupt women more than women interrupt men; and men's interruptions of women more often introduce trivial or inappropriate personal comments that bring women's discussion to an end or change its focus. It is also indicated that what men say carries more weight. A suggestion made by a man is more likely to be listened to, credited to him, developed in further discussion, and adopted by the group than a suggestion made by a woman. (Houston, 1985, p. 362)

We could argue that after thirty years of the women's movement, more women are speaking. My own experience and the experience of several women participants, however, bear out Houston's observations. We may still need to ask Tournier's (1981) question, "Do men listen?" (pp. 94-103).

Dialogue, however, can provide a remedy in two ways. First, genuine dialogue in which women and men can discuss their frustrations, even anger, may point to mutual understanding. Rather than trying to be heard, we can truly listen to one another. The hopeful result is that by listening we will learn from one another (Kroege & Beck, 1998, p. 12). The second remedy is open and honest communication with God through Bible study and prayer. Though often hidden, this form of dialogue provides the foundation for the first. Among the benefits of a growing dialogue with God are more open vistas, enlarging people's ability to see their own lives in a different light. As Tournier (1957) acknowledges, "Dialogue with God gave my life an axis. So far from impoverishing it, it has made it more fertile, more interesting, more adventurous" (p. 206). Dialogue within the community of believers is to begin with our personal dialogue with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, then extend to other believers with whom we are "one in Christ" as was the Lord's petition for us in John 17. We are to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) and in our communication strive to be Christ-like, "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). As we progress through the study, we will hear from women and men who have benefited from—and are encouraging—this kind of transforming dialogue.

The Bible: A Gift of Dialogue

The Bible is primarily the written revelation of God telling us who God is and who we are in relation to one another. It is a "single unit, bound together by the theme of God and his relationship to humankind" (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1991, p. 23). In my younger years, I delighted in the explanation that the Bible is God's love letter to me. Of course, it is addressed not only to me but also to all of humanity. The Bible provides a historical framework for the activity and person of God and sufficient wisdom and knowledge for a life of faith by any

person—male or female—in any setting. It has been called the "authority for faith and practice" (Dilday, 1982, p. 126).

We could say much more about the Bible, but I will keep my remarks brief. Because this study considers women in leadership in the evangelical Christian community, the authoritative nature of the Bible is assumed.

We may simply assume the authority of the Bible on the basis of the integral relationship of theology to the faith community. Because the Bible is the universally acknowledged foundational document of the Christian church, its message functions as the central norm for the systematic articulation of the faith of that community The Bible functions in the church as the Spirit-produced document through which the Spirit continues to speak. (Grenz, 2000, p. 17)

The Bible, as the Word of God, invites us to interact with the Author. How each of us approaches this dialogue with scripture will be determined by our relationship with God. My personal relationship with God is a blend of God's initiative and my response, which in turn may become an initiative from me awaiting his response. It is a real relationship between two persons. If I do not engage in the dialogue with God through his Word, my relationship with him will be stunted. God is in dialogue with us in four different ways. As Hannah W. Smith (1870/1970) observes in her classic, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, God "reveals His will to us: through the Scriptures, through providential circumstances, through the convictions of our own higher judgment, and through the inward impression of the Holy Spirit on our minds" (p. 67). Smith acknowledges the authority of the scripture for guidance. She warns, "If we fail to search out and obey the Scripture rule, where there is one, and look instead for an inward voice, we shall open ourselves to delusions, and shall almost inevitably get into error" (p. 67).

Fortunately, we do not have to figure out scripture by ourselves. John's gospel tells us that Jesus is God Incarnate, "the Word made flesh" (John 1: 1, 14). As Christians, we recognize that Jesus is the embodiment of God and we can look to the life of Christ for our understanding of how to know God and how to live. When Jesus prepared for his own death, he told his followers that they would not be left alone, but that Jesus must leave so that the Spirit of Truth might come (John 16). The Spirit did come at Pentecost (Acts 2), poured out "on my servants, both men and women" (Acts 2:18a), and continues to indwell Christians today. We are told in scripture that it is this Spirit who is our teacher (John 16).

Discerning what the scriptures say and what it means for each person, each culture, in each generation is our on-going task. This process of understanding, called hermeneutics, also involves dialogue.

Hermeneutics: Making Meaning Through Dialogue

While Christians agree that the Bible is authoritative, we often disagree about biblical interpretation. The role of women in leadership is one such problematic area of disagreement. How are we to make meaning of the scripture today? In this section we consider a definition of hermeneutics, highlight its relationship to dialogue, and identify the role of hermeneutics as central to the question of women in Christian leadership. Next I will explain how hermeneutics has shaped my position and indeed this study. Finally, I will share some of the perspectives of the participants.

A Definition

Hermeneutics comes to us through an extensive and careful process. Mickelson (1963) explains that the discipline involves both science, or careful research, and art, or personal interpretation of findings:

The term "hermeneutics" designates both the science and art of interpretation. The Greek verb *hermeneuo* means "to interpret or explain." The Greek noun *hermeneia* means "interpretation," "explanation." In both the Greek counter-part and the contemporary technical term, interpretation has to do with meaning. (p. 3)

While hermeneutics involves personal interaction with the text, scholars acknowledge the significance of rigor and caution in the interpretive process.

Interpretation as a discipline is important because meaning has to do with the core of a man's thinking. . . . Whatever the documents, the interpreter must be careful not to distort the meaning. Such care is required especially in the interpretation of the Scriptures, for they involve not only history, proverbs, peoples, and institutions, but the very message or revelation of God. (Mickelson, 1963, p. 3)

The task of interpreters of the Bible, according to Mickelson (1963), "is to find out the meaning of a statement (command, question) for the author and for the first hearers or readers, and thereupon to transmit that meaning to modern readers" (p.5). The problem we inherit with interpretation comes with the time and distance that spans scripture's original writing and our current reading. However, interpreters also face another problem: they are interpreting the Bible for a community of believers, and, at times, may make discoveries that disturb the current thinking. John Wycliffe, a translator committed to getting the Word of God into the language of the people, worked during the 14th century, "a period in history when Scriptures in the English language were regarded as dangerous heresy" (Glassman, 1981, p. 13). One of Wycliffe's enemies "deplored the fact that...through him it [the Bible] became vulgar and more open to the laity, and [to] women who could read, than it used to be to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding" (Glassman, 1981, p. 13). However difficult it may have been for Wycliffe and many who followed him, men and women today benefit from better understanding because of their work. Today, as we encounter the question of women in leadership, we find the same difficulties. Determining a

biblical perspective about women and leadership by maintaining the original meaning across time, language, and cultural barriers is a difficult task. Furthermore, those interpreters who are shedding new light and bringing new meaning to passages concerning women are risk-takers because they are challenging the traditional assumptions.

Much that we understand of women's roles in the Scriptures comes to us through tradition and church history – the result of centuries of study and interpretation. As Cooper (1998) explains, "Principles of biblical translations have varied somewhat and have been debated, especially recently" (p. 267). Speaking of their work in studying the roles of women in the scripture, Kroeger and Kroeger (1992) say that the venture of translation calls for the exercise of "the most serious scholarly endeavor of which we are capable" (p. 38). Women have called our attention to a need to re-examine biblical truth regarding the nature and roles of women. Our tradition and history have been shaped for the most part by male scholars. Women, traditionally excluded from this dialogue, that is the hermeneutic process, have begun to enter the serious scholarship required. One of the recent additions to the process has been the increased number of women's voices.

A Process

What, then, does a scholarly and rigorous approach towards hermeneutics look like? How does this apply to women and roles of leadership? As I studied both of these questions, four key principles of hermeneutics surfaced: (1) consider the Bible as a whole; (2) understand progressive revelation, which honours God's work through history; (3) view all of scripture through the life of Jesus; and (4) maintain an eschatological view.

Few of us will read the Bible from beginning to end at a single sitting. I'm not sure that is even possible. I remember, however, my grandmother telling me once about her day's

activity. It was 8:30 in the morning. She had been up since before 5:00, had done her gardening, and her Bible reading, and was now beginning to work on the afghans she crocheted for each of us. "Where are you in your reading?" I asked. "Well, I'm just starting from the beginning again. I finished Revelation last week, and it's time to start again in Genesis." I was surprised, not only that she had done it, but she had started Genesis in January, and this was only April! My grandmother had learned the value of reading the Bible in its entirety to see the big picture. Over time, as we read it in little pieces, or even by books, we need to learn how the pieces fit together in the whole. The story of the Bible is one story of God's activity: his revelation to humankind and the story of redemption.

Over time, the dialogue between God and humankind grows and changes as the relationship changes. Progressive revelation, a term used by William Walker (1971) in his book of that title, is an "unfolding of divine truth over an extended period of time" (p. 6). Walker writes,

God did not reveal all His truth to Adam, nor to Moses, nor to any one man. Jesus conformed to this principle, when He said: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth...and he will show you things to come" (Jn. 16:12-13). As Dr. C.I. Scofield aptly stated: "The Bible is a progressive unfolding of truth. Nothing is told all at once, and once for all. The law is, 'first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn.' Without the possibility of collusion, often with centuries between, one writer of Scripture takes up an earlier revelation, adds to it, lays down the pen, and in due time another, and another, add new details till the whole is complete." (p. 6)

Walker summarizes two phases he identifies in biblical progressive revelation: Progressive revelation may supplement what has already been written, as in the case of the revelations concerning God; or, progressive revelation may result in the setting aside of earlier commands, which are replaced by new directives (p. 10).

Louis, one of the participants, referred to the notion of progressive revelation when he described the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. He commented, "The New Testament is the superstructure. This builds, the New Testament building on the Old, and fulfills the Old...So in the New Testament we have what God really intends for his people." While Louis states that "interpretations and insights" resulting from study through the centuries are not "on equal par with scripture," he also suggests, by referring to John Robinson, "That God hath more light yet to shed from his word." According to Louis, "The illumination of that Word is an on-going thing and we see it in new ways, in new applications, and we need to be open to that."

It is vital for the Bible student to be aware of the principle of progressive revelation so that we can understand God's requirement for us today. In this unfolding of God to humankind, there are "distinguishable stages of revelation when God introduces new things for which man becomes responsible" (Walker, 1971, p. 10).

I have often been challenged to ask, "What 'new thing' is God saying?" The question that we need to ask for our study on women in leadership is "What is God saying now regarding the role of women in the church?" I have come to understand that the prophecy of Joel 2:28 quoted by Peter in the Sermon of Pentecost (Acts 2: 17) is the ushering in of women's full participation in the life of the people of God. Pentecost has been called "Women's Emancipation Day" (Van Leeuwen, 1990, p. 35). As with other revelations of God, we first get a glimpse, then over time, a fuller realization comes and the truth is worked out in the life of the church. I believe the day for women to participate in leadership with men has fully arrived.

The third principle, viewing scripture through the life of Jesus and his teachings, is also central to developing a proper hermeneutic. In my conversation with Louis, he mentioned that there is still "a lot of resistance among the older generation" toward women in lead pastoral positions. Louis attributes this reluctance to "the patriarchal understanding that they have." He concluded that "a proper hermeneutic . . . should be mirrored through Jesus and his message of liberation and how he treated women, and what he taught about women and the liberation that he brought."

The fourth principle takes into account that we look forward to Jesus' second coming when all parts of creation will be redeemed. Rather than only looking backward, we need to look forward with eyes of faith to God's preferred future. We are part of what is commonly referred to as the "Judeo/Christian tradition," but we as Christians claim to be "a newly constituted people" (Fee, 2000, p. 137) and as Fee suggests, we need to reckon with the "theological/experiential basis for the New Testament church's discontinuity with the old" (p. 136). The combination of looking backward (into the pre-church era) and looking forward (toward the fulfillment of the Revelation and the return of Jesus) has caused no end of confusion. Those of us living in this period are said to be living both in the "now" and the "not yet," (see Fee, 2000, p. 174 and Goldsworthy, 1994, p. 95). Van Leeuwen and her study group (1993) entitled the first chapter of *After Eden* "Living between the Times: Bad News and Good News about Gender Relations" (p.1). In it, they recognize that

Part of our Christian confession is that we live not yet in the new heaven and the new earth but in "the time between the times". . . . Our final healing awaits God's full inauguration of the new heaven and earth at the end of salvation history, and thus we must be cautious about the claims we make for any solution to the brokenness of gender (and other) relationships Nevertheless, substantial healing *is* possible...through Christ we share in the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, and that our God is ever "the God of the second chance." (p. 3)

How are we to understand these in between times for women in church leadership?

Theologian Stanley Grenz (2000) recommends, "We must look to the trajectory of the proclamation of the story of God's salvific activity within the history of Israel, Jesus, and the infant church" (p 17). The Bible is the story of the kingdom of God in which God is reversing the curse brought upon mankind because of our own sin. As Gordon Fee (2000), a theologian and professor, says, the coming of Jesus "changes everything" (p. 136). The implications of these changes caused turmoil in the first century and still do today. This study concerns some of these changes being made regarding women's roles in the trajectory of grace.

Hermeneutics and Communal Dialogue

As various scholars continue researching and publishing their findings, and as men and women in churches engage in conversation about the issue of women in leadership, the dialogue grows and changes. New perspectives on familiar passages may cause some to re-examine long held positions. Indeed, hermeneutics is at the heart of this issue. As women and men come to a new understanding of what the Bible says and means, they allow the Word of God to work in their minds rearranging old patterns of thinking and replacing them with new ones. As our thinking is changed, our conscious choices and actions change. This is the process of transformation (Romans 12:1-2).

Organized into several denominations, evangelicals have formally discussed the issue of women at multiple levels, from the local church to the national levels. And they have not found unanimous agreement. Even within denominations, there is disagreement as to whether women will be encouraged, even allowed, to hold the highest levels of leadership positions. For example, while women are actively encouraged to pursue God whole-heartedly and

respond to God's call on their lives, some groups assert that the God of the Bible would not call a woman to lead a congregation by calling her to be a senior or lead pastor.

Each of these dialogues becomes a part of the larger discussion of a community. The community may be a local church, or it may be a denomination. Genuinely interactive dialogue is much more easily accomplished in a smaller setting. As the smaller groups interact and share the results of their dialogue, discourse begins to take shape. Individuals who may have been heard in a smaller setting may or may not believe their perspectives are communicated in the larger arena.

Within a community each person finds herself or himself in a cultural context. These meaning-making groups discern what they believe to be an accurate understanding of women in leadership—or of a particular woman in a particular leadership role. This is called a "community of hermeneutic" (Harder, 1998, p. x) and the influences on the group may be fairly homogenous. When the dialogue moves to a larger forum, the influences will be proportionately larger, and the hermeneutic achieved will reflect the larger perspective.

Mickelsen (1963) advises us to form "good habits of interpretation," including dependence on the Holy Spirit, and talking over hermeneutic procedures with "fellow Christians who come from different denominational backgrounds" (p. 378). These two habits provide safeguards to ensure high quality interpretation. Regarding the interchange of ideas from others, Mickelsen's counsel is timely for evangelical Christians as we discuss the issue of women in Christian leadership. He writes, "If we talk only to those who interpret 'our way,' we begin to assume that 'our way' is the correct way. We never get a chance to see a more excellent way in actual operation" (p. 378). I hope this study provides some useful

information for you as you explore your own thinking regarding a biblical perspective on women in leadership.

The Current Dialogue of Women in Christian Leadership

Over the past thirty years, the dialogue concerning women in leadership has taken a series of twists and turns. With the coming of the women's movement into the cultural scene, Christian women joined other women in society to wonder once again what their roles might be. By the mid-eighties Clouse and Clouse (1989) presented the four views which had developed: (1) a traditional view in which women "are not to be involved in Christian ministry"; (2) a male leadership view which allows for "a limited involvement of women in ministry as long as they are under the direction of a male senior pastor"; (3) a plural ministry view that argues "all believers are ministers and that an overemphasis on ordination has caused Christians to argue over women's roles in the church to a greater extent than they should"; and (4) an egalitarian view that "fully supports female ministry" (p. 20).

Scrambling to decide with which position to identify, some groups began to make policy decisions to establish a particular hermeneutic for their community. Each, of course, based its policies on a particular understanding of scripture, which found a broad base of support in a particular community. Thus, the "community of hermeneutic" had established a policy, at least for a time, regarding women in leadership. The dialogue within each community, or denomination, had shaped policy which in turn shaped actions filtering through every denominational agency and each local church.

But the issue was not so easily settled. Not everyone in the respective communities agreed with the policies established. As time passed, spokespersons from each of the views gained supporters across denominational lines. Were the people writing the policies correct

in their reading of scripture? Was false thinking swaying them? As the discourse grew in numbers and volume, the four views in time began to collapse and polarize (Lutz, 1997, p. 39) into two: complementarians and egalitarian. Even the names of the groups need some explanation.

By 1987, a group, "deeply concerned about certain trends both in secular society and more especially in the evangelical religious world, formed an organization called the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood" (or CBMW) (Piper & Grudem, 1992b, p. 9). They chose the term *complementarian* to express "the beautiful reality of complementary differentiation that God designed for our joy in the beginning when God created us male and female equally in his image" (p. 8). Further explanation of the term tells us why they prefer this term and reject others:

We prefer the term *complementarian*, since it suggests both equality and beneficial differences between men and women. We are uncomfortable with the term "traditionalist" because it implies an unwillingness to let Scripture challenge traditional patterns of behavior, and we certainly reject the term "hierarchicalist" because it overemphasizes structured authority while giving no suggestion of equality or the beauty of mutual interdependence. (p. 8)

In other words, complementarians support the notion of spiritual equality between men and women while holding to an interpretation of scripture which views men alone as leaders.

The second view, egalitarian, has also developed an identifiable organization. Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) advocate among other affirmations, that

The Bible teaches that both women and men are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (I Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under his authority. (Piper and Grudem, 1992a, p.45)

This view, then, recognizes "women as partners rather than as subordinates" ready to "make the transition into full partnership in the body of Christ" (Lutz, 1997, p. 240).

My voice in the Dialogue

During the past few years, I have read many books and articles whose authors span the views mentioned above. I have come to understand that each group sincerely believes they are "right" in the interpretation of Scripture. The Kroegers (1992) observe, "Translation and interpretation are crucial. The proper interpretation can release women to serve wherever God may call them, or it can consign one half of the church to leave its world-wide ministry to the other half" (p. 14). Slowly, cautiously, and sometimes painfully, I have changed my own position from traditional to egalitarian.

I didn't know I even had a position until several years ago when I first read Clouse and Clouse's (1989) *Four Views*. Our church's denomination was in the throws of considering policy regarding women in leadership, and local churches were encouraged to study. *Four Views* was the text chosen by our church for an adult study group on the topic of women in leadership. I remember reading and interacting with each of the contributors of the text and later being involved in animated discussions with others on Sunday morning. In time, I identified my own position as something of a blend of the traditional and a "limited involvement" position.

More recently, however, I have become convinced that the egalitarians are biblically correct, and that women are created and called to serve alongside men. I feel almost compelled to voice a disclaimer at this point. I am not an advocate for any sort of "quota" for women in ministry, for example, that would require each church to have co-pastors, one male and one female. Rather, I believe that God will call out the leader best suited for the situation

in ministry and God will impress the congregation as to who that leader is. The ability of God's people to discern and respond to God's leading is the crucial component. In many cases, the leader will be a man. In other cases, God's choice of a timely leader will be a woman. The question may not be "Will God call a woman to lead?" but "Is our congregation able to discern and obey the leadership of God?" I believe that the authority within the congregation, or body, is given to the group as a whole, and not just to the men within the body. I also believe that the leadership is to be reflective of the whole and will listen to both male and female voices in the church. In neither case do I believe a man or a woman should "lead alone," but that God calls us to work together. As Fee (2000) explains,

The people of God in the New Testament are still thought of corporately, and individually only as they are members of the community. And leadership is always seen as part of the whole complex. Leaders do not exercise authority over God's people – although the community is to respect them and submit to their leadership; rather they are the "servants of the farm" (I Cor 3:5-9), or "household" (I Cor 4:1-3) They do not rule, but serve and care for – and that within the circle, as it were. (p. 136)

Fee's argument is one of many over the years that has helped me to clarify my own position and in fact change my position. Earlier years of Bible study and a life-time commitment to the Word of God as authoritative in my own life provided a very solid foundation for study and a confidence that God was capable of keeping me secure while I entered a period of uncertainty in study. I knew that while I questioned him, he would not let go of me. Some passages guided and even comforted me. Three came repeatedly to my mind. I share them with you now by way of helping you to see part of my own dialogue with scripture and with hermeneutic.

Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left . . . do not be ashamed . . . (Isaiah 54: 2-4)

These verses, addressed to a woman, encouraged me more than a decade ago to step out boldly into a broader world than I knew at the time. I strongly sensed the Lord leading me into new territory. At the time, I was a homemaker with two preschool children. Little did I know that in time God would "enlarge my tent" and lead me to teach in a Christian school where our families come from almost 100 different churches and several denominations. Or, that I would enter university to pursue a doctoral degree! The number and kinds of dialogues provided in each of these educational environments has enriched my understanding of women, specifically in leadership.

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5: 39-40)

These words, spoken by Jesus, grabbed my attention during my personal reading on February 9, 1989. I know the date, because I marked it in the margin of my Bible. On that particular morning I was wrestling with a personal issue and reading furiously for an answer in Scripture. The voice of God spoke to me through this verse to stop *searching* and merely *come*. Many times through my studies on women's issues I have remembered the peace that swept over me that morning.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into this likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:17-18)

As I reflect on these three verses, I realize that God the Father spoke to me about risking a new, larger adventure. God the Son reminded me to come to him for life. And God the Spirit urged me on to liberty and freedom, being confident that I am being transformed into the very likeness of God. My pilgrimage, while on-going, has included a transformation in my thinking about myself as a woman and the role of women in the church. In the process,

I have become convinced that it is God's desire to free women to serve more fully. My pilgrimage has also included dialogue with other people, but more importantly it reflects a growth in my personal understanding of God and his Word. The value of understanding the Bible, a proper hermeneutic, is crucial not only for this issue, but also for every other issue in life.

My position is the filter through which this study is written. Other positions are presented in the paper, through reading and sharing participants' views, which I will include in the next section. But, I am presenting more than a collage of perspectives. I am presenting to you my understanding of the issues surrounding women in Christian leadership in North American evangelical churches. I will identify several problems and present solutions. I will also suggest some areas for further study. I invite you to join me in the dialogue as we learn more about hermeneutics from some of the study's participants.

Participants' voices

Alicia is evaluating her understanding of women's roles and senses a shift in her own thinking. Recently, however, as a student in a theological post-secondary setting, she has gained a new sense of appreciation for the scriptures. In talking about some of the new insights that affect her life, I asked if there were particular sections of scripture that influenced her thinking. Here is Alicia's response:

Well, my whole approach to scripture has been transformed here. I've been . . . the one that is entering scripture and watching people deal with scripture narratively. [Students and instructors are] treating it as a whole canon and interpreting it as a whole, [looking at] this big picture instead of taking scriptures out of context and just dealing with them as pieces.

Notice that Alicia's observations recognize a new-found notion of treating scripture as a whole. She is then able to "enter" scripture, or step into the biblical story. Locating herself in the biblical story allows Alicia to make fresh meaning of familiar passages in the Bible.

Roberta, a former theology teacher, spoke during our interview about her pilgrimage including her years of theological training. She is another woman who, through gaining a new understanding of the Bible, changed her beliefs and actions about women in ministry. In our discussion, she shared that she had been torn between the instruction she believed to be from the Lord and the contrasting teaching of the church of which she was a member. I asked her to share her struggle with me.

The first struggle was what seemed to be the inner witness of God calling me to do something that violated my understanding of what was written that caused an inner conflict. That sent me on a search to see whether in fact the conflict existed, or whether in fact it was my perception of the conflict.

Roberta's search included several years of personal study, culminating in a three year Master of Divinity program during which she discovered the resolution to her biblical conflict. During those years, she engaged in deeper Bible study that included the original languages and historical perspectives on women in ministry. She also extended her own hermeneutic community to include a broader group of Christians than she had previously encountered. All the while, Roberta maintained a close relationship with her husband with whom she frequently discussed her observations. Eventually, her study led her to believe that the God of the Bible did and does call women into pastoral leadership.

So we discover the importance of hermeneutics. Roberta's original understanding, which had come through the teaching of an evangelical group, prohibited her from going into the pastoral ministry. But when she felt God calling her to go in that direction, she was compelled to search for deeper understanding through the written Word.

Along the way, one of the insights Roberta experienced concerned the instructions of Paul regarding women being silent (see II Tim. 2:11-15). Her study sheds light on one of the passages many use to restrict women's involvement.

That setting (in the church in Ephesus) gives context, a cultural understanding, of the placement the geography of the room, in which they would have been sitting that particular passage is located in a section that speaks about order. Paul is concerned (about) as against disorder. And that this is not the only example of it. He talks about that, he talks about prophecy and tongues, even I Corinthians 11 which talks about the veil. . . . with the resurrection of Christ, the whole tension between the "now" and the "not yet." The tension between the body and the spirit, the individual and the corporate. They are all tensions that are addressed by Paul in his letter. And when you see that the beginning of the letter has the disagreements—people saying, "I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos"—you've got a bigger context for the whole letter. So, we can't pull out one line when in point of fact it is half a line, and say "This is Paul's teaching."

Roberta points out that the context of the letter helps interpret a single fragment of a verse. She is using a solid hermeneutical principle. She continued to point out that her journey toward seeking and obeying the mind and will of God

involved learning to do exegesis--learning to read what is there, rather than reading into what is there, and also learning to take what's there in the context of the paragraph, and of the section, and of the whole letter. And then, taking what Paul says in one letter in the context of his teaching in the other letters. And I think that that is imperative that you do that on any issue, not just this issue.

Roberta, like most of us, wants to properly understand the scripture. And, like most of us, it took a personal internal conflict for Roberta to do some serious digging!

Pause for Reflection

Before proceeding further into the study, take some time to think about what you have just read. Do you understand the difference between Howe's notion of dialogue and typical conversation? Can you think of specific encounters you have had with others in which dialogue played a significant role in helping you understand a person or a concept in a new way?

Have you thought of the Bible as being God's instrument of dialogue with us? More than a book locked in time, the Bible "comes alive" as we engage God in the written Word through the life of Jesus and with the help of the Teacher, the Holy Spirit.

How do you make meaning of the scriptures? Have you considered principles and dynamics of hermeneutics as hidden contributors to your current understanding of the Bible? Have you engaged in intentional Bible study on the issue of women in leadership?

Do you consider yourself individually only a part of the body of Christ on whom the authority of God rests? Is your church able to identify God's voice in the discernment of leadership?

Record some of your initial thoughts in a journal. You may want to refer to them as you share your perspective in a study group and reflect on your own journey of discovery through dialogue.

CHAPTER TWO: CULTURAL FACTORS

Trying to criticize one's own culture is like trying to push a bus while you are sitting in it.... Can I get off the bus? (Lesslie Newbigin, 1992, p. 95)

Culture as Context

Each generation of Christians attempts to make meaning of the gospel for its cultural setting. By focusing on women in North American evangelical churches, I have established the parameters of the cultural discussion. How do we present or package the gospel to communicate to our culture? How does our culture affect the presentation? In regard to our focus for women in Christian leadership, is the recurring call for women to serve as leaders a cultural phenomenon or the activity of God? How do we know what is "cultural" and what is "Christian"?

Christians have been discussing the intersection of their lives and their culture since the initial days of Christianity. John's gospel, for example, begins by proclaiming Christ as the *Logos*, a uniquely Greek concept. The term *logos* refers to a "universal principle that permeated and governed everything" (Phillips & Okholm, 1996, p. 135) and was successfully employed to "relate the Gospel to the culture by packaging the message in cultural terms" (p. 134).

First grappling with this concept years ago, I encountered the work of Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951). An American theologian, pastor, and scholar, Niebuhr identified "the question of Christianity and civilization" not as a new one, but as a problem that has been "an enduring one through all the Christian centuries" (p. 2). He asserts this problem arose during the days of Jesus Christ's humanity when, as a Jew, Jesus "confronted

Jewish culture with a hard challenge" (p. 2). How are Christians to make sense of the interaction of faith and culture today? How are we to understand the question of women in Christian leadership as we consider both the message of Christ and the dynamics of our culture? Though Niebuhr's work does not address the topic of women in leadership specifically, his insights are helpful in a consideration of culture as context. Indeed, he argues that culture "is concerned with what is good for male and female, child and adult, rulers and ruled. . . .(p. 38).

To address the complex problem, Niebuhr begins by venturing "toward a definition of Christ" (p. 11-29). While recognizing great variations among Christian beliefs, Niebuhr identifies a common feature among Christians: they acknowledge the authority of Jesus Christ over their lives. Further, Niebuhr argues that each virtue of Jesus—love, hope, faith, obedience, and humility—is "intelligible in its apparent radicalism only as a relation to God" (p. 27). As Christians base their faith and actions in Jesus, they, too, must reckon with a relation to God through Christ, which, says Niebuhr

can be symbolized by no other figure of speech so well as by the one which calls him Son of God. Hence belief in Jesus Christ by men in their various cultures always means belief in God. No one can know the Son without acknowledging the Father. To be related in devotion and obedience to Jesus Christ is to be related to the One to whom he undeviatingly points. (pp. 28-29)

Niebuhr concludes that this relationship involves a double movement, "with men toward God, with God toward men" (p. 28). This, then, provides the transition from focusing on faith to addressing the concerns of culture. Again, Niebuhr ventures a definition. Culture, he proposes, "comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organizations inherited artefacts, technical processes, and values" (p. 32). He identifies culture's chief characteristics

as "always *social*" (p. 32); the result of *human achievement* (p. 33); "a *world of values*" (p. 34); concerned with the " (p. 36) *temporal and material realization of values* (p.36); *concerned with the conservation of values* (p. 38); and finally, directed to the *pluralism* that is characteristic of all culture" (p. 38).

Niebuhr at last comes to the intersection of these "two complex realities—Christ and culture," urging that "an infinite dialogue must develop in the Christian conscience and the Christian community" (p. 39). His own reflection and research led him to identify five approaches to the question of Christ and culture, and in so doing provided the "paradigms that describe how Christians have dealt with culture" for the past half-century (Solomon, 1998). Niebuhr devotes his text to an explanation of the five answers, or types, as follows: Christ against culture (pp. 45-82); the Christ of culture (pp. 83-115); Christ above culture (pp. 116-148); Christ and culture in paradox (pp. 149-189); and Christ the transformer of culture (pp. 190-229). Niebuhr's call for dialogue has been heard. Phillips and Okholm (1996) assert that Niebuhr "set the agenda for discussions of the relation of the Christian church to culture" (p. 275). The agenda at hand is the question of women in Christian leadership.

Although his work was written fifty years ago, Niebuhr's (1951) words apply not only to our own day, but also to the particular focus of this study. The cultural challenge for us comes as we discover the layers of dialogue evident in our culture regarding the roles of women in Christian leadership. Niebuhr understood that Christians often hold variant and conflicting views, and that each of us as Christ's interpreters have only partial insights into our necessary conflicts (p. 2). This study exposes some of those conflicts as they relate to women in Christian leadership. An example of such conflict is whether one's view of male leadership in the home and church results primarily from a person's cultural experiences or from his or

her relationship with Christ. A second related example considers whether the influence of various types of feminism have served to move the church toward God's intended purposes or have served as a distraction or hindrance.

While Niebuhr's seminal work provides a touchstone for our discussion of culture, we will move to consider the contributions of others. The focus of this chapter centers on the influence of culture as it interacts with the lives of the participants. In order to understand what has helped and hindered women in Christian leadership, it became apparent that cultural influences have always played an enormous role.

How does culture bear upon us as people and as Christians? Culture, according to Niebuhr (1951), results from human achievement. Further, argues Groothuis (1994), culture is

An outgrowth of our humanness, a consequence of our createdness and our creativity. It is, in fact, exactly what God intended humans to produce People not only create culture, we are, in a sense, created by culture, as it in turn influences the ideas and actions of humans in society. As such, culture is a potent, pervasive, yet largely hidden force in everyone's life. The person most influenced by a particular cultural perspective is the person most likely to be unaware of its influence. (pp. 149-150)

Groothuis highlights the interactive quality of culture and our lives. In terms of this study, I suggest that as we experience various facets of life, we are in dialogue with our culture. Not only are we influenced by culture, but we can in fact influence culture. Culture, then, can mean either "the *dominant* [or *prevailing*] way of life" or simply "life in the world," that is, "the total process and result of human activity" (Phillips & Okholm, 1996, p. 276).

I have long believed that God acts in history, and speaks through culture. I also believe that the timing of God's activity is intentional. As women, many of us are familiar with the question Mordecai used to challenge Queen Esther: "For if you remain silent at this

time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place Who knows but that you have come to this royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14) Many times Jesus himself said, "the hour is," (Jn 4:23; Mt 26:45; Mk 14:41; Jn 2:23) or "the hour is not yet..." (Jn 7:30; 8:20) So, as I approach the question of the interaction of culture and Christianity, my presupposition is that God has and does work intentionally to speak to us through culture. The question that follows, then, is "What is God saying to the church about women in leadership today?" This brings us to the crossroads.

As I reflected on the participants' interviews, two currents within contemporary culture emerged as the most significant for women in Christian leadership: feminism, or the women's movement, and patriarchy. This chapter attempts to explore the notion of culture in light of these two phenomena as experienced in the lives of the participants. Even though my research and discussion are limited to North American culture, as I talked with men and women, I have made an interesting discovery: those with broader cultural experience tend to have a broader understanding of the biblical roles of women. This chapter will present several observations from the participants on various aspects of their cultural experiences and comments from authors who address related subjects.

Upon identifying these two cultural factors as themes running through the lives of the participants, I began to recognize the roles that feminism and patriarchy have played at this critical juncture. Analyzing these themes in light of the Bible, I will present, along with comments from those interviewed, my own observations and gleanings from the works of other authors. I will also comment on the value of both patriarchy and feminism to our current cultural situation. Before we hear from the participants, however, I will first introduce the notion of the intersection of Christianity and culture.

Crossroads: Where Christianity and Culture Meet

I've been interested in the past few years at the use of the term "crossroads" to serve as a metaphor for the intersection of faith and culture in a person's life. Two examples are *Women at the Crossroads* (Malcolm, 1982), and an illustration used by Michael Goheen (2000) at a Christian teachers professional development seminar. Using crossing lines marked "Biblical story" and "Western story," Goheen explained that we live in the place of the intersection of these two stories. We are Christians who have chosen to live according to the story of the Bible, and we are members of a society which, according to Goheen, is moving away from biblical values.

According to our broad understanding of culture as life in the world (Phillips & Okholm, 1996), each of us experiences culture whether or not we recognize our relationship to it. At this point it may be helpful to articulate my use of the term "culture." Crysdale and Beattie (1973) establish a distinction between a culture as "a set of ideas, values, and expressive symbols...which marks one collection of persons apart from another," and a social system which consists of "interdependent people or groups" (p. 34). For example, the term culture may be used as broadly as "Eastern" or "Western culture," or as narrowly as "the culture of a school." The scope of the "collection of persons" determines the breadth and context of the term, culture. For the participants in this study, culture refers to the various communities in which they find themselves, including their church community and their geographic community. Recognizing that society as a whole includes varieties of cultures, we turn to Morgan (1997) for an understanding of the term culture "being used more generally to signify that different groups of people have different ways of life" (p. 120). In this study, the

participants' experiences reflect their involvement in extended families, churches, local communities, regions and countries, and religious networks and denominations.

In discussing a Christian perspective on culture, Christians frequently look to the words of Jesus in his prayer that as his followers we be "in the world . . . not of the world" (John 17:11a, 14b). Jesus' words indicate a distinction between the values of his followers and those of the predominant culture. As maturing Christians, we come to a place in our growth where we discern how the influences of our unique cultural experiences have shaped us, both in positive ways that allow us to grow, and in negative ways that trap us (Morgan, 1997, p. 219). When we stand in that place of discernment, we are at the crossroads seeking to determine the impact of cultural realities on our lives, how they shape our worldview, our relationships, our understanding of scripture and how we live out our lives in family, church, and society. We are standing, as it were, in an intersection between the cultural story and the biblical story.

Goheen's understanding of culture is a "common way of life rooted in a shared story" (2000, p.1). He illustrates a culture by placing elements of a culture on the outside of a circle (for example, language, social political and other factors). At the core of the circle, that is to say, at the core of the society, is the "religious core story" (p. 1). In this he agrees with Newbigin (1992) who points to the "need for and the possibilities of a 'dialogue' between the Christian story and other stories" (viii). In addition, Newbigin observes that in most cultures "religion is not a separate activity set apart from the rest of life . . . what we call religion is a whole worldview, a way of understanding the whole of human experience" (p. 172). Our recent tendency in Western culture to divide religious and secular affairs is, says Newbigin, "one of the most significant peculiarities of our culture and would be incomprehensible to the

vast majority of people who have not been brought into contact with this culture" (p. 172).

The notion of "religious core" denotes every culture's faith-based ideas of how life came to be and how it is to be lived out.

One of the results of becoming aware that religious life and cultural life are so thoroughly intertwined will be the subsequent realization that each person's very theology is a by-product of a combination of factors. Grenz (2000) explains that because each of us forms his or her own theology or system of beliefs in the context of culture, we are more easily able to see that theology is not

solely the construction or systematization of truth by appeal to the Bible alone. The process of contextualization requires a movement between at least two poles—the Bible as the source of the good news of God's action in Christ and contemporary culture . . . Even though Scripture must remain the primary norm for theological statements, contextualization demands that we take seriously the thought-forms and mindset of the culture in which our theologizing transpires. Only then can we explicate the biblical message in language understandable in our specific setting. (p. 15)

Grenz's explanation of contextualization points to the need for conscious, genuine dialogue with our culture. Culture, it has been said, is like the water surrounding a fish and like the bus on which a passenger rides. The fish just swims, without being aware of the water. Perhaps it's like us and the air we breathe. We don't give it much thought until something calls it to our attention, like a foul odor, smog, or a blocked windpipe. The bus is the vehicle that transports us to one place from another. And, like the water to fish and air to people, the bus doesn't get much thought as long as all is well.

In North America, something has happened to get our collective attention regarding the roles of women. The political scenes in both Canada and the United States at the turn of the 21st century indicate that people in both countries are concerned with cultural issues ranging from economics to education to family values. Spiritual matters are in the news on

both sides of the international border. It seems that we are examining our culture in new ways. Both nations are part of a larger culture, that of "western thought."

The larger point remains. Culture permeates every aspect of our lives, and we need to become aware of its influences on us. How else will we be able to differentiate between cultures, specifically, our own which is "of the world" and "the biblical story" into which we step as we become Christian? We are standing in North American culture, viewing feminism and patriarchy from our twentieth century perspective and trying to determine how to walk in a way consistent with the biblical story. We are in the crossroads.

Can Christians learn from modern thought?

Based on the prayer of Jesus (John 17), I believe we are to be in the world as responsible, active participants. Among evangelicals, Unger (1991) notes that "moderates" are those who "integrate gospel truth with modern culture without sacrificing the good news" (p. 14). Relying on the Bible for faith and practice, I often look to scripture for principles and guidelines in making contemporary decisions. I choose to walk in the biblical story.

One reason I affiliate with evangelical Christians is because evangelicalism tries "to achieve balance of text and context" (Unger, 1991, p. 14). Committed to living a life consistent with the Bible and relevant to my world, I am encouraged by this observation. Unger adds, "genuine evangelical Christianity holds doctrine, experience, and life in balance" (pp. 14-15). This statement holds the three elements together: the teaching of the Word of God, historical perspective, and my life as it connects to the other two. In his article assessing evangelicalism, Unger points to Donald Bloesch, saying "the kind of evangelicalism about which Bloesch is optimistic is that which can relive the best of historic Christianity while at the same time carefully reaping the benefits of modern thought" (p. 14). Sociologist David

Lyon also addresses this idea of Christianity at the crossroads in what he calls "critical integration" (1983, p. 32). Sociology, according to Lyon, exists on three levels. "world-view, institution and intellectual practice. The dialogue, the integration, most evidently takes place on the world-view level . . . where deep but essential questions of the social aspect of humanness must be faced" (p. 33). The starting point for Lyon, for me, and for many evangelicals is a Christian viewpoint, asserting our "fundamental orientation comes from the Bible in which we hear the very voice of our maker" (p. 33). Lyon points to the express need for deliberate dialogue, what he calls a "two-way traffic" between Christian belief and sociology (p. 34). I agree with his observation that the church may need to consider that it has "wittingly or (more usually) unwittingly contributed to the development or persistence of biblically unwarranted social patterns" (p. 34). In his statement, Lyon recognizes the interactive give-and-take between cultural groups within society. As Morgan (1997) explains, "Culture is not something that can be imposed on a social setting. Rather, it develops during the course of social interaction" (p. 137). The church is an active part of that interaction. I have come to the studied conclusion that excluding women from certain positions of leadership is such a pattern.

Transforming culture

This study, however, is not about culture generally, or even Canadian or North American culture. Rather, we are looking at culture through the eyes of the participants who experience daily living in both the evangelical circle and the wider society in which they find themselves. One helpful understanding comes from Kari Torjesen Malcolm (1982) who observes that Christians throughout history have experienced the same tension. In fact, she says, "Jesus faced this problem as much as we do, for he was 'tempted in every way, just as we

are' (Heb. 4:15). The example of Jesus challenges us not to conform to culture or to go against it but to transform culture"(Malcolm, 1982, p. 27). What does this mean for women?

In *Women Caught in the Conflict*, Groothuis (1994) reminds us that we "are immersed in culture," not conscious of how our environment influences and affects us (p. 150). I appreciate Groothuis' encouragement to her readers to "submit emotional reaction to reasonable reflection and become informed concerning actual ideas and issues, rather than rely on caricatures thereof" (p. xi). I have a growing conviction that reflection is something that comes with age and experience, not just personality type or temperament. The issue of women in church leadership may benefit from such thoughtfulness.

As I reflect on Christianity and culture, it occurs to me that "immersed" is an apt expression. It is particularly striking that the term "baptism" means "immersed." The physical symbol of the spiritual re-birth of a Christian is baptism. When we are literally dipped under the water in the baptistery, we are, as pastors often say, "raised to newness of life" (See Rom. 6:4). While we usually think of this "newness" in spiritual terms, we are also identifying with a new culture, a local group of Christians who give our faith a very localized shape and meaning. Derek Tidball (1984) includes a chapter in his sociological analysis of New Testament Christians called "The Early Church's Relationship to the World." He observes, "Christian believers should already live as they will live in the new creation . . . the Christian community is to anticipate by its social behaviour the renewed creation that is yet to come" (p. 109). By the act of baptism a believer is metaphorically swimming in new water. What does this mean for women?

Here we have the opportunity to shift focus from past and present to future. The church is grounded in an historical event, the life of Jesus, and is being lived out with a

future-focus, Jesus' second coming. We have a glimpse in the Bible of what the new community of believers "looks like." Among Jesus' followers and Paul's co-workers, numerous women were present alongside men. If our doctrine is rooted primarily in the past, we will tend to duplicate old patterns. If our doctrine, rooted in history, is focused on the future, we will have the freedom to create new patterns. The issue of women in ministry is one of the concerns in the dialogue between past and future.

The Question of Culture: Which Way Do I Go From Here?

The value of culture in a very basic sense is that culture is one context in which we encounter God. We are born into a specific culture with all its shaping influences. Through our culturally oriented experiences, we gain our perspective of the world, or our worldview. Regardless of where we live, and how we think, God intervenes in our lives to reveal himself. He comes to us in the midst of our cultural experience. What is God saying and doing in my life? In your life? Among North American evangelical Christians? To recognize culture and its influence in our lives is to acknowledge that we are standing in a crossroads and that we need to ask a question: Which way do I go from here? Do I allow myself to be swept in one direction or another? Or, do I consciously determine to walk "in the world and not of it"? The question asked in this study is simply, what is God saying to women in Christian leadership? Which way do we go?

To examine the role of women in leadership in North America, it may be useful to separate the two "stories" (one biblical; one cultural) so that we can see each more clearly. Done intentionally, this evaluation could help us understand both the Bible, which itself contains many cultures, and our specific culture more clearly. Then we would be in a better position to move through life and consciously acknowledge the influence of a particular

culture on us. We can begin to tease apart "what is cultural and what is Christian." In the process, we examine our lives, prayerfully seeking to be transformed in the image of Christ rather than to the patterns of this world (Rom. 12:1-2).

We also share our lives and our perspectives with others along the way in genuine dialogue. As a woman in leadership, I have done much scripture- and soul-searching. I have engaged in meaningful dialogues and benefited by dialogue with others. I appreciate the new understandings gained by hearing from others whose perspectives were different from mine and who challenged me to think long and hard about my own positions, particularly about feminism and patriarchy. We listen to some of these conversations now.

Encountering the Crossroads: The Participants Speak

During my conversations with the participants, cultural thought surfaced on more than a few occasions. A number of participants related very personal moments when they consciously encountered the crossroads of Christianity and culture. During this time, their assumptions were challenged and they were forced to take a look at the Bible with fresh eyes, seeking how to resolve the conflicts they perceived between the Bible and culture. For most of the participants, the encounters occurred while they were outside of their regular experience, either in a different culture or interacting with men and women with different theological positions and traditions.

My own experience is that of growing up in north-central Texas, then moving to Saskatchewan, back to the United States for a period of time in Northern California, and then to the West Coast of British Columbia. I soon discovered that North American is not a homogenous culture, though most of us speak (sort of) the same language. I believe I can attempt to critique my culture as a result of two discoveries: first, as Newbigin (1992) and

Ted Ward (1996) illustrate, it helps to get out of one's culture to be able to see it more clearly; and, second, we can learn from others who have different cultural perspectives. Ward credits this awareness to a mentor, Clara Olson, who helped him see "the value of learning about human processes in education from intercultural experience" (p. 9). Olson, at age 70, "left for her first Asian assignment, a year with the Ministry of Education in Thailand. Clara Olson showed us that the only alternative to being trapped in one's own narrow perspectives and perceptions is deliberately to seek experience in other cultural contexts (p. 9).

Candy admits to having a limited cultural experience because her church and the three educational institutions she attended (college, university, and seminary) were all part of the same denomination. She describes herself as "a dyed-in-the-wool Southern Baptist." Then something happened to change her experience and her perspective. While Candy went as a missionary to South America, she realized that all her denominational trappings were the trappings of culture.

I even had to ask myself, "Is this Christian or is it Southern Baptist?" Is it Christian or is it American? A lot of it was in the methodology of how I did things. Was this cultural? One of the things that is stressed at the Mission Board is to adapt to the culture . . . but to hold on to your Christian principles. And that's where the water really hit the wheel for me . . . on the mission field.

Candy learned in another cultural setting the value of an examined perspective. She grew to see herself not so much as a North American or a Southern Baptist, but as "a believer."

Teresa's experience is both similar to and different from Candy's. Working in a foreign culture created new areas of awareness for her. It is different, however, in that those areas of awareness have to do with her work as a Christian woman more than as a transplanted North American. Her life experience and missions' training had been different enough from Candy's at this point that she knew more of what to expect. Teresa serves in a country where

Christianity is not a majority religion. In time, indigenous Christian leaders appointed Teresa to a national leadership position. Teresa related that "when this appointment was told to the leaders of all the missions and the missionary projects, their response was, 'Well, we don't have to accept that.' The other missionaries decided they did not need that position." As a result, Teresa says, "I really got stymied." She explained that a variety of denominations are involved and that all missions "organizations work together in the country." As Teresa described it, most of the leadership is male, and while the nationals encouraged her leadership,

a lot of the anti-women-in-ministry stuff is really coming from the foreigners, and particularly the Americans. It seems to be mostly a North American, and even more a United States cultural teaching, in my experience . . . who make an issue about it [women in ministry] and are teaching these things overseas.

This was, of course, only part of my conversation with Teresa. She is quite well read, well traveled, and has experience working with several different denominational and mission-sending groups. It was interesting to hear her speak of mission groups from Europe and Britain who do not have a policy that limits women in ministry. Their approach is rather, in Teresa's words, one of "modeling equality in ministry." Culture plays a significant role in determining what is and is not acceptable for practice on the mission field. And, noticeably, persons from some cultures are much more vocal about it.

Alicia, like Candy, did not intentionally set off to be enriched by another culture. Like Teresa, Alicia's personal experience crosses several continents and denominational lines. Her varied cultural experiences led her to reflect and examine her life through new lenses. Early in her travels, she went from her Southwestern and Mid-American experience to Europe to participate in a Christian community focused on theological study. Once in Europe, engaged in serious discussion with Christians from several European countries,

Canada, and the United States, Alicia came face-to-face with a disturbing awareness.

Reflecting on her identity as an American woman, she says she has come to understand that growing up in that culture left her with the belief that "I'm actually inferior [as a woman]."

While in Europe, she explains she had

my first real head-to-head run-in with women who saw things very differently than I did....After I graduated from university, I was in a Bible church, which . . . [was] very conservative, and women are very restricted in their forms of ministry in regards to different roles for women and men in the church, in the home, in life, in society And I was pretty encased in that.

Alicia explained that in her family she felt treated equally with her brother, so she is "not really sure where my particular bent toward a kind of an inferior position of women comes from. I think it's cultural."

What we hear in Alicia's narrative is that by moving from one cultural experience to another within evangelicalism, she came face-to-face, or as she said, "head-to-head" with women who had different understandings, convictions, and practices. As Alicia told her story, she shared her beliefs that she had a balanced upbringing and that her parents treated her and her brother with relative equality. However, her last statement is telling. She found herself, an adult in her mid-twenties, with an awareness of her inferiority to men and came to believe the cause was cultural. If these evangelical Christians gathered in Europe had a different view from one held by a North American, where did they get it?

I wanted to pursue Alicia's self-awareness, so we paused in her story for her to explain. She then recounted her European experience, where she met "two women who were older than me, married, and . . . in very egalitarian marriages." As Alicia got to know the other Christian women, she realized she had internalized "a kind of positional inferiority of women, not a qualitative inferiority of women." Alicia found herself defending her position to her

new friends, claiming a difference "between the qualitative inferiority and just a positional inferiority. The inferiority in that context doesn't have a negative connotation . . . it just wasn't a problem for me, but I felt like I could fully be myself with this hierarchy in place."

Alicia got quite animated as she relived this retelling! It was exciting for me to be in her presence. Here sat an intelligent woman, now in her early thirties, who was retracing the steps of a major shift in her thinking and in her life. I'm sure at some point we both took a breath and had a sip of tea. But we continued our conversation. Alicia told me that although her European experience was her first "confrontation for me of those issues," it certainly was not the last. In time she came to study theology in Canada, again surrounded by evangelical Christians from around the world. She recalls a particular incident during which "it finally broke through to me that there could legitimately be another way to see all of this stuff."

Now in a third cultural setting, surrounded by people from additionally varied backgrounds, Alicia was beginning to tease apart different strands in the fabric that made up her life. Where once her position as a woman determined her position in ministry, she is now able to see with a different view. Still, there is more to Alicia's story. She realized in her Canadian setting that "this inferiority, has to do with decision-making," being able as a woman to make decisions as a leader, in the family, in the church, and even in business.

Alicia said earlier she believed her parents raised her with equal status to her brother. Now she identifies the sense of inferiority with decision-making, a domain left to the men. We will say more about that in the discussion on patriarchy in the next chapter.

As she continued her studies and her personal inventory, Alicia realized that it was easier for her to break out of her inferiority mindset "when it came to the business world" rather than the church. The next segment of her story reveals her original view as traditional:

Men were the ones who should hold that decision-making capacity . . . when it came to the building up of people, the church . . . all of that kind of leadership. There was [a] covering, that men are the covering [arc her arm above her head like the shape of an umbrella], and they had the ultimate responsibility.

So, what happened for me that night in studying had to do with taking that covering off. Or seeing how the language, where I had never had a problem with using the masculine pronouns before in referring to the grand population, it finally broke through to me that maybe there was something prejudicing, and just incredibly subtle, in dealing with the pronouns, that I was buying in to something just a little bit more because of course we use the masculine pronouns—and I would have told you that had nothing to do with gender issues, but I think that it was just one of those very subversive blocks in this kind of foundation of male superiority. And that moment was revelational . . . I still remember it which probably goes to show how fundamentally revelational it was for me.

Can you sense the speed of her voice racing to keep pace with her own excitement?

Can you hear her sentences tumbling into one another as she tries to find a way to express both her discovery and her thrill? Words like "subtle" and "subversive" may seem surprising in this context. She is beginning to sound like one whose sight has been restored, as one who can see clearly. For her it was "revelational." For Christians, this is a very powerful word.

Revelation speaks of the activity of God. And, as for Alicia, revelation is usually the place of renewal, of fresh starts and new beginnings. Again, I refer to Alicia's observations. From that awareness, she

started to see these people that I respected that were living their lives in all humility before God, who held women to be in the same category as men. Feminine as opposed to masculine, but nothing to do with superiority or inferiority.

Alicia realized this major "shift in what I really believe" had earlier, deeper roots in "what I've really believed all my life."

Alicia says all this has happened during the last five years, since she has been in Canada. She was out of her original cultural context and observing women in marriages in a

way that testified to an alternative. She found herself studying in a theological situation "where women are given as much respect as men."

At this point Alicia's comments signal a shift from her old view of the world, to seeing afresh how other people view the world. These worldviews lead them in different directions. My conversation with Alicia was far from over, but I think you get the impression that her life, her history, and her doctrine came to an intersecting point over the issue of the role of women in home and church. I was to find this was not unusual among the other women participants.

Alicia is surprisingly typical of women in evangelical Christianity. First, she is genuinely committed to Christ and his kingdom causes. Second, she is aware of a distinct difference in the way contemporary Christians view women and men. Third, she has begun to examine her life through the experiences that come with age and maturity. Fourth, she has articulated several new insights as a result of her reflection. Finally, not only has she not rejected her faith in light of her new found freedom as a woman, she has reaffirmed it.

Not every person who participated in this study shares Alicia's conclusions. Rather they reflect the range of views held among evangelicals. But as we will discover, not only are the times changing, the perspectives among North American evangelicals are, too.

Louis articulates the need for Christians to interact with others who have different perspectives and cultural experiences. Some of his own views regarding women in leadership positions were shaped while he met with Christians from different backgrounds and who held different assumptions from his. While discussing different views of women in ministry, Louis articulated the two primary views espoused by evangelicals. It became clear to me that he holds an egalitarian view, although he never said it in so many words. When I asked him

directly, he responded. "My thinking has changed through exposure at a broad level. Way back in the 70s I went to my first [international] conference, and I moved into the circles of ecumenical evangelical--and sometimes not evangelical ecumenical circles." He mentioned returning fairly frequently over the years and meeting many people. "I'd hear some of the great speakers, LeeAnn Payne, a great Episcopal writer and other women . . . I saw their gifts and how God has blessed them. And some of them have even been ordained." Louis remembered one "godly woman and a gifted woman" in leadership and recounted "that just opened my eyes to understand that these people understand scriptures a little different, and it forces you to look and say, 'Well, how do they read the same passages I do, and come out at a different end?' You have to have an open mind."

Louis mentioned the need for some pastors to read more widely and attend conferences other than those sponsored by their own denominations, then continued

I need the spectrum there. Some of it gets me mad, but that's all right. I get to understand the different points of view. And moderate points of view, even extreme. We've got to know that, what's going on out there . . . it is an attitudinal thing . . . Hopefully being more charitable and open to other people, and truly understanding what God is saying to the church. I think God is saying to the church now, we have to be much more open and respectful of women in ministry and in leadership.

Louis articulates the need to seek places where assumptions are challenged and to be open to dialogue with Christians from other cultural backgrounds and theological positions. Being open to dealing with difficult issues, like women in Christian leadership, helps us understand, in Louis' words, "what God is saying to the church."

This chapter has introduced the notion of culture as a collection of people reflecting particular values, ideas, and beliefs. North Americans embrace multiple cultures and cultural expressions. Evangelical Christians reflect a cross-section of persons from varied

backgrounds and regions of North America, while affirming a common belief in Jesus Christ. The participants in this study are persons in dialogue with their cultures, giving and taking from aspects of their local communities and thereby shaping and being shaped by various influences. The intersection in a person's life in which she recognizes the convergence of the values of contemporary cultures and the belief in the essential story of the Bible forms a type of crossroads.

As Christians, we need to be conscious of the crossroads, examining cultural assumptions in light of scripture and learning how God might be revealing himself to us through culture. Next we will look at two of the predominant cultural themes which we encounter—patriarchy and feminism. Chapters three and four analyze how they have shaped our thinking and the roles they have played in the lives of the participants.

Pause for Reflection

Before we move on, take some time to reflect on what you have read regarding culture. In your notebook or journal, write down how your culture and the Bible have influenced you. For example: Have you lived in one cultural setting for most of your life? As you encounter people from other cultures, what impressions do you have about the differences? Is your background in an evangelical church? Did you grow up in one? If so, have you previously thought about how this has shaped your thinking? Are you currently involved in evangelical circles? Why? Why not? Prime the pump of thinking about your own life, so that as you continue reading you can make appropriate applications along the way. You may find yourself challenging some of what you read. Or applauding. Whatever response you have, try to understand it. Your response will give you clues about how your culture has helped shape your life, and influenced decisions made in your crossroads. Hopefully you will discover ways your own cultural experience(s) have stimulated or stunted your spiritual growth.

You may want to consider the comments of the participants. With what in their experience do you identify? Have you recognized some gnawing sense of inferiority and not been able to identify its source? Have you become aware that some people receive more respect than others? Cultural experiences vary widely, and so will your observations. Take some time to think, reflect, and pray. Write down your impressions. There may be an "Ah-ha," "revelational" moment awaiting you!

CHAPTER THREE: PATRIARCHY—ROOTS AND INFLUENCE

As I thought about the women and men I interviewed during this project, I began to think the struggle between women and men was a result of the residue of patriarchy. However, upon closer examination, it became evident that the views expressed in the interviews reflect another cultural reality of the past thirty years. Feminism had shaped a culture sensitized to gender issues, including the place of women in the church. The pendulum effect had to be considered. We will look at these two cultural and political factors which both help and hinder women in leadership among evangelical Christians. This chapter considers the participants' perspectives on patriarchy and includes a biblical perspective on the value of the patriarchs.

Because we recognize the importance of patriarchs in the biblical story, we may view today's patriarchy as a logical extension of Old Testament patriarchy. Personally, I found researching this section to be the most challenging of the entire study. To say patriarchy as male privilege (Hancock, 1999, March, p. 31) is ingrained in society is one thing. To recognize that it is ingrained in me is something quite different. Slowly over a period of more than a decade, with more intense introspection the past three years, I have recognized the inveterate nature of patriarchy in my personal, religious, and cultural experience. I have asked myself tough questions. The process, while valuable, has been laborious and sometimes painful.

Patriarchy with its rich roots in scripture tends to degenerate toward a subtle sense of male superiority (Cooper, 1998, p. 32) at best and male dominance (Morgan, 1997, p. 226), sexism (Ezell, 1998, p. 17), and abuse (Perriman, 1998, p. 229) at worst. In addition to the

term patriarchy, "Patriarchalism and androcentrism, the dual dynamics of sexism, have cooperated," according to Cooper, "not only to make women subordinate, but also to *marginalize* them" (1998, p. 31).

The feminist movement reacts and responds to the negative aspects of patriarchy, as we will see in the next chapter. What I share here are highlights of my research as discovered during the dialogues in the interviews.

Patriarchy: A Cultural Reality

I believe that women have a mission today. Men have kept them out of public life and have built up our Western technical civilization without them—a masculine society, ordered entirely in accordance with masculine values, and tragically lacking the contribution women could make. (Tournier, 1981, p. 1)

A "masculine society," as Tournier (1981, p. 1) puts it, recognizes the reality that we live in a world of patriarchy. Most recently, the term has been brought to light by feminists who have identified patriarchy as a "tool of domination in which groups are taught that certain powers and privileges are the natural prerogatives of some people," a notion which is "deeply embedded in society and defended as natural" (Bunch, 1990, p. 50). Inevitably, the cultural impact of feminism's challenge to patriarchy prompted evangelical Christians to examine their beliefs. Not surprisingly, many were driven "back to the Bible" searching for a sense of direction in this critical crossroads. Facing the question of whether patriarchy was valid in the church, evangelicals have joined the cultural dialogue.

This issue of patriarchy emerged in most of the interviews I conducted, often accompanied by a sense of discomfort or dis-ease. Implied in expressions like "male leadership," "headship," or "male authority," the notion of patriarchy *is* embedded in evangelical Christianity. Surprisingly, the term patriarchy as such was only mentioned in three conversations. One woman who has held multiple leadership roles across Canada and in

several countries overseas pinpointed the difficulty discussing this issue. We were talking about some of the difficulties she has faced when I raised the question of whether men might help to pave the way for her and other women called to leadership. Teresa responded.

Well, I've stopped for many years even really talking about the issue. I just get on with my life . . . I still have blocks and it's still something you come across, but it's not a battle I choose to fight. I've got plenty of other things I'm doing.

Over time Teresa has chosen to avoid "some situations where it is an issue." She continues her active ministry in ways that allow her to work around this obstacle. Even though initially she wanted to address her concerns, she realized, "It's the rare man, or woman, that is willing to talk openly about these issues." With resignation in her voice, Teresa told me she sees no "point in trying to be an advocate," and that the issue is rarely open for discussion. She concludes that it is "probably more likely" that a man who is a recognized biblical scholar would receive a better hearing than would an equally trained woman.

Fortunately, I have found both men and women engaged in the dialogue. Since Tournier's statement in 1981 about our western, masculine society, Christians have opened wide the conversation. Recognizing the reality of male dominance globally, Van Leeuwen (1990) addressed the subject in a sociological study, calling one chapter "The Persistence of Patriarchy" (p.125). The phrase simply says it like it is, that patriarchy is persistent. Among many evangelicals there seems to be an acceptance that patriarchy, for better or for worse, is the intended way of life and there is little if anything to be done about it. It is as if, to return to an earlier metaphor, evangelical Christians are swimming in the water of patriarchy. Ironically, those same people readily admit other cultural adjustments are advancements of the gospel (for example, the development of a democratic society).

What, then, is patriarchy? How can we as Christians view patriarchy? Before we explore these questions, pause to think.

Pause for Reflection

What can we learn from Teresa's approach? Why do you think this woman long ago gave up trying to get men, women, and organizations to recognize her gifts and abilities? She has chosen to find a place and a people among whom she can simply live out her calling. Many would say, "Bravo!" Others would say she has no business holding positions of leadership and that her leadership is an act of a rebellious spirit. Still others would sadly observe the loss of the people she chose to leave in order to fulfill her calling. You may have other observations.

In addition, she believes a man, and not just any man but a recognized authority, would receive a better hearing than a woman, whether or not she is a recognized scholar. What do you think of this observation on her part? As you think about Teresa's comments and your own reflections, make a few notes in your journal.

What is Patriarchy?

As an English teacher, I often refer students to a dictionary. Reluctant students frequently reply, "I know what it means, but I can't put it into words." Now, it was my turn. Most often I refer to my college dictionary. But for really in depth definitions, I occasionally go the Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary purchased by my husband's father when it was new in 1946. About six inches thick, it has its own home on a small table in the den. A quick search revealed several related words: patriarch, patriarchal, patriarchism, and finally patriarchy. The first term "patriarch" is specifically related to the individual:

the father and ruler of a family; one who governs by paternal right; usually applied to the progenitors of the Israelites, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the sons of Jacob, and to the heads of families before the flood; as, the antediluvian patriarchs. (*Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*, 1946)

Patriarchy, then, is simply the "jurisdiction of a patriarch" (*Webster's*, 1946).

These definitions helped, but I decided to check a more current dictionary. Although the concept and practice of patriarchy have been around for thousands of years, the social

climate of the past thirty years has seen increased use of the term. It has become an emotionally laden word. Often it is used with negative modifiers, resulting in phrases like "patriarchal oppression." In an attempt to find a more contemporary understanding, I kept looking.

As a result of my word search, two observations emerged. First, the meaning of the term (like many in our language) has indeed changed over time. While the 1946 dictionary defined patriarchy as "the jurisdiction of a patriarch," the 1967 version included "government by men." The first meaning, that of "father and ruler of family or tribe," has been in use since c1175 (Mills, 1989, p. 147). A subtle shift is noted in the 1632 definition of patriarchy, "defined as: 'Social organisation marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family both in domestic and religious functions, the legal dependence of the wife or wives and children, and reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line'" (Mills, p. 149). To say "marked by supremacy" indicates a difference in quality or equality between the husband/father and the wife/mother. Legally, women have been dependent on men for centuries, including the period of the New Testament (Evans, 1983, p. 120). Evans argues that one interpretation of woman as the "weaker partner" (I Peter 3:7) may be her legal status; thus, "a Christian husband was to regard his wife not in terms of her legal position, which was undoubtedly weaker than his, but rather in terms of her spiritual position, which was not" (p. 120). Equal status legally is a relatively recent fact. The currently expressed negative responses to patriarchy seem to arise at the point of an innate understanding of men as somehow "supreme." Feminist writings refer to "sexist oppression" (hooks, 1984, p. 43) as the result of universal patriarchy.

Patriarchy: A Christian Perspective

Another observation about patriarchy is that the term contains two different meanings, one for the relationship of the father to the family, and the other for the relationship of men to the society. When we tease apart these meanings, we are able to begin to see the basis of the difficult issue of women in leadership more clearly. The difference, as pointed out by Van Leeuwen (1990), is that between the private and public domains (pp. 128-131). Is there a difference between the role of a man in the home in his relationship with his wife, and the role of a man as a person in relationship to society as a whole? We then need to ask, what is the relationship between the family, the society, and the church? While patriarchy originally dealt with the family or tribe, the term now has come to mean "the social system enshrining male privilege" (Hancock, 1999, Sept.-Oct., p. 31). Haubert (1993) notes that from "headship" (which we have said is related to the perpetuation of patriarchy) the church "fosters an erroneous assumption that there is something inherently inferior about women" (p. 39).

I have come to believe that the lasting value of patriarchy is the recognition of God as not only as our Creator, which can be interpreted as distant and impersonal, but also as "Our Father." It is notable that when the earliest Christians, Jesus' own disciples, asked him how to pray, he taught them to call God "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). In Matthew's gospel, the instruction is set in the larger context of what we call the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes. Jesus instructs his disciples that peacemakers will be called "sons of God" (5:9) and later says, "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). He was teaching them implicitly that their father was God, not Abraham. The shift, though on the surface subtle, was most significant.

It is instructive for us to know that Matthew's gospel was written specifically to the Jews. It was fundamental that the Jews themselves understood that this Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. And, it was part of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be born a Jew, a descendant of David, a son of Abraham. The Fatherhood of God was particularly, uniquely important in the life of Jesus as "the only begotten son of God" (John 3:16). The rest of us are adopted as sons (Rom. 8:15-17). I say "sons" advisedly here because often the scripture refers to all believers as "sons" in the inclusive, generic sense that was both understood as inclusive and also culturally acceptable until the past few years. Haubert (1993) points out a significant fact in New Testament theology:

Galatians 3:26 begins with Paul's declaration, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." . . . Sonship is expressive of the Godward relationship experienced by all believers, female and male. Thus Paul identifies the status of believers, a status equally shared by all who are in Christ. (p. 31)

The Jews of the first century understood that the firstborn male would be the heir. Spiritually, each of us is considered in that position, "co-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). This notion is echoed when Peter refers to the Christian husband and wife as "joint-heirs" (I Peter 3:7), acknowledging the woman's full religious equality with man (Evans, 1983, p. 120).

Pause for Reflection

Bible translators are improving our understanding of the text by using inclusive language where it is intended in the original languages. Do you think "sons" should be changed to "children" or "sons and daughters"? What do you think is the significance of calling each of us "sons"? Are women, "enough" like Jesus to be called by him "sons"? Does this terminology contribute to the problem we now face? By using the term "sons" biblical writers continued the Old Testament notion of inheritance. How does the use of the term "son" for a male or female believer line up with the idea of spiritual heritage?

For Christians, this differentiation between patriarchy as a type to reveal God as father and patriarchy as "institutionalized male supremacy" (French, 1992, p. 16) is crucial.³ We are faced with the question of whether there is a created ontological distinction that somehow causes men to be "supreme" over women, thus giving men a position of privilege intended by God. We will address this question in a later section. For now, however, we will listen to how the persistence of patriarchy has influenced the life of one of the women who participated in this study.

The persistence of patriarchy in our society has resulted in a deep sense of superiority of men and inferiority of women. While the secular cultural debate rages on in socio-economic and political realms, the debate in Christian circles is no less significant for women. During the interview introduced earlier in our discussion on culture, the young woman named Alicia groped to find words to express her sense of frustration regarding patriarchy in both society and in the church:

I had been so encased in my understanding that women were in an inferior position, and that's just the way it was, that I couldn't even really conceive that there was anything legitimate about another perspective on the whole situation. And so what I'm talking about, this inferiority, has to do with decision-making.

Alicia's experience was very typical of the women I interviewed. She was the most articulate about her experience, possibly because she is the closest to this discovery-revelation in terms of time lapsed between the discovery and the interview. She recognized the subtleties inherent in the current discussion about women and the cultural reality of patriarchy. Whatever patriarchy's original benefits, we can see the shift over time has resulted

³ French asserts "Men's need to dominate women may be based on their own sense of marginality or emptiness; we do not know its root, and men are making no effort to discover it" (1992, p. 19). Among the Christian authors mentioned in this study, some believe male domination is rooted in the Fall (Van Leeuwen, 1990).

in the exclusion of women from decision-making arenas because of the belief that they need a male "covering."

Alicia's struggle with this issue in her life had gone on with some intensity for several years. As we continued talking, she described a particular incident one evening during which her thinking changed in a kind of an "ah-ha" moment.

So, what happened for me that night in studying had to do with that covering. It finally broke through to me that maybe there was something prejudicing [my understanding], and just incredibly subtle.

That "something prejudicing" men and women, as articulated by Alicia, is the underlying assumption of patriarchy as male privilege. The question is, do men have privilege for Christian leadership and decision-making that is essentially different than for women? In a moment, Alicia recognized her own involvement.

I was buying into something...Of course, we use the masculine pronouns—and I would have told you that had nothing to do with gender issues, but I think that it was just one of those ... very subversive blocks in this kind of foundation of male superiority.

As my conversation with Alicia continued, I asked her to explain a bit further her new-found understanding of being "covered." This is a notion at the heart of the traditional view. As we learned in the previous chapter, Alicia discovered the depths of her own traditional upbringing had left her with a sense of inferiority. Her new perspective requires that she have "the responsibility of being a person." Alicia's culture had taught her that as a woman she was to expect men to remain in "kind of a parent role and we are in some way in a child role." Her new revelation caused her to see that it is not "possible to be an adult and have someone 'cover' you in that way. I would have told you five years ago, or six years ago, that of course that's possible. And now I think that there's just something very subtly wrong with that." What is wrong, according to Alicia, is that having a male covering prevents women

from "standing up independently in the fullness of personhood . . . where I believe we have to be in Christ before we are in true, real relationship with other people."

As we consider a Christian perspective on patriarchy, two biblical metaphors come to mind. First, the metaphor of marriage (Eph. 5) compares the relationship of a husband and wife to the love of Christ and the church. This metaphor is intended to show us the kind and quality of love Christ has for his bride, the church. Second, the metaphor mentioned earlier that as believers we are all "sons." This metaphor eliminates the possibility of differentiation by gender, pointing rather to our equal status as siblings. When we change the metaphor, we change the perspective. Perhaps we as Christians need to change our focus from the first to the second metaphor. As Morgan (1997) states, "We use metaphor whenever we attempt to understand one element of experience in terms of another" (p. 4). The benefit of any metaphor is that it helps us to see relationships between the two objects compared. The problem, conversely, is that the metaphor prevents us from seeing other aspects. "Metaphor is inherently paradoxical. It can create powerful insights that also become distortions, as the way of seeing created through a metaphor becomes a way of not seeing" (Morgan, 1997, p. 5).

To view our relationship as men and women only through the metaphor of marriage limits our ability to see other dimensions of great biblical truth. To view patriarchy as requiring a male covering prevents us from seeing God as father and us as children with equal standing⁴ before him. Alicia, for instance, introduced another metaphor of the family, that of parent and child. The tendency of patriarchy is to place men in the role of parent and women

⁴ Implicit in patriarchy is that "male children are valued over female children" (Hancock, 1999, Sept.-Oct., p. 32). The media has brought to our attention that in some cultures female babies are aborted and abandoned in larger numbers than are males. While these facts are abhorrent, we need to allow ourselves to think through the foundational presuppositions that would encourage such behavior and dare to face the implications for our own cultural experience.

in the role of children. This inequality should signal us that something is wrong with our understanding. Through a community of people who lived out mutual respect and allowed her the room to think and to study and to live, Alicia experienced what she considers insight from God. That experiential, transformational knowledge has begun to change the way Alicia views herself and others, and the way she takes ownership for the decisions in her life.

Pause for Reflection

This is our second consideration of Alicia's observations. What do you think about her observation regarding the covering of a man over a woman for protection? For decision-making? What do you think about her realization that she cannot be a "full person" and live responsibly while "under" another person? Do you think she is rebelling against God's plan? Do you think she is discovering more fully who she is before God? Do you agree with Alicia that women are treated as children by some men? If you are a woman, how does that make you feel? If you are a man, how does that make you feel? What about the notion of two different metaphors? As you evaluate your own perspective, record your thoughts.

Our Patriarchal Past

While society at large has a vague sense that male superiority is rooted in the unabated male ego, Christians, as I have indicated, point to the origin of patriarchy as growing out of the Old Testament. As I talked with Louis about this issue, he commented, "Throughout history and from our patriarchal past, men have just automatically felt superior because they have exercised this power and authority." I asked him where the notion of male superiority came from. "Is it 'patriarchal past,'" I asked, "and something else now, or are we still living in patriarchy?" Louis' response brings insight:

Well, insomuch as the Bible was written in patriarchal culture and rooted in the Hebraic tradition, we tend to transfer a lot of those cultural situations to today. I don't think we have to. But even in the Old Testament there were a lot of women who exercised leadership Now it probably isn't the norm in the Old Testament, and it was a patriarchal society, and in Jesus' day it was, too. *But Jesus fought to reverse that* [italics added].

What was God doing in both the Old and New Testaments? What bearing does it have for us today? God used the predominant social organization of the day to call out a man, Abraham, and create a people to demonstrate to the world who God is. Was this a cultural fluke, a mistake in God's economy of time? Of course not. We then must ask, what is God's purpose in working through patriarchs? Did God actually establish patriarchs or did God deal with individuals who, in a patriarchal society, were heads of their extended families?

First, God was starting all over again. After his good creation came the tragic results of the fall and the degeneration of humankind (Genesis 1-11), including hierarchy which replaced God's intention of supplementarity (Grenz, 2000, p. 290). The early chapters of the Bible tell a story mixed with deplorable decadence and occasional righteousness. God's covenant with Abram (Gen. 12:1-3) establishes a new "family line" while maintaining genealogical connections with Noah, Adam, and God. The Matthew 1 and Luke 3 records are valuable demonstrations of family ties linking Jesus with this family line.

God's purpose was not only to make Abraham (his name change is recorded in Gen. 17:5) a father, but also to become a father to Abraham. The covenant is repeated in Genesis 17:1-2: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'" The Hebrew word translated here as God Almighty is the word El Shaddai, "the Father-Mother God" (Chambers, 1935, p. 19). This revelation of God is particularly significant in this study because of what it tells us as men and women about the nature of God. While "El" means might or power, "Shaddai" denotes a particular kind of power,

not of violence, but of all-bountifulness. "Shaddai" primarily means "breasted," being formed directly from the Hebrew word Shad, that is, "the breast." or, more exactly, a "woman's breast." . . . meaning "The Pourer or Shedder forth," that is, of blessings, temporal and spiritual. (Arthur, 1977, p. 45-46)

In the process of calling Abraham, God the creator was more intimately revealed as divine parent, the Father-Mother God, who had given Abraham life and would now bless him to become a blessing for others. By being all-sufficient El Shaddai, God would teach Abraham how to become a father who could then become a blessing to his own children and to future generations. It is no small miracle to note that El Shaddai included the aging wife Sarah in the promise. Although she was past the age, God restored her body to be not barren but fruitful. The revelation of "the breasted one" is particularly meaningful for every woman who has nursed a child. The biblical patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the sons of Joseph, and David) are real, historical persons. Their significance, however, is not merely in their historic contributions, but in their human manifestations of the divine fatherhood (parenthood) of God.⁵

The Bible contains other stories of barren women whom God blessed with children. Read the amazing accounts of Hannah (I Samuel 1 and 2) and Elizabeth (Luke 1). These women, though barren, received children. The great prophet Samuel was born to Hannah; John the Baptizer is Elizabeth's son. Both of these men began life with the knowledge from birth that they were gifts of God.

Patriarchy in a biblical setting, then, is not so much about patriarchs exercising familial or social power as it is about relationship, identity, and inheritance. While in a human

sense a parent must be either father or mother, in a spiritual sense. God is the All-sufficient one, able to give (paternal) and nourish (maternal) life.

Pause for Reflection

Read the account of God's relationship with Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12-18. Then, read Paul's commentary in Galatians 5:30-31 and the roll-call of the faithful in Hebrews 11:8-12. Notice that although the family line is traced through the male, the Bible is careful to record the significant role of both husband and wife in this Covenant of Promise.

Patriarchy: Reversed in the New Covenant

As Christians, we look at all of scripture through the filter of the life of Jesus. Louis observed that Jesus sought to reverse patriarchy in his society. What did Jesus do to reverse the patriarchy of his day? Two things, I believe. First, his bold teaching to the Jewish leaders clearly states that they are to affirm God as their father, not Abraham. While their physical heritage is traced to Abraham, their spiritual lives are to be born of God. The person who is a descendent of Abraham is one who acknowledges God as Father (John 8: 31-39) regardless of physical heritage. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians about this special relationship (Gal. 3:6-9). The new covenant, relationship with God through Jesus, supersedes the earlier covenant. The physical seed of Abraham that God promised to be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth is fulfilled in Christ Jesus through the virgin birth. Every individual must be born again, Jesus explained to the Jewish Nicodemus (John 3: 1-21), or born of spirit, in order to become part of God's family. When one is born again, he or she is invited to call on God as "*Abba*, Father" (Rom. 8:15).

⁵ Authors vary in their understanding of "El Shaddai." Reimann (1992) omitted the reference to Father-Mother God mentioned in Chambers' (1935) classic devotional work. Cooper (1998) discounts the term as one "inclusivists are fond of claiming" (p. 84) and includes a lengthy, documented explanation of his understanding. To get a feel for the dialogue around this particular name of God, I suggest reading the explanations provided both by Arthur (1977, pp. 43-48) and Cooper (pp. 84-88).

The second way Jesus fought to reverse patriarchy was through his very life. I have often wondered, especially as a Christian woman, why Jesus, God in human flesh, chose not to marry. And, why did God choose to be incarnate in a male body? Many believe it is because the primary image of God is male. Others point to the need for a Jewish religion to have a male leader, who then chose twelve apostles to reflect the twelve patriarchs (a reference to the sons of Joseph who became the tribal leaders). In his discussion on the maleness of Jesus, Grenz (1995) asserts

The liberating work of the male Jesus occurred in the context of the male-female roles within the orders of human society. The Genesis creation narratives teach that in the beginning God created male and female to live in egalitarian mutuality. Thereby humans could reflect the image of the triune God. In the Fall, mutuality was replaced by hierarchy (see Gen. 3:16).

Into this situation Jesus brought a new paradigm. Our Lord liberated men and women from their bondage to the social orders that violate God's intention for human life-in-community. Jesus freed males from the role of domination that belongs to the fallen world, in order that they can be truly male. On behalf of women Jesus acted as the model human standing against the patriarchal system, bringing women into the new order where sex distinctions no longer determine rank and worth. (p. 209)

Jesus did and does indeed free men and women.

In addition, I suggest that Jesus came as Jewish male and did not marry in order to end the physical lineage of the Israelites and so complete the Abrahamic covenant. Paul the Apostle and New Testament theologian points to the significance of the patriarchs in the formation of the nation of Israel who "are loved on account of the patriarchs" (Rom. 11:28). The position of the patriarch, like the patriarchal era, though foundational, is now past. The valued lesson is that each of us should recognize God as our Father. The drama of the seed is the story of God our Father promulgating a "chosen" people, through whom to reveal himself to the world. Would the promised seed of Abraham survive the conflicts of the Old

Testament? Would the God of promise prove faithful? Graeme Goldsworthy (1994) explains, "the people of God is [*sic*] essentially the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob" (p.89). His ultimate revelation is Jesus, God Incarnate, born of the Spirit and a woman.⁶ No human father participated in the birth of Jesus. Here is the claim of the doctrine of Virgin Birth. Rather than arguing for patriarchy, this very act leads to the first argument against patriarchy. This is why we must read carefully Jesus' teaching on the family: his family are those born of the spirit. Hermeneutic principles require that we give primacy to Jesus' instruction.

This "drama of the seed" is a theme picked up in Groothuis' (1994) discussion of patriarchy in which she says that for centuries men thought the male seed alone resulted in new life:

Fathers . . . have the power of the seed, which is the power to beget life by depositing that seed in another . . . a woman's role in reproduction was merely to provide good "soil" in which the male seed could be "planted." The mother's equal genetic contribution to new human life was not acknowledged. (pp.68-69)

We now know, of course, that the woman's contribution is much more significant than that! But, we can observe something very powerful here. If we understand the seed in another metaphorical sense as the seed of the farmer, we can see fuller implications of the parable of the seed Jesus told about the kingdom of God (Luke 8:4-18). In this story, Jesus likened the seed to the Word of God. Whether the seed grew depended on the condition of the soil, not of the seed. So it is with the word of God. Even in this comparison, the seed is not independent

⁶ The story of the virgin birth is one of the central miracles of scripture. Just as no human male was involved genetically in the incarnation of Jesus, so, I believe, neither was a female. Modern medicine has demonstrated that a surrogate mother can provide a "home" for a baby other than her own. This is the role of Mary, and her gift is no small matter. Read her story in Luke 1:26-38.

of the soil, as man and woman are not independent of one another (I Cor. 10:11). God seems determined to convince us of our interdependence.

While evangelical Christians do not go so far as to worship Mary the mother of Jesus, we do recognize that God ushered his son into the world through a miraculous blend of extraordinary events through the channel of ordinary human beings. And what of Joseph? He, too, received an angelic message, and is recorded as the "supposed father of Jesus" (Luke 3:23) for the purposes of Jewish lineage. In obedience to God, he took a position which would forever find him in a supportive role (Hull, 1987, p.145).

Pause for Reflection

Read again the accounts of the birth of Jesus. Think about the cultural and social implications of Mary and Joseph's involvement in the Incarnation. How does their obedience to God demonstrate their crossroads experience, to step out of culture and into God's story? What can we learn from them about women in leadership?

What does this mean for today?

I think many of us do not know what to make of patriarchy. We recognize the root word as a significant connection to our Judeo/Christian faith. At the same time, however, we sense the ways in which patriarchy results in male privilege or supposed superiority and contributes to a corresponding devaluing of women.

Lest you think I am throwing out the patriarchal baby with the bath water, I will make two observations. Patriarchy was useful to the plan of God. As Louis said earlier, patriarchy is very much a part of our past. In trying to determine the role and value of patriarchy for our day, we will benefit by placing the biblical period of patriarchy where it belongs—in the past. While Christians rightly claim that patriarchs and patriarchy are a part of our historical, biblical heritage, we must also remember that the prophets spoke against abuses of power.

We find a New Testament parallel in that Paul did not denounce slavery as an unjust form of social practice, but he taught the gospel in such a way as to subvert slavery. It took centuries to eradicate slavery!

In a fascinating discussion on patriarchalism, Hull (1987) notes

There is no question but that Scripture records a patriarchal society. The crucial questions are: Is patriarchy a true record of a false idea? Is male domination a true idea, or is it simply an account of fallen man's discrimination against a fellow human being, woman? Interestingly we have no problem answering that set of questions in the negative if we substitute racism or classism for sexism . . . Yet many persons seem to accept patriarchy, with its resulting discrimination against women, as a "given," without asking our crucial question: Does the fact that Scripture records patriarchy teach that it is God's plan for society? (p. 83)

Hull's final question might be extended to ask "for society for all time?" While patriarchy certainly served a purpose for a season, it gave way biblically to the monarchy, foreshadowing Christ as King, and the prophetic kingdom, in which the prophets "restate the promise of the Kingdom as something that will be fulfilled in the future" (Goldsworthy, 1994, pp. 46-47). With the birth of Jesus, the promises of the Old Covenant were fulfilled, the Father's promised Son and instrument of blessing was born. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, further promises were fulfilled, including the oft quoted prophecy of Joel 2:28, "I will pour my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." (See also Acts 2: 17.) It seems to me that in order to recognize the biblical value of patriarchy, we need to let go of the notion that it is a continuing cultural mandate. We can still affirm its unique role in the activity of God, the father, who acted in history by giving his son as our Saviour, Jesus, through whom we can be adopted as sons, or perhaps more accurately, as children (Rom. 8:16).

Goldsworthy (1994) observes

Jesus Christ is the head of the new race. All who are united to him are members of that race, but only because he is that race. Thus whoever is "in Christ" is a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17), that is, he belongs to the new order of which Christ is head. (p. 90)

It is in this sense that Jesus is the head of the church, the "fountainhead of a new company" (Grenz, 2000, p. 286). As head, Jesus taught his disciples that their citizenship in his kingdom demanded a loose coupling between a person's citizenship in this world and human relationships. Jesus' primary relationship was with God, and his instructions for living came exclusively from his Heavenly Father (John 5:19). His earthly family, while important, was always understood to be subsumed by his relationship to God (Luke 2:49). His family were "those who do the will of the Father" (Matt. 12:46-50) and not restricted to members of his physical family. While a fallen world will continue to be fractured, only as children of God, siblings if you will, will we discover the equality of relationship which brings mutual dignity, respect, and honour of men for women and women for men. The dialogue about patriarchy needs to be opened and extended. Women need to be encouraged to take responsibility for their part in reflecting the image of God, and men need to humbly renounce their privileged position in society for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Even as I reflect upon my readings and interviews, I am aware that the theological truths are not new. They are timely, however, because the implications of an improper understanding of patriarchy have resulted in the exclusion of Christian women from positions of leadership and decision-making in both the home and church. One interview I conducted was with Carl, an ordained minister and a teacher in Western Canada. We were talking about the practical exclusion of women in ministry among evangelicals when Carl acknowledged "there has been more verbal gain than there has been actual gain And I think in part the

reason is because even though biblically and theologically that battle is over, culturally and importantly perhaps sociologically-psychologically, it isn't."

The battle is being waged over leadership among evangelical Christian church members where there is a predominance of male clergy even though many denominations have gone on record affirming women in ministry at all levels. Carl's point is that while we may come to recognize the male-preferential patriarchal systems as a part of our past, we have continued patriarchal practices—culturally and psychologically—specifically in our homes and churches.

Pause for Reflection

If you are unfamiliar with God's covenant with Abraham, read Genesis 12: 1-7. John 3 includes both the story of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus and the famous words, "You must be born again." In Galatians 3:5-9, Paul explains the "seed of Abraham." Romans 8:15 affirms our "spirit of adoption." Jot down your discoveries, then consider the following questions for personal reflection: What is your current understanding of "patriarchy"? What aspects of this chapter are new to you? What aspects of this chapter do you agree with? Disagree? As Alicia explained her revelation about the inferiority of women, how did you respond? Do you think women are the equals of men in every respect? How does your response affect the roles of women in Christian leadership?

Think about additional questions or responses you have about patriarchy, then record them in your journal. You may want to share this information in your study group.

For more reading on patriarchy, I recommend *Women Caught in the Conflict* (Groothuis, 1984), *Equal to Serve* (Hull, 1987), and *Women as Risk-Takers for God* (Lutz, 1997).

Some assert that patriarchy as a system of male privilege has caused untold damage, including incidents recorded in the Old Testament. How patriarchy has influenced the evangelical Christian community will be evident in subsequent sections of this study. But to understand the patriarch as a type of God as Father is invaluable.

In the last book of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi presents the word of the Lord revealed for his day. When read from the viewpoint of God as Father, the mood of the book is heart-rending. A broken-hearted father laments at the ways of his children. God,

through Malachi, says, "I have loved you A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me?" (Mal. 1:2, 6) Ever the seeking Father, God promises to send another prophet who will "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4: 6). We see the fulfillment of this prophecy in the coming of John the Baptist, the last prophet, who introduced Jesus to his earthly ministry (Luke 1: 17).

Where are we in the crossroads? We are ready to turn our attention to the influence of feminism, particularly biblical feminism, on women in church leadership.

CHAPTER FOUR: FEMINISM—A RECURRING REALITY

The role of women in the evangelical Christian church is one of the pivotal questions being raised today. Many suggest that patriarchy is God's intention and that to perpetuate exclusively male leadership is to walk in the biblical story. Growing numbers of biblical scholars disagree. In a seminar I attended for Christian teachers, Goheen (2000) challenged us regarding culture: "If we share the whole gospel of Jesus Christ with our culture, except in the one area of cultural need, then we have not shared the gospel." I have become convinced that evangelical Christians must come to grips with the question of whether patriarchy is to be continued as the accepted basis for our practice. Feminists, secular and biblical, have got our attention. In this chapter, we will hear some of their concerns.

Considered one of the most visible and pervasive cultural and political forces of the past thirty-plus years, feminism continues to influence evangelical Christians. I expected the topic to surface during the interviews, and it did. I place it here the study because it emerges in our culture partly in response to the perceived excesses and abuses of patriarchy. Like the section on patriarchy, this piece proved difficult for me to research and to write. My chief struggle lay in deciding whether the feminist movement was "of God." Because I believe God is the God of history, I entered this study asking, what does the feminist movement reveal about God? About women? About the church?

I listened carefully to the participants and reflected much about their comments and read related literature. The women in the study have given a great deal of thought to feminism, though none of them claims to be a feminist. During my research I began to

understand why: the terms *feminism* and *feminist* are so loaded emotionally that the women wanted to avoid the terms. In addition, the terms carry such varied meanings as to cause confusion. This chapter will shed some light on the spectrum of meanings of feminism, both secular feminism and evangelical or biblical feminism. We will hear from the women who set the stage for our discussion of feminism in evangelical Christianity. Next, we listen to the men as they analyze feminism. I conclude this chapter with a response to feminism based on my observations and the research I have done. After this examination, I hope you will reflect on your understanding of feminism, its influence on church practices, and to consider afresh your position on women in Christian leadership.

What is feminism?

Getting at one definition of feminism is hard as definitions abound. Secular definitions of feminism, while varied, contain common elements. In this brief section, I will attempt to differentiate between secular feminism and evangelical feminism.

To begin with a dictionary definition, I again consulted *Webster's New World Dictionary*. Simply stated, feminism is "the theory that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men, or the movement to win these" (1967, p. 276). Most of us are aware of this general meaning of feminism, but I wanted to understand the movement from a feminist perspective. Feminists themselves venture descriptions and definitions of the movement, adding a fuller dimension to the meaning. Secular definitions allude to the notion that feminism is a way of approaching life and politics, recognizing the value of a unique perspective of women. A central theme is the understanding that women have been oppressed by men. One feminist writer argues further that "feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression directs our attention to systems of domination and the

interrelatedness of sex, race and class oppression" (hooks, 1984, p. 31). This definition encourages observers to look past the oppression of women to other oppressed groups. Others point to the benefits of the movement, for example, feminist theory encourages women to develop "as learners and claim an education that relates to their agendas" (Maher & Tetreault, 1996, p. 148). This observation stems from the earlier recognition of a paradigm shift "from a perspective that views men as the norm to one that opens up the possibility of seeing the world through women's eyes" (Maher & Tetreault, p. 150, citing Carol Gilligan, 1982). By the time they presented their study, Maher & Tetreault had observed feminisms and feminist theory for some time and noted a "current backlash against feminism" (p. 168).

Still there is more. Is feminism simply a way of viewing life, with women's perspectives in mind? Not quite. Feminism challenges each woman and man to develop individual personhood and autonomy, struggling against forms of domination, including patriarchy, "a tool of domination in which groups are taught that certain powers and privileges are the natural prerogatives of some people" (Bunch, 1990, p. 50).

We in the evangelical church might ask, are we in such a system of domination? This cursory exploration of an understanding of secular feminism provides several standards by which we might examine religious practices to determine whether they are in fact oppressive or lead to the exclusion of women generally and of women in leadership particularly.

Considering the breadth of feminist thought, it is evident that we as evangelicals need to clarify our terms before we get into a position of arguing for or against "feminism." Feminism has influenced our culture including evangelicalism. Disapproval of feminism by some evangelicals is well known among us. After all, our Christian roots, as we have said, run deep in our patriarchal past. I was interested to note that feminism was called the first

historic movement "ever to challenge patriarchy per se" (French, 1992, p. 17). The stage is set for a conflict between feminism and traditional evangelicalism.

While I was aware of the conflict, I was also aware of some of the advances achieved by and for women the past three decades among evangelical Christians. There seemed to be ambivalence among Christian women I knew about feminism. Secular definitions, while helpful, did not get at the heart of the question for me as a Christian. I was interested in achieving all that God called me to be and to do, but that is essentially different from "self-determinism." Conversations with other women and men through the years had convinced me that while many Christian women wanted respect and an opportunity to serve fully, they did not want a personal independence to the exclusion of marriage and family. Where, then, was the source of conflict regarding women in the church?

My reading led me to discover several Christian authors describing themselves as biblical feminists. Biblical or Christian feminists point to the biblical story of creation of humankind to establish the equality (not sameness) of men and women in essence and in function. Many Christians take issue with secular definitions of feminism, particularly those aspects that in their view overstate the oppressive nature of patriarchy and those that urge women to live in ways harmful to families and children. But others affirm the central feminist focus on women being regarded as equal persons with men. Van Leeuwen (1990) calls attention to lack of justice apparent in the unequal treatment of men and women in Christian settings, noting

Many Christians, especially women, feel that if the Bible gives husbands a nonreciprocal authority over their wives or forbids women to hold certain offices in the church, any accompanying talk about "spiritual equality" or "equality in Christ" is at best meaningless, at worst hypocritical. (p. 23)

Van Leeuwen (1990) ventures a definition for a Christian feminist as "a person of either sex who sees women and men as *equally* saved, *equally* Spirit-filled and *equally* sent" (1990, p. 36). Recognition of women as fully human, alongside men, as partners in the human experience constitutes the most basic premise of Christian feminism.

From there, however, perceptions diverge. Groothuis (1994) has done a wonderful job of delineating the "Varieties of Feminist Thought" in a chapter by that name. What I offer is cursory at best and shallow at worst. I recommend (if your interest has peaked) reading her lengthier explanation. Rather than summarize her chapter, I have condensed her explanation in the form of a chart. Perhaps it will be helpful. (See *Figure 1* at the end of this chapter.) By setting her work in a historical framework that explains evangelical feminism as a "two-century tradition" (p. 49), Groothuis provides valuable insight for those who think the current traditional evangelicalism is the dog being wagged by the tail of modern feminism. Ironically, according to Groothuis, feminism has been around as long as "traditionalism" which saw its beginnings in a "newly industrialized nineteenth-century society in response to social conditions that prevailed at the time" (p. 63). She asks, "Which, then, can best claim to be traditional—traditionalism or evangelical feminism? More to the point, which tradition is based on the ideas of secular society and which is based on biblical principles?" (p. 63). How's that for a provocative question? I join Groothuis in her conclusion that biblical principles point toward equality for women and men.

The Women Speak: Setting the Stage for Feminism.

With this as a backdrop, we will turn our attention to some of the participants' comments as they relate to feminism.

Roberta: Avoiding the Feminist Label

One interview struck me as peculiar yet insightful. My conversation with Roberta had been fascinating. I found her enthusiasm for ministry stimulating. But something in her intensity disturbed me. I soon discovered that as she had pursued her calling into pastoral ministry, she began a struggle with opposition because she was a woman.

The first struggle was what seemed to be the inner voice, the inner witness of God calling me to do something that violated my understanding of what was written [and it] caused an inner conflict. That sent me on a search to see whether in fact the conflict existed or whether in fact it was my perception of the conflict.

Her "struggle" was that she believed God was calling her into the pastorate; however, her understanding at that point was that the pastorate was open only to men. This conflict sent her on a search that was to last for many years. In the process she attended seminary, graduated, was ordained to pastoral ministries, and has served in many capacities, including a theology teacher. She is, by the way, also a wife and mother.⁷

As I listened to Roberta, I was struck with her sense of confidence and competence. She had obviously given much consideration to the role of women in Christian leadership. I wanted to know whether she considered herself a feminist, so I asked. "Are you a Christian feminist? Do you support feminist thinking?" I was frankly surprised by Roberta's response:

I avoid using the word, because I don't want to be identified with some of the extremities of the movement. I don't want to be seen to be trying to push a particular dialogue because of being a feminist. I don't feel I am. I have felt myself very angry with some of the feminists. I still can. Part of that was my own problem and that is that I wasn't hearing the hurts. I was recognizing the anger. Anger is alienating. Hurt can sometimes draw out our sympathy. And I hear anger.

⁷ In a later section we explore the relationship between women and their families.

Notice that in her answer, Roberta reflects the confusion over feminism and feminist terms. Through the years she had related to many women, some of whom were very angry. As we continued to talk, Roberta explained that she had on occasion acted defensively against the anger. She admitted to being frustrated with some angry people, but "had not gotten beneath that to the hurt in those same people." In time, she has learned to listen for the deeper meanings in angry people. Based on what I have learned of her extended ministry, Roberta is an effective, compassionate minister.

Upon reflection, this fragment of conversation served as a reference point for other comments that I had heard, allowing me to mentally collect them together. The vagueness of a definition of feminism was evident in Roberta's comments. I reread pages of interview transcripts to find whether Roberta's experience shared a theme with others. Many of the women echoed the hurt and the anger mentioned by Roberta. You will hear more from them later in the study. Among my gleanings, a portion of a conversation with Frieda stands in sharp relief against Roberta's.

Frieda: Difficulty Relating to Feminism

Frieda and I were discussing the differences in women and came to a point in the conversation where the topic of a woman's choice regarding career and ministry worked its way in. The cultural influence of feminism has contributed to the acceptability of women working. Frieda notes

We all have different needs, and different talents and gifts, different goals. So it would vary all the way from someone who does not want to have a career and does not have goals outside of her home, to a woman who wants to be a CEO in a business or be a senior pastor in a church. So there's all in between, depending on personality and giftedness, just as there would be with men as well So, women must be very different.

Frieda's comment recognizes the theoretical possibility of a man choosing to stay at home, "depending on personality and giftedness." This would certainly be a departure from a traditional perspective. She observed that many women she knew experienced frustration and "some kind of resentment or bitterness that they have not been able to go as far as they wanted to" in Christian ministry. Frieda, however, has another perspective. "But to be honest, I have a little trouble relating to that. I have been able to do everything I want. So when women say they've hit the ceiling and can't get any farther, I don't know. I don't relate to it." I recognized in Frieda a desire to honour Christian women who hold a different opinion. Her opinions, like most evangelicals', are rooted in her hermeneutic of scripture. Frieda referred to church policy and biblical authority.

Our church does . . . not support having [women] senior pastors and some churches don't want women as elders. It's a complicated thing because it's a biblical interpretation, not some business/gender prejudice. It's an interpretation of the Bible—what we take as our basis in our faith. So it makes it very right or wrong, not just kind of a preference. I think there are biblical scholars, very knowledgeable, intelligent people on both sides of that issue.

As we continued to talk, Frieda said she expects the question of women in Christian leadership "will be a culturally difficult thing throughout our age." She adds, "Deep down inside of me, I suppose maybe I'm traditional," and believes "many, many leadership roles that we can have would not be controversial." But she also knows other women feel called to "controversial" tasks and some of them "resent that there are some scholars" who oppose their position. Her concern, reflecting her commitment to biblical authority, is that some sections of the scripture are being misinterpreted; she fears that "today's society tries to make (scripture) fit into our culture just because we want it to. And just because the world's movement of women in careers and leadership is going that way, that we think that in the

church it has to as well." Frieda continued to assert that "society's pressure" has shaped biblical interpretation regarding women's issues, because

thirty years ago [before] the women's issue, most evangelicals would have thought that it's not right to have women pastors at all. We've progressed from that, or regressed, whatever some may think, to women in leadership. People slowly change their views as times go on and as they hear more and more of the arguments for one way. And I think we become more and more accepting of how society does things. That does influence our interpretation of the Bible.

This is the central question for many: Is the God of the Bible calling women into leadership, or are women being misled by a secular society in a wrong direction?

Pause for Reflection

Enter these conversations. What would you say to either or both of these women? Have you experienced the hurt and anger Roberta mentioned? Are you experiencing the confusion and internal dialogue Frieda expresses? Have you come to grips with the role of the Bible in determining your own position? How might the discussion differ if a non-Christian were participating? How important are cultural influences in shaping our understanding of women's roles, particularly in light of feminism? Would you call yourself a feminist? Let this soak in a bit before continuing.

My Observations

Through these interviews I became aware of several aspects of the influence of feminism(s) in the lives of the participants. First, feminism has sent women and men back to the Bible. How we understand the biblical text is paramount for Christians. We are, to use Groothuis' (1994) expression, caught in the conflict, and we would rather be "obedient" to the Word of God than "fulfilled" in terms of personal satisfaction when the two seem to be at odds. Next, the "inner witness of God" continues to speak to women, as to men, giving specific guidance to their lives. Any resulting inner conflict must be resolved and is often a catalyst for change. For many women controversy is seen as something to be avoided. Central to the cultural point, the term "feminist" evokes an uncomfortable emotional response.

particularly because of "extremities of the movement" and actions suspected of being out of line with biblical guidelines. The relationship between culture and the Bible, while recognized as a factor, causes confusion. There is a concern that society's pressure will dilute the truth of the Bible. But as study continues, different conclusions are reached and various evangelical churches support differing positions on women in leadership. Our tendency in churches is to "rely on the experts" who, in this critical issue, disagree. Finally, how we view women "in business" is different than how we view women "in church." If we in the church adopt some features of the women's movement, have we "progressed" or "regressed"?

The Men Speak: Analyzing Feminism

Before we address some of these concerns, let us listen to the men. Each of the conversations was helpful. The following are "sound-bites" illustrating various aspects of feminism's influence. The purpose of involving men in the study was to gain their perspectives on women's issues. I was very interested to learn what they thought of feminism. Here are some of the highlights of those conversations.

Louis: Realizing Contributions of Feminism

We begin with Louis. I asked about his understanding of feminism and culture in light of his biblical hermeneutic. Louis explained,

I don't think you can ignore the feminist movement. There are so many good things about the feminist movement. Finally there is more equality—not total—but there is more equality for women. [There is] more consideration for them as gifted human beings in every sphere of life.

Louis noted the pendulum swing effect of both feminism and the Christian backlash. "Radical feminists have gone overboard, that's all. And so we are reacting to that over-reaction. So we go to the other extreme." Louis' remarks reflect his research on the

subject of feminisms, his acquaintance with feminists, and his observations of women in church leadership. His general interpretation is that

sociological trends do influence us, and we have to listen to what is going on in our society. A lot of the things are very, very legitimate. And as they draw our attention to these issues, the more sympathetic evangelical interpreters are forced to go back to the Bible, and they begin to read it a little differently; and they see, yes, the people do have a point.

In our earlier discussion on culture, we asked whether Christians could learn from secular cultural thought. Louis argues that we can. What point do feminists have that is legitimate? How do we as Christians understand their position? Louis places the issue squarely within the gospel:

The teaching of Christ was of liberation. It was one of equality, and it wasn't one of oppression, although there was a lot of oppression due to the patriarchal society. Men took this idea of headship to the extreme. So, I think the feminist movement has given us many, many gains.

In addition to commenting on scripture, Louis referred to Christian history:

Women have made enormous contributions in leadership in spite of some of the roadblocks that have been put in their way. So, historically we can go back to the Florence Nightingales . . . and preachers of the 19th century, and the holiness movement historically freed women. Charles Finney freed women . . . to speak in public, to pray in public, to preach, and so on. The Pentecostal movement gave women that liberty, and so on. Particularly in our own circles, I think we base (a woman's contribution) on giftedness and competence, not on gender.

I eventually asked if Louis could say one thing to encourage women or men in the area of women in leadership, what would it be? His answer came without hesitation:

I think to honestly recognize the gifts that God has given right across the genders and to affirm them and let them be used in the church for the edification of the church. We're only going to profit from it. But by putting up barriers and restrictions, we are losing out. We are not being enriched, as God would have us. So, let's drop the barriers, and be open to what God is saying through the giftedness of both men and women. And let them exercise those gifts.

Louis views restrictions on women as a remnant of "oppression due to the patriarchal society." He sees the need to be more open to and encouraging of women in leadership. I came away from our interview grateful for the opportunity of hearing the perspective of this wise elder statesman.

David: Questioning Feminism's View of Authority

David's discussion took a slightly different turn. I asked him, too, about his understanding of feminism in view of the biblical statement that both "sons and daughters will prophesy" (Acts 2:17). Our conversation took us to a place I did not anticipate. David explained:

It's a stirring issue in our culture. It's not necessarily a stirring big issue in some other cultures Is it God bringing about a new freedom for women? Is it Satan trying to make the church appear prudish and narrow and to lead women to reject God-given authority so that they are outside the protection that God has ordained?

The unexpected tack dealt with spiritual authority and spiritual warfare, two issues important for Christians. This was the first conversation among the participants to address these subjects explicitly. I had given these topics considerable thought, as they are crucial to a proper understanding of Christian life. They also were reflected in Alicia's comments about a male covering. I pursued David's comments further, asking if we have properly understood who protects women, a man or God? David answered instantly.

It's God, but the key of it is that God has ordained authorities and if men are living in proper submission to Christ, they are under his authority, and that authority extends to his family, to his wife and to his children.

We had a provocative discussion at this point about Ananias and Sapphira, a couple who were individually struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit. The issue was whether the woman was held responsible for her own actions, or was "under" the covering of her husband.

Authority emerged as a significant issue regarding women in secular (Morgan, 1997, p. 227) and Christian (Fee, 2000, p. 136) literature, and I was fascinated with David's observations. I admit these are mysteries in scripture that I have grappled with quite awhile. The issues David raised are very important. His conclusion is that men are responsible for those under their authority, including, if a man is a minister, his church and extending to his family.

Carl: Recognizing Feminism's Challenge to Hierarchy

The final interview I will share is Carl's. We talked at length about women in ministry exercising various forms of leadership. Although the discussion at this point did not focus on feminism per se, it is relevant to this issue. I asked Carl what contributions he thought women had made in leadership.

Well, I think one important contribution is the undermining of the assumption of hierarchy. When women come and simply refuse to play the hierarchical game, or follow the hierarchical model, that calls that whole thing into question, which has allowed us, I think, to rethink from the Bible what actually are biblical or New Testament or Christ-centered ways of engaging in leadership.

Carl has observed, and worked with, women in ministry for years. He has studied and taught about women in the Bible and women in leadership. His conclusion recognizes the shift some women have taken in regard to hierarchy, in part, because of the focus of feminism. As we will later see, this shift is being felt in homes and churches.

Pause for Reflection

As the conversations reveal, the women seemed more emotionally involved with feminism and the men were more analytical. The women were looking at feminism "from the inside," and their interviews were characterized by personal experience. The men, while affected by women's actions, did not express the same degree of personal involvement. If you are a man in a study group, consider sharing your experiences with women in leadership with your group.

Here are some questions for you to consider, individually or in a group setting, whether you are a man or a woman. Take time to think through your personal response before articulating it for others.

What is hierarchy? What place does it have, if any, in the male/female relationship in the home and in the church? In society? Could you explain and discuss your views? What does it mean for a woman to "have a covering" or a man to "have authority over" a woman?

Do you have a good understanding of where you stand on the issues of patriarchy and feminism? Could you explain it to someone else? Educators tell us that once you are able to teach a concept, you have understood it. Try it. Where you get "stuck," make a note to find the answer. Then, start reading.

My Observations

My conversations with these men helped me to understand a male perspective about the influence of feminism(s), particularly in the area of leadership. First I noticed each recognized the link between cultural movements and biblical understanding. As a major cultural/political movement, the feminist movement has had many positive results, including more equality and consideration for women as gifted persons in every sphere of life. Many, however, hold that radical feminists have gone too far, sparking an evangelical Christian backlash.

In the midst of this cultural pendulum swing, biblical interpretation is being re-evaluated. Such notions as "oppression," "patriarchal society," and male "headship" are linked. While some view "radical feminists" with caution, others recognize the contributions of feminism for women generally and women in Christian leadership specifically, in spite of

some barriers. Because of these barriers, the church has not benefited from the gifts many women have to offer.

I was impressed that with the men, as with the women, knowledge of Christian history and broad exposure to the Christian community led to an awareness that the phenomenon of women in Christian leadership is neither new nor unusual. But many questions are still being asked, including whether women are to lead, and in what roles. This is a part of the larger question of spiritual authority. The hierarchical model of church leadership, long accepted in most circles, is under scrutiny, and women (as well as some men) are increasingly reluctant to "play the game." While evangelicals continue to rethink their stance(s), women who are gifted and called are being encouraged by many men to pursue active involvement in every level of church leadership.

Feminism: A Response

One day several months ago a dear friend and I made the time to meet for a "catch-up" session. As we shared recent life events, I eventually spoke of this project. Soon enough I was drawing sketches and time-lines on the paper placemat in the coffee shop. During an attempt at explaining how women can be equal in essence but not in position, she spoke up and said, "Like, we're all equal. Just some are more equal than others."

That stopped me cold. Although it was familiar, I could not remember the source of the phrase. She reminded me of George Orwell's (1951) *Animal Farm*. Though his context was certainly not gender issues in Christian leadership, the idea that some people are privileged though supposedly equal sounds like the feminists' central argument. Are women equal to men?

It's something I've given a lot of thought to. Growing up in the southern United States in the 50s, 60s and 70s (okay, do the math!), witnessing racial prejudice, being a woman in a predominantly Christian culture, I've experienced a lot of theoretical equality and practical inequality. This discussion on feminism calls us to examine how we see things and why we see things in a certain way.

The women and men who shared their stories and perspectives with me have helped me understand how varied are our evangelical viewpoints. Their observations sent me scampering for a more comprehensive view of my own. I've combined my observations from both women and men, and have chosen to respond to some of them. Space does not allow a thorough examination, nor is one necessary here. There are excellent resources waiting for you to discover them. I hope these serve as a springboard for your further study.

The Bible as Paramount Influence

As discussed earlier, the Bible is the authoritative source for faith and practice for evangelicals. For Christians, practice (what we do) grows out of our theory or faith (what we believe). We affirm the Bible as our source of both. There is an on-going discussion, however, about how to make meaning of the Bible's text. We discussed hermeneutic in chapter one, including the current debate over how to decide meaning for each generation. The question posed examines the relationship between the written Word, the Bible, and the Living Word, Jesus. As we consider feminism, we need to point to how important both are to a thorough understanding of the Bible and a good grasp of hermeneutic.

In her helpful work, Lydia Neufeld Harder (1998) describes various ways to hold the Bible in high regard and to see it from very different perspectives. She identifies herself as part of two communities, Mennonite and Feminist. A surprising combination, you may think.

The result of her work is a conscious recognition that both of the groups have influenced her understanding, and each is in fact a "hermeneutic community" (p. x). She attributes feminist theologians for moving the discussion "most strongly towards an ideological critique of patriarchy" (p. 63). Their contribution is insisting that the oppression and domination of women within the interpretive process be acknowledged. In their challenge of traditional interpretations these theologians have expressed their conviction that the biblical text must be liberated from its "patriarchal captivity," so that it can again exercise a liberating function in the Christian community (p. 63).

Harder (1998) says that because women have been excluded from formal theological study, they have not been allowed to participate in the "interpretative process." For many of us with conservative backgrounds who have admittedly relied on the experts, Harder's observations are difficult to read. Do you remember Louis' comment that exposure to some different people "got him mad"? Sometimes new ideas do that, as they challenge our way of thinking. It is at those piqued points where we recognize conflict that we need to decide what we believe and why. Feminism has challenged women and men to return to the Bible for deeper study. I believe that in itself is a significant contribution. What naturally follows Bible study is Bible teaching. We become responsible for what we know. Will women be allowed to teach men and women? As David points out, the fact of women in ministry raises issues of authority.

The question of Authority

Recall David's comment: "But the key of it is that God has ordained authorities and if men are living in proper submission to Christ, they are under his authority, and that authority extends to his family, to his wife and to his children." Notice the twin concepts of authority

and submission. My discussion with David came back to me as I read Richard Foster's (1978) chapter "The Discipline of Submission." He acknowledges the biblical limits of submission. Submission, says Foster, "reaches the end of its tether when it becomes destructive" (p. 105). The context of Foster's discussion is within a larger one on self-denial, explained as "the freedom to give way to others. It means to hold others' interests above self-interest" (p. 100). Calling for "revolutionary submission" as taught by Jesus, Foster asserts Jesus reversed his culture's idea of greatness.

Leadership is found in becoming the servant. Power is discovered in submission...He flatly rejected the cultural givens of position and power when he said, "You are not to be called rabbi Neither be called masters" (Mt. 23:8-10). Jesus shattered the customs of His day. . . by taking women seriously and by being willing to meet with children.(p. 101)

Foster, like many others, acknowledges the radical nature of Jesus' life and teaching:

It is impossible to overstate the revolutionary character of Jesus' life and teaching at this point. It did away with all claims to privileged position and status. It called into being a whole new order of leadership. The cross-life of Jesus undermined all social orders based on power and self-interest. (p. 101)

Understanding what Foster says in light of our discussion on biblical, evangelical feminism is crucial. No claim to privileged position and status is legitimate, including gender. This, of course, calls patriarchy into question. Notice, too, Foster does not use the term "servant leader," as many are prone to do, but simply "servant." This word alone identifies Jesus' new type of leadership. Can we get our minds around the difference? To say *servant leader* places the emphasis on the noun or main idea as leader. While this is preferred to a dominating style, it falls short of Jesus' intention. To say *servant* alone places the emphasis on the essence of serving. We are to find our primary identities as *servants who may lead* rather than as *leaders who may serve*.

Furthermore, Foster (1978) claims that Paul teaches this same kind of submission. Citing the "tiny letter to Philemon," Foster observes this and other letters of Paul "did not consecrate the existing hierarchical social structure. By making the command to subordination universal they relativized and undercut it. They called for Christians to live as citizens of a new order based on 'universal subordination'" (pp. 104-105). The implication for the issue of women in leadership is that we are part of a mutually submissive church. We have assumed the submission of men and women to men of godly authority. This leads us to another question: Can men submit to women? If we are part of a body of equally saved, equally Spirit-filled and equally sent people, then the challenge may be whether men can and will recognize their need to submit to the leadership of the women whom Jesus has called to lead.

How are we to think about a tradition that has long held men as authority in home, church and society? The issue of authority is "almost always tied" to the question of women in leadership (Fee, 2000, p. 142). Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (1990) first introduced me to the notion of the public and domestic domain dilemma in her book *Gender and Grace* (p.128), suggesting that men attend to public affairs (including church) while women attend to the domestic (like home). Our Christian notions of these two spheres weave together both biblical and historical notions. Harder (1998) addresses this issue, tracing it back in history, preceding the first modern wave of feminism:

By the 1830s and 1840s some women began to see the need for a different understanding of the Bible and its authority. At the same time, reformers like the Grimke sisters began to question the way images of maleness and femaleness were linked to particular spheres of activity. The issue moved very quickly to the differences between the "male/public realm" and the "female/private realm." By supporting this difference with biblical references, the clergy were able to challenge women who attempted to enter into public discussion on moral issues such as slavery. Women began to call for a

distinction between those parts of the Bible that were essential and those that were culturally relative. They were seeking alternative interpretations to oppressive interpretations based on the patriarchal culture of the times in which the Bible was formed. A crucial change was taking place in the approach to the Bible. This change had to do not only with how the Bible was interpreted but also with who interpreted it. Women began to see the need to do their own study of the Bible. (p. 64)

This in no way meant or means that women reject the authority of the Bible. What Harder points out is that men used the Bible to defend their position and prevent women from public disagreement. What women question, and sometimes reject, is the "male monopoly" of biblical interpretation (Pape, 1976, p. 15). For many of us, the question of who has access to the scripture was settled in the Reformation: we all are to have full and equal access. In seeking gender balance on this issue, I found an interesting historical observation by a man. Crediting Christianity as a major contributing factor to the emancipation of women, Dr. John Redekop (1984) notes that in "areas of the world where non-Christian religions are strong, women are often still treated as inferior beings" (p. 42). He muses, however, that in view of the liberating influence of Christianity,

It is all the more puzzling that many evangelical denominations, our own included, often treat women members so shabbily. If I were a woman I would feel insulted. It seems to me that it is high time that we change some of our time dishonoured customs . . . Christ has taught us that in his sight all people are essentially equal, and that from the Christian perspective physical or social differences are of no consequence. We have made much ado about overcoming racial, educational, and economic barriers; it is high time that we put into practice the notion that Christian equality extends to women as well. (pp. 42-43)

How much clearer could it be? This well-known, well-respected spokesman at one critical point in his life made a decision "not to give up on the church" (Redekop, 1984, p. xii). Many evangelicals who have weathered the difficult transitions of the past few decades have made similar decisions. It is interesting to me that while Redekop's collection of essays was published in the 1980s, his essay on women first appeared in print in 1964, very early in the

second wave of feminism and well before the current evangelical backlash. I am grateful for the persistence of men like Dr. John Redekop who lead the way in the church.

Others, of course, do not agree with Redekop's view that women have been treated "shabbily." The proponents of the complementarian view hold firmly that the Bible presents a direct analogy between the family and the church, and that "men—and not women—are called on to exercise decisive fatherly leadership as elders" (Poythress, 1990, p. 9). While few would argue that men are called on to be fathers, I would suggest that just as children need both father and mother, so the church needs both fatherly and motherly leadership. It seems to me that with the renewed commitment of fathers to their families has come an accompanying devaluing of the mother in the home and of women in the church. Recently I read Berger's assertion that "to become a parent is to take on the role of world-builder and world-protector" (1970, p. 55). He led up to this statement with a lengthy illustration of a *mother* comforting her frightened child and assuring the child that all is well. In this moment, says Berger, the mother is in "the role of high priestess" (p. 55). Many who call themselves complementarians would argue that the father is the priest of the home. Berger's argument in 1970 preceded the backlash to feminism that left many women questioning their ability or right to influence their children, since, they are now told, the husband is the spiritual leader.

Poythress' presentation about fatherly leadership in the church makes the traditional omission. He acknowledges, "In relation to God the Father, we are brothers to all other Christians" (1990, p.10). His statement is absolutely true, when understood in the intended inclusive sense in which all people are to be considered siblings to other believers. Taken further, based on Poythress' own argument, since we are all "sons" of God, we are all "male"

spiritually, and therefore all eligible for any position, whether that of servant or leader. He fails to make that point. Hermeneutic is critical, don't you think?

With a commitment to the authority of Scripture soundly established, evangelical Christians need to recognize that not only is there more than one way to be an evangelical, but there is also more than one way to interpret scripture as it relates to the issue of women in leadership. Above all else, this theme continues to come through in the interviews, in my own practice, and throughout history. The danger in discovering differing positions, of course, is to succumb to polarization.

The pervasiveness of polarized thinking is so widespread as to make it appear essential to human comprehension. Yet, from a feminist viewpoint, to accept dualistic perception as an inevitable condition of human experience is to accept concurrently the inevitability of oppression. (Harder, 1998, ix)

Harder, aware of the current polarization of the traditionalist (complementarian) view and the egalitarian view, seems to be warning us that polarization will bring oppression. We have seen in our discussion that in reaction to the perceived oppression of patriarchy, feminism resurfaced. In reaction to the perceived excesses of feminism, traditionalists defend patriarchy and decry feminism. Both sides defend and attack. Is dualistic thinking necessary? Dualistic thinking comes to us through Greek philosophy. The Hebraic way of thinking is more connected, relational, and holistic. The church as a body allows for difference, even disagreement. Considering that the Bible comes to us through both of these cultural lenses, we might take another look at how those ways of thinking shape our understanding of women in leadership. I will not elaborate further, except to note that the Hebrew Old Testament records the lives of many women leaders, including Miriam, Deborah, Esther, and Huldah. Perhaps the absence of prohibitions of women in leadership would make an interesting further study.

For now, let's be aware that while feminists cause us to view the Bible through a different lens, the result can be quite helpful and even positive. And I, for one, am thankful for glasses. Reading anything, including commentaries, would be very difficult without them! Whether you are man or woman, I suggest you try Redekop's (1984) implied counsel: Try "seeing" as a woman for a while. Try reading the scripture through the eyes of a woman.

Pause for Reflection

We have been dealing with some fairly heavy issues. What do you think of the notion of domestic and public spheres as separate for men and women? What about the question of authority? Were you aware that the debate connecting the two is considerably older than the current movement of feminism? Can you articulate a relationship between authority and submission? In your experience, are you aware of men who submit to women in leadership in the public sphere? How about in the church?

Take some time to think about your responses to these questions and be aware of other questions or observations you may have. Record them in your journal.

God's Gifting and Calling

While this issue will be addressed in more detail later, what is helpful here is to recognize that sometimes God's call goes against our expectation. I raise it here because women are being called out by God to serve in the church and other Christian organizations in leadership. If we do not expect God to call women, what are we to do then? Responding to the surprising call of God in her own life, Roberta began a serious search for clarification and direction.⁸

God calls whom he wills. One lesson from the book of Judges is that God alone selects leaders for his people (Judges 2:16-10). He made some very surprising choices, including Gideon, whom some have called the "runt of the litter." To Gideon the Lord said,

⁸ In the chapter concerning church structures, we consider the call of God as it relates to our contemporary setting.

"Go in the strength you have and save Israel...Am I not sending you?" Gideon's response betrays his reluctance, claiming, "My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least of my family" (Judges 6:15). Another surprising choice was Deborah. Her story, recorded in Judges 4-5, begins "Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time." Her call by God is not recorded. Did she have to be convinced that she was capable of leading the nation? If so, that detail is left in the silence of scripture. It is enough to rely on Judges 2:16: "The Lord raised up judges," including Deborah. We do not know the extent of her gifts or the specifics of her calling. But we do know that she was a woman, a wife, and the chosen leader of Israel during a crucial time in the nation's history. Why do we find it difficult to believe that at this point in our history God would choose to call women to lead his people?

To listen only to the "inner witness" is to open oneself to all kinds of deception. To limit oneself to the text, apart from a vital relationship with Christ, is to flirt with arid legalism. I have become convinced that God still calls women into leadership. Women are increasingly attending Bible colleges, Christian universities, and seminaries. They are attesting to the call of God in their lives, and many are waiting for the church community to endorse their calling.

I believe God speaks through the written text, with meaning interpreted for believers by the Holy Spirit in each generation. It is the Holy Spirit of God who gifts and calls each one "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature" (Eph. 4:12-13).

It makes sense to me that after generations of our male culture assigning women the task of spiritual nurturer in home and church, God would then use those sensitized, equipped women in increased leadership capacities. Two problems come when a woman experiences a

call of God to lead. First, like Gideon and Moses, she may express reluctance to obey because she believes she is unqualified. Second, she may experience resistance from the very people she is to lead.⁹

Resolving Inner Conflict

How can one know what is right when facing inner conflict? Some studies have shown that women have not given much weight to their own views for decision-making; they have deferred to the authority of others (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 44). As women begin to recognize their ability to make decisions for themselves, a pattern of what Belenky and her colleagues (1986) call "women's ways of knowing" emerges. Rather than making decisions in isolation, women tend to seek the opinions of others. A newfound personal awareness results in the process. As Christian women, we can engage in on-going dialogue with the Lord. We can also include family and church members in the process. I found it tremendously helpful to seek authors, Christian and secular, to help expand my thinking. Contrary to signalling some feminine weakness, this style of decision-making is wise (Prov. 11:14; 24:6).

Eventually, like Roberta, we will construct our own solution. Married women in traditional families and churches may have become so accustomed to following the directives of the men in their lives that they find thinking through an issue on their own not only difficult, but frightening. For women who have perhaps become "too independent" as a result of feminist leanings or personal pride, I encourage a more interdependent approach that invites the significant others of your life in on your decision-making. These in depth

⁹ The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood plainly state, "We do not believe God genuinely calls women to be pastors" (Piper & Grudem, 1992b, p. 36).

discussions go a long way in building enriched relationships. Beyond the personal sphere, pursue relationships within the local church. As Redekop did, so others of us may need to reaffirm our commitment to the church as Christ's body. It is in the church that each of us will grow, serve, and help others grow.

Relationship to the Broader Community

Feminism has grown in the fertile soil of radical individualism in North America (Groothuis, 1994, pp. 74-75, 135). Sadly, this flies in the face of the community spirit of the scripture where God created a nation, and then built his church. Too often we (men and women) have individualized scripture when it was intended for a communal hearing. (For an excellent theology based on this understanding, I refer you to *Theology for Community*, Grenz, 1994/2000.) For now, I will limit my comments to these: Ephesians 4, I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 are clear that the gifts of God are given to us individually for the common good. As one young man noted in a church leadership meeting, none of these gifts is gendered! If, when we become aware of our gifts and calling, we do not begin to use them for others, we are in danger of spoiling them.

Where Do We Go From Here?

As we conclude a study of culture and two of themes influencing women in Christian leadership, we can easily see the connection between patriarchy and feminism. I think patriarchy and feminism shed light on ways of making sense of our Christian heritage and our contemporary pilgrimage. Not to be separated from its past, Christianity can look to patriarchy as the culture out of which sprang our beginnings. We can value the view of the Fatherhood of God, reminding us of the source of our physical creation and our spiritual life now and eternally without viewing God in a limited, masculine sense. Where remnants of

patriarchy in society find expressions of "male privilege" resulting in oppressive attitudes and behaviour toward men and women, we can evaluate those actions in biblical terms against scriptural correctives. At the same time, we can value the contribution of feminism which allows us new ways of seeing.

We can cherish the Motherhood of God, not in a pagan religious sense of false origins, but seeing the biblical metaphors used to guide us to the sustaining, nurturing, sacrificial love of God, reflected in El Shaddai. We can take confidence in our relational God who breaks in to our lives and speaks with a familiar voice (John 10: 4). And, we can affirm that our God created us "in his image, male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27).

As we look at experiences of women and men in church and denominational life, family life, and indeed their personhood, these cultural issues of patriarchy and feminism will continue to influence our discussion. I hope, as a result of this examination, your study can be more conscious and reflective.

This chapter and the preceding ones have explored how we understand culture and its influence on our Christian experience. We have looked more closely at patriarchy and feminism as they relate to the issue of women in Christian leadership. Now we turn our attention from the collective to the individual: the formation of personhood.

Pause for Reflection

Have you considered gifts and calling to be issues related to gender? As you read the portions of scripture mentioned, think about the relationship between the gifts, the gifted persons, and the church.

We have acknowledged the nature of radical individualism in North America. In what way does that affect our churches? How does it influence our ability to read scripture as a community?

Finally, let us acknowledge that the cultural discussion is indeed taking place in North America, where our history has been influenced by Christian values. In what ways do you think Christianity has served as fertile soil for feminism? For the gospel?

Pause to record your thoughts. You may want to take some extra time to ask the Lord for discernment. Written prayers can be helpful tools of personal expression and reflection.

Table 1: "Varieties of Feminist Thought"-- a chart developed summarizing R.M. Groothuis' findings in her chapter by this title (1994, pp. 90-109)

Liberal Feminism (original modern type)	Seeks to work within the system to ensure that the law provides equal rights and opportunities for both men and women, in order that gender not be a basis for legal discrimination (ex: Betty Friedan). (pp. 90-91)
Psychoanalytic Feminism	Seeks to remediate the psychological consequences that various traditional social customs tend to have on women's sense of self and/or social status, for example through shared parenting and equal participation with men in the work force (ex: Carol Gilligan). (p.91)
Marxist Feminism	Seeks to free women through economic opportunity. (pp.91-92)
Radical Feminism	Goes further than liberal feminism in that it seeks not only political opportunity, but also results. Includes efforts to "remove the physical limitations inherent in women's biological differences" (supports legalized abortion). Sees patriarchal social system as deserving of destruction. (pp.92-93)
Woman-Centered Feminism (gynocentric)	A more extreme remedy for the "disease" of patriarchy; discards the mainstream feminist prescription for creating a society of gender equality; propose to build a woman-centered society. (pp. 94-95)
Academic Feminism	Directed against the traditional academic curriculum as "incorrigibly male-biased, androcentric, and logocentric ¹⁰ ." (ex: Alison Jaggar) (pp. 95-97)
Pagan Feminist Spirituality	A blend of radical feminists who seek a spiritual cure and look to the ideals of woman-centered feminism for their salvation, rather than to orthodox Christianity. Ties with Christianity are severed and the Bible is condemned as without redeeming value (ex: Mary Daly) (pp. 97-103)
Feminism in Liberal Theology (Reformist feminist theology)	With its understanding of the Bible as essentially advocating human liberation, theological liberal feminism seeks to interpret Scripture according to the experience of women as an oppressed group. A form of liberation theology, its protest does not entail a wholesale rejection of the Christian tradition; certain elements are retained, and the Bible is considered authoritative in a qualified sense. The hermeneutic of liberal theology is grounded in a person's or group's experience or consciousness. (pp. 103-108)
Biblical or Evangelical Feminism	These terms are used interchangeably to describe a feminism rooted in the Christian worldview, which looks to the Bible—not "women's experience"—as its final authority. The biblical diagnosis for the "disease" of sexism recognizes that legal and economic inequity and the cultural institution of patriarchy are some of the factors that perpetuate gender injustices. But human sin is identified as the root cause of sexism as well as of the factors that perpetuate it. (p. 109)

¹⁰ Logocentrism—"the valuing of logic as an objective tool for discerning truth and the nature of reality." This view suggests that men have objective logic, while women have subjective intuition. The fallacy is that neither is purely subjective nor objective (from Groothuis 1994, p. 97 with my comment added).

CHAPTER FIVE: A SENSE OF PERSONHOOD AS PIVOTAL

The cultural discourse for feminism as a reaction to the perceived abuses of patriarchy set the stage for "the gender wars."¹¹ While sociologists document the great similarities between male and female persons (Van Leeuwen, 1990, p. 54), still the battle of the sexes rages over the differences. Why? What difference does one's sex/gender have to do with one's leadership in the church? What kind of person does God call to lead his people?

One of the themes which emerged from my discussions with the participants was "personhood" – how their sense of person has developed and led them to discover gifts of leadership. Their awareness of "sense of person" sent me to engage in further study particularly focused on the image of God and what it means for men and women to be created in his image. In the process, I broadened my understanding of who God is, how God relates to us, and how this informs our sense of person. I also discovered that this understanding has great implications for how we view women and their roles, and, even further, how we are called to lead. A sense of person is developed as we relate to other people and to God through dialogue. Central to the Christian's understanding of personhood is the fact that we are created in the image of God. God's image is best reflected when women and men recognize their interdependence and lead together.

As an individual develops a sense of individual personhood, she or he roots that identity in some specific soil, to extend the metaphor. For example, children initially identify with family; teenagers with peers; adults with a cultural group or community. When one becomes a Christian, in the evangelical understanding of conversion, one is "born again,"

¹¹ One of several books to pick up on this theme is Marilyn French's (1992) *The War Against Women*.

(John 3: 3) or "born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Gradually one's primary identity is established as a *Christian*. Paul, in teaching the young believers in Corinth, tells them not once, but twice, that they are to reckon with a new reality, a new identity in Christ which determines their personal identity and resulting actions: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (I Cor. 6:20; I Cor. 7:23). For a Christian woman to transcend "the inhibiting attitudes of the *conventionally* Christian approach to life" (Briggs, 1958, p. 106) and locate her primary identity not as *woman* but as *Christian* is for her to be able to consider the possibility of God's call on her life for leadership. For Christians, a consideration of leadership inevitably includes gifts and qualities of a leader. The primary criterion is that the leader be a Christian. This chapter examines the question of leaders in terms of their primary identity as Christians rather than a secondary identity as women.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first offers a definition of "person," emphasizing the pivotal role that dialogue plays in shaping a person, and explores how sense of person has helped or hindered several participants in this study. The second section discusses the image of God, highlighting what it means for both men and women to be created in God's image. Finally, it explains how these insights relate to the ongoing discussion of women in Christian leadership.

Definition of *Person*

One of the first books I remember reading years ago about personhood was *The Meaning of Persons* by Paul Tournier (1957). My pastor recommended it to me during a period in which I was trying to figure out who I was as a single woman in a "married world." Tournier's book helped me to understand that I was not incomplete as a person because I was single. He also helped me to understand that the only way I would know who I was as a

person and find personal fulfillment (whatever that is) would be through meaningful relationships with other persons and with God. That wise counsel has held me in good stead and proved valuable over the years.

So it was natural for me to dig through my personal library and blow the dust off Tournier's book when I once again had questions about the meaning of persons. This time, however, I read to find insights into what it means for persons to be male and female. Although his book was first published in 1957, I believe its insights are still useful.

Tournier describes the paradoxical necessity that what creates in me consciousness of self is the consciousness of a "not-self, of an external world from which firstly I distinguish myself, which next I observe objectively from without, and with which I enter into relationship" (p. 125). He writes:

What creates in me consciousness of being a person is entering into relationship with another person, the "thou." Here, again we find the double movement: the consciousness of being distinct from another person, and the possibility of entering into personal relationship with him. (p. 125)

It is in the process of discovering our separateness from other things and from other persons that we begin to discover who we are. When we choose, for example, to let someone in on a secret or to share in a life experience, we begin to manifest the "autonomy of his person" (p. 127). Tournier goes on to explain that as persons we have two essential features: first, the free giving or disposition of oneself (p. 127) and, second, responsibility (p. 128). The first calls for risk; the second for reciprocity. He explains, "True personal relationship, of the sort that makes the person, involves both choice and risk; it lays one open to a reply, and to the necessity of replying in turn: it is a dialogue" (pp. 128-129).

So, here we begin to see how important is the role of dialogue. Dialogue is the vehicle which allows us to connect with others, for others to approach and connect with us, and in the

process for each to discover themselves and one another as persons. Seeing others as valuable in themselves is, then, part of the process of becoming a person. The reference to "thou" used in the earlier quote is a term made familiar by Martin Buber in his seminal work *I and Thou*. Buber's contribution which seemed to most greatly influence Tournier's thinking is reflected in this observation: "It was as if man's spiritual communion with others, which is peculiar to him, had been rediscovered after centuries of individualism" (Tournier, 1957, p. 129). It seems that Tournier as a psychiatrist had recognized the isolation and pain of his clients and realized that in order to be helped, each person needed to come out of himself or herself. Had Buber rediscovered God's observation of Adam: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18)? While Adam, for a time, lived in isolation as the only human, we in North America often find ourselves individually isolated even when surrounded by people. We sometimes refer to people, for instance, as acquaintances or associates. Our connection with people may be paradoxically frequent and non-relational. Tournier describes the dulling effect of such relationships then points to the benefits of communication.

The whole difference between an individual and a person is that the individual associates, whereas the person communicates. There is the same difference between the personage and the person; the person is an external appearance which touches the personage of others from outside, the person communicates inwardly with the second person, the "thou." (p. 129)

What then is a sense of person? I have come to understand that *the person is the developing identity of an individual human being in the process of relating to other persons.*

What is involved in the process? How do our encounters with other persons shape who we are? How do women develop as persons? How does a woman's sense of person affect her leadership in the church?

Risk, Responsibility and Respect

In order for me to connect with you, to communicate rather than merely to associate, I must risk sharing part of myself that you could not know unless I told you. Risking,¹² then, is the first big step in relating to another person, and in turn becoming a person. "Nothing ventured; nothing gained." What you gain or lose will have tremendous influence over your next risk taken. Recognizing each personal encounter as an opportunity to make a choice in extending yourself to another person is to recognize that in "the cross-roads is this moment of true dialogue . . . which obliges us to take up a position " in regard to the other person (Tournier, 1957, p. 130). Such cross-roads require risks because in part we may fear the outcome of the encounter. This fear, or barrier to relationship, has merit in our desire to "make right choices" and must be balanced to avoid "becoming locked into a 'fear of risking' pattern" (Wood & Wood, 1983, p. 76). As women find themselves in patterns of relationship which discourage or even harm them as persons, they may tend toward this pattern. When women have been excluded from or discounted in dialogue, they may question whether such a venture is worthwhile and choose not to engage in dialogue. As Tournier explains, "Even to run away is to make some sort of dialogue, choosing a side-road in order to evade the dialogue" (p. 130). In terms of women in Christian leadership, this may explain the reluctance of some women to serve on boards where they find their "contributions are not needed," as a friend once explained to me.

¹² Two books on women in Christian leadership encourage women to take risks. *A Time for Risking* by Miriam Adeney (1987) and *Women as Risk-Takers for God* by Lorry Lutz (1997) tell the stories of several contemporary women who are risking in various ways to share themselves with others for the sake of the gospel. If you want to branch out in ministry and are not sure how, I recommend that you read either or both of these books.

Inherent in this *risk* is *responsibility*. Several years ago it occurred to me that the word responsibility implies the ability to respond; it is a matter of choice, not something externally imposed. Here we see the second aspect of personhood that Tournier presents. Reciprocity is the giving and taking, giving and receiving in a relationship. I give because I choose to give, and I respond out of a sense of personal autonomy.

Sadly, however, some Christian women have lost their sense of personal autonomy, and, consequently, the ability to respond to life situations. The result is a diminished sense of personhood. In order to reclaim and rebuild themselves as persons, women can take responsibility for choosing the direction a particular dialogue takes, whether it means engaging in dialogue and further relationship or separating herself from a devaluing situation. Part of my responsibility in developing as a person is to avoid the tendency toward deceptive self-protection and face the truth about myself (Briggs, 1958, p. 109; Crabb, 1988, p. 175). Turning to God for wisdom in such situations can prevent us from getting "stuck" in the paralysis of analysis and lead us toward transformation (Rom. 12:1-3).

If *risk* is the courage that it takes for me to come out of myself and reveal or extend myself, to give myself away, to another person, *responsibility* is the courage it takes for me to be reciprocal with integrity. Responsibility calls for me to speak the truth in love (Eph.4: 15). It calls for me to consider what is best both for the other person(s) and myself. It calls for me to treat the other as carefully (full of care) as I want to be treated.

Intrinsic in this responsibility is the requirement that I view and treat others with *respect*. During several interviews women referred to perceived male arrogance or the male ego. Women felt men treated them with a degree of condescension. On the other hand, I noticed that some of the women tended to regard men as somehow better than women—better

able to lead, better as people. I believe both arrogance and self-depreciation are ungodly attitudes. Both cut off dialogue and prevent the development of "full" persons. Stanley Benn (1988) provides a useful distinction between what may appear to be respect, but which in fact may be either "concern" or "deference." He first addresses "concern:"

"Respect" . . . differs from concern in that a person may be treated without the respect due to him as a person even if his well-being is deliberately and solicitously promoted and nothing is done to cause him harm or suffering or deprive him of any advantage which might otherwise have been his. Indeed, one way of treating someone without respect is to impose conditions upon him for his own good. (p. 104)

As I thought about the conversations I had with both women and men and the reading I had done, it occurred to me that the way men, particularly those with a traditional stance, are expected to treat women falls into this category. Perhaps this grows out of the "imposed condition," rather than a choice freely made. Women have suggested to me that when this occurs, they feel they are being patronized.

Benn's explanation helps us to tease apart the notions of genuine respect for something less. His second perspective is that respect is also different from deference:

Deference presupposes hierarchy; it implies acknowledging the person so respected as someone to be looked up to, in some degree better, more worthy, than oneself. It would be shown, for instance, by not contradicting someone whose knowledge of a subject one believed to be in general greater than one's own, even when one felt convinced that on a particular point he must be mistaken. The principle of respect for persons, by contrast, presupposes a certain minimal equality, capable in some measure of overriding established hierarchy. (p. 104)

As we have already seen, hierarchy has been called into question. Among evangelicals, however, a hierarchical understanding of men in leadership in both church and home leads to deference and can open the way for "spiritual abuse" (Ezell, 1998, p. 50; Tyvoll, 1998, p. 196). I believe women are in the process of untangling our spiritual identities

from previously unquestioned roles. Drawing on the works of several others, Ezell (1998) concludes.

Adherence to hierarchical theology in regard to gender has made it acceptable for a woman to avoid personal responsibility in the name of obedience to men and seeming fidelity to the Word of God Recognizing the woman's tendency to defer her appropriate dominion in order to maintain her relationship (Van Leeuwen, 1990) can assist in empowering a woman to bring change to what appears to be a hopeless situation She will be the person giving an account of herself to God. (p. 50)

Respect, then, encourages genuine dialogue and indicates how we are to treat one another. Buber's term "thou" is reminiscent of the King James' English of 1611 and carries with it a reverent tone. As we relate to others, we will do well to recognize the worth and value of every other individual as equal to our own—whether male or female. In the words of Paul, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Rom. 12:3). As evangelical men and women, it is time to affirm our mutual respect, which goes beyond concern and deference. Many of us may have to risk self-examination and difficult dialogue with others. We may take strength in Paul's counsel, and do so by faith.

We learn from Jesus' words, "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31). The Ten Commandments were summarized into two: Love the Lord your God; and love your neighbour as yourself (Mt. 22:37-40). Seen in the context of discovering ourselves in risking, responsible, respectful relationships with others, these two major New Testament teachings are phenomenally practical. The way we are to know ourselves is through our relationships with others. The story of the Good Samaritan is pointed. The "neighbour" is the one who extended himself, risked his time and money for the sake of another. His responsibility to help demonstrated his respect for this wounded stranger

who Jesus called his neighbour. Others who passed by had claims to religious identities, but their actions proved irresponsible. The hearers knew instinctively that the *person* of the Samaritan (a despised half-breed in the eyes of the Jewish crowd) was good. Not so the Pharisee and the priest who passed by on the other side (Lk. 10: 33-37).

While this story taught a significant lesson, so does an incident recorded in John's gospel. Jesus made a point of going through Samaria, a traveler's risk. In the heat of the day he went to the well for a drink. His dialogue with a Samaritan woman brought new life to her. Jesus treated this woman, normally despised by Jews, with utmost respect. He risked revealing himself to her as he had to few others at that point in his ministry. Jesus' poignant personal encounter with this woman illustrates mutual risk, responsibility, and respect. The results were transformational for the woman, who in turn carried not only water but also a message of wholeness from that well to an entire community. In this story we see Jesus drawing a woman out of her past and challenging her to a new future. For women in our day, this is a truly remarkable account.

Pause for Reflection

Explain in your own words the importance of risk, responsibility, and respect in the development of the person. Recall an incident in which you risked something of yourself, acted responsibly, and in the process treated another person with respect. What impact did that event have on you? On the other person(s) involved?

Consider the differences between respect, concern, and deference. Think of some situations in your experience which illustrate each. Do any of them involve gender?

If you are a woman in leadership, think of an incident in which one person helped you to discover something about yourself. How did that contribute to leadership development?

If you are a man, ask yourself how you regard women in leadership—as equal persons, as persons to whom you defer or for whom you are concerned?

Be prepared to share something of your reflections with others in your study group.

The transformed person

As Christians we know that our sense of self, our personhood, is not simply constructed by dialogue with other people. In fact, the Bible teaches that through the work of the Holy Spirit we are being transformed. Romans 12:1-2, possibly the clearest teaching on transformation, says we are to be "transformed in the image of Christ." But how does that happen? And what is the effect of transformation on a person?

When a person comes into a relationship with the living God, she becomes a "new creation" (I Cor.5:17). Once a person's spirit is made "alive in Christ," the ability to reason is influenced by "the mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5 KJV). As a result, values come into line with those of God, and choices grow out of renewed reasons and values. The culmination of new thoughts and actions is a "new self" or a transformed person.

This process takes time. Evangelical Christians believe that the initial conversion of a person, or salvation, may happen quickly (John 3:16-18). The ongoing work of transformation (or a very theological term, sanctification) takes a lifetime.¹³

Sense of Person in the Lives of the Participants

As we continue to look at personhood, we will listen to parts of the conversations I had with several of the participants. Each of the participants I chose to interview had a well-developed sense of person. Several expressed that they had been through a struggle or a long process before arriving at this particular understanding in their lives. Others were aware that they are still in process and are cognizant of some of the obstacles they have encountered and must still overcome. How had their *person* emerged into a *leader*?

¹³ For an explanation of the ontological nature of the human person, see "Our Nature as Person, Destined for Community," in *Theology for the Community of God* (Grenz, 2000, pp. 155-162).

Frieda: Reflections on Growing Up

When I met with Frieda, I asked her, "What has helped you in the process of becoming a leader?" Her answer was reflective and insightful. "I think the process is more just growing up as a person from a child to who I've become. There are all kinds of things in our lives that affect us." Frieda pondered, paused, then continued. For the next few minutes she shared highlights of her developing years. Her family, which was active in church, "did not help me in the process of becoming a leader My father did in his business, but not too much in . . . the church." Frieda found it informative that her father, an active Christian and church participant, did not actively encourage her in church work. Other adults, however, encouraged Frieda toward church responsibility. Leaders in the church came to her and said, "Would you like to teach Sunday School? Would you like to be in charge of the youth?" Frieda remembers, they "thought I had potential. . . . And so that gave me confidence to try some things." As Frieda's church leadership experience grew, she began reading "Christian material, magazines and books, which promote the idea of significance or service." Frieda seems to have taken this step into leadership seriously, even as a young woman. Listen to how those early days shaped her long-term goals:

I think being a leader in a Christian way is different than being a leader in society We all have goals that we think are important and want to work for . . . but as a Christian, there is an eternal value that we place on the reason we do things. So, with an eternal perspective in mind, I gradually became more and more aware that I wanted my life to be significant and to serve as a leader in ways that would promote faith in God I guess when it really came down to it, it would be a personal choice.

Frieda's willingness to hear leaders in the church, open herself to leadership opportunities, and study books about service shaped her sense of person and helped her to understand how she could serve God.

Teresa: A Pioneering Personality

Teresa's story tells of her personal risk, as an extension of her personality. Our conversation led us to discuss her pursuit of unusual ministries which include being single in a Middle Eastern country. Her ministry involves risk and responsibility. One step at a time, she moved ahead in dialogue with others whose encouragement has helped to shape her sense of personhood. I asked Teresa what it was in her that urged her to pursue those things. Her background plays a key role. She explained:

I think that I had been raised to think through things and to take initiative and to sort of push ahead for what you believe. And also, to have the confidence [that] if you believe the Lord is saying something, go ahead and do it . . . Also for myself, it is personality type.

Teresa said she kept "moving more into pioneer types of things," using her visionary, entrepreneurial personality to begin new work.

In Teresa's case, her personality, her family that encouraged her to think things through, and a clear sense of hearing God's voice are elements of dialogue which in turn enhanced her sense of personhood. As our interview continued, I also discovered that Teresa had been both influenced and encouraged by men (leaders in her supporting missions organization) who talked and prayed with her, affirming her sense of direction in the ministry. She recalls them visiting her on the mission field and spending time in prayer with her. "They said I have very strong leadership giftings," Theresa explained. They told her that she had apostolic and prophetic gifts, a very strong combination.

Teresa related that as she developed her ministry tasks, she "always emphasized more on the . . . prophetic side, because, as a woman, that was something that I would be allowed to do." Her strong leadership gifts and skills were recognized by fellow missionaries and her supervisors. As a person, however, her work was limited because she is a woman. She

continued, "The apostolic side, which they think is actually the strongest gifting, I've not moved ahead with it the same way. And that is definitely related to being a woman." Both Teresa's personality and her spiritual gifts combine to make her a pioneer. In spite of obstacles placed in her way, her strong sense of person allows her to assert, "I tend to go out there and start things. I don't wait for men to be involved. I don't have to ask men anything about it; I just go and do it."

During the next few minutes Teresa described a national event which she led. She was hindered, in part, because as a woman she encountered objections from some of the male missionaries. But, as you will notice in her previous comments, Teresa was not acting alone. She was encouraged to move forward by other male missionaries. In overcoming some of those hurdles, Teresa resists the tendency to act independently. Among other Christians in her part of the world, she looks for those "who can act as people you can be accountable to." This type of submission to the body of Christ typifies her willingness to risk with people, take responsibility for the gifts and calling in her life, and be respectful of those who support her as well as to those who are still somewhat resistant to a woman's leadership.

Charity: Caught in the Backlash

Another participant, Charity, was caught in the conservative backlash against women's progress in Christian education and ministry in her southern seminary. In contrast with Teresa's experience of having men encourage her and affirm her gifts, Charity met male professors in seminary who erected stumbling blocks for her and other female students. With years now past, she is able to put the hurtful situation in perspective. Attending seminary to pursue a career in pastoral ministry, Charity went with the endorsement of her local church. Once she arrived in seminary, however, she faced opposition from those who believed the

women's movement had gone too far and that the church was in danger of being disobedient to God if it allowed women in leadership. The pain of her seminary experience drove her to deep self-examination and a soul-searching encounter with God. She persevered, grew as a person, and now is pursuing her ministry. In retrospect, she says.

My hope is for wisdom. And one thing that concerns me is that I have some anger . . . about what the convention has done and how it has marginalized women. But there's another part of me that would like to be a part of something that would bring my denomination back. [do something] that helps the people who are leading it to understand that they are discarding 50% of God's blessing. I want to be a part of the reconciliation The hope for my ministry is that I will continue to have the faith to go where God sends me. To trust the intuition, to trust the voice. And I don't know where that will be.

The voice is the voice of God speaking in the quiet places of Charity's spirit. Her hope is that others in leadership in her denomination will be interested in working toward reconciliation, particularly as the rift relates to the issue of women in ministry.

Patricia: Personhood Enriched Through Prayer

In a very different situation, Patricia serves in a position to teach and to lead pastors through a prayer ministry. I asked her about her working relationships with men. She found that "Most of the time . . . I have no problem." In other cases, however, she says, "I either say the wrong thing or don't look the right way or don't act the right way. And I just feel immediately that I have not been accepted by them." Patricia has learned over the years to take her time getting to know others, and "talk about personal things, spiritual things." As she has, she has discovered a mutual respect developing between her and the male leaders with whom she works.

Like many women involved in church leadership, Patricia has managed to keep her priorities straight. She has listened to and followed the voice of the Lord in her life and at the

same time maintained functional working relationships with others "for the sake of the ministry." Later in our conversation Patricia explained that "becoming accepted" among mostly male leaders has been a difficult experience. It has been a "stretching" time for her, resulting in spiritual and personal growth for her as well as growth for the ministry she leads. Almost reluctantly Patricia said she was aware that the strain in some of the relationships is "because I'm a woman." In her case, the strain has produced a spirit of grace and perseverance contributing to her strong character and confidence in ministry.

As our dialogue continued, Patricia told me of a deeply personal experience in prayer when she "got down on my knees. It was just like all of heaven opened up and he [God] just poured everything down on top of me." Patricia remembers she wept with "a strong, strong sense of the Holy Spirit" present with her. In time, she has learned to identify a similar hunger in the hearts of others for a relationship with God. Her life has changed from that of an insecure, immature Christian to a confident, vibrant, mature woman seeking simultaneously a deeper relationship with her God and an opportunity to minister among and with his people. Patricia explains that her life follows a pattern in scripture, one in which prayer plays a vital part. She observes that many people approach prayer "like a duty. It's just something we do every day. And then we kind of go about our own business and do our own thing and don't even think of God for the rest of the day." This is not, Patricia believes, what God intends.

I think if you look at the prayer life of Jesus Christ, he was in constant communication with the Father, 24 hours a day. It was constant communication. He knew exactly when God spoke to him, and he always stressed, I only want to do the Father's will.

Patricia says that through prayer we will grow in our relationship with God and become more like Jesus. "He also tells us that he is making us into the person of Jesus Christ." At this point, she shared a recent discovery. "I have always looked at my prayer life as being

very personal." But as one now helping others to pray, she senses that "people want more They have to experience God. There has to be an experience that just keeps them coming back and makes them hungry" for a relationship with God in Christ.

Prayer, communication between Patricia as a person and God as a Person, is having a transforming effect in her life. Prayer has proved for Patricia the single most important helping factor in her growth as a person. As she spends time in prayer, she gains a sense of confidence in God's direction for her life that strengthens her through difficult times and over significant obstacles. Recognizing her need to anchor her understanding of God in the scripture, she attended regular Bible Study Fellowship (BSF). Eventually she became a leader, learning "a lot of leadership skills that I wouldn't have learned anywhere else." Later, a pastor in Patricia's church opened the way for her to be more involved in local church leadership. He

really allowed me to bloom. He led me to make decisions. . . . And some didn't work out. He just said, "That's how you learn." You know, you learn from your mistakes as well as the things that work out well. I learned what my spiritual gifts really were.

Patricia's growth as a person included personal and group Bible study, personal prayer, Bible study leadership opportunities with the encouragement of her pastor.

Pause for Reflection

Consider the stories of Frieda, Teresa, and Patricia. What were the contributing persons or factors in their growth as persons? As Christian leaders? What hindered them?

Remember to keep notes in your journal, and be willing to dialogue with others about your observations.

Personhood: Revealed in the Imago Dei

For me, the bottom line of this study is that I live as a person committed to God as revealed in the scriptures. I began my study about women in Christian leadership a few years ago asking God to lead me into a fuller understanding of what it means to be a woman leader in the evangelical church today. This section on the image of God is one that I did not expect to dwell on. But as a result of the dialogues I have engaged in with men and women participants, as well as through reading and prayer, I have become increasingly convinced that our understanding of this concept is crucial to our current topic.

Christians believe that the essence of personhood is to be found in our being created "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). Just what that means has been variously interpreted through the centuries. I began to think more about this after a conversation with Carl, a Christian educator and theologian, who was very interested in how our understanding of God influences women's leadership. He explained:

Unfortunately, we've interpreted it [the image of God] . . . in an individualistic manner and lost what I think is the biblical understanding of the *imago Dei*, namely that it's a social reality. So that *we* are in the image of God . . . God's essential character comes to be reflected through relationships.

Notice that Carl mentioned "God's essential character." Earlier I mentioned my own quest, that is, to discover what the creation of woman could teach us about the revealed quality of God. Here, at least in part, is a glimpse of the *imago Dei*. I had made a discovery through dialogue. Our continued conversation led Carl to caution against the notion of hierarchy in the Trinity and in male/female relationships. He observes that some today, with whom he disagrees, claim men and women are "equal in essence but not in function."

Carl's comments forced me to address some very important questions: What is the connection between my individual personhood and the "social reality"? With what social

realities am I to be concerned? What relationships reflect God's image? What does it mean to be created in God's image? The motif of this study became evident in my own experience as I began to wrestle with these and other questions. Because of my dialogue with Carl, I returned to the interviews for further reflection, and focused my research on this dimension of personhood, eager to discover what being created in the image of God might have to do with women in Christian leadership. I uncovered some important insights regarding our understanding of the image of God as relational, non-hierarchical, and non-gendered. In this section we will consider each of these, then look at some of the implications of the image of God for women and leadership.

The Image of God: Relational

Over the centuries there has been much discussion about the image of God and how humans reflect His image. For hundreds of years God's image has been interpreted individualistically, and even predominantly as male. Today complementarians hold this view (Grenz, 1995, p. 169). In recent years, however, a shift has occurred in theological thinking about what it means to be in the image of God. In the introduction to *In His Image*, Brand and Yancey (1987) trace briefly different understandings of what this might mean, which each of us "in some refracted way" possesses:

How can visible human beings express the image of God? We certainly cannot look like Him, sharing characteristic features of eyebrow or earlobe, for God is invisible spirit. Philosophers and theologians have long speculated on all that could be contained within the mystery of that single phrase. Predictably, they tend to project onto their definitions the principal concerns of their own era. The Enlightenment age assures us the image of God is the ability to reason, the Pietists identify it as the spiritual faculty, the Victorians claim it is the capacity to make moral judgments, and the Renaissance thinkers locate the image of God in artistic creativity. As for our own psychology-dominated age? What else could that image be, we are now

advised than our capacity for relationships with other people and with God. (p. 20)

Brand and Yancey point to the historical shifts in thinking about the image of God. Our discussion about women in leadership is shaped by this development, including our current perspective focusing on personhood as in dialogue and in relationship. Rather than think that centuries of theologians have merely imposed human notions on to the person of God, I believe that in God's divine plan he has revealed various aspects of himself and his nature to different eras of humanity. Is God still revealing himself, as he has through the centuries of progressive revelation? I believe he is. And, we now ask, what is God revealing to our generation?

With Brand and Yancey, I agree that the relational aspect of the Trinity has captured our attention in the last half of the 20th century. Jewett (1975) credits Brunner and Barth with an understanding that "Man's being is a being-in-fellowship" (p. 35). Consider what was said earlier about persons being developed and growing with a sense of risk, responsibility, and respect. We see hints of those qualities again as Jewett explains his position of the unique gift that humankind has of being in God's image:

All creatures created prior to Man exist, it is true, in an interrelated-ness and dependency, but not in a genuine mutuality and reciprocity. In heaven and earth, land and sea, even among the living creatures, from the plants to the highest animals, there is not "thou" who is responsibly related to the divine "I." But Man exists in such a relationship from the start. And because Man is created as the one who confronts God and is confronted by God and by another like himself [the woman], he is created in the image of God. God is, in his own being, supremely free and in fellowship. Since God is not *Deus solitarius* (solitary God), but the *Deus triunus* (the triune God), i.e. God-in-relationship, there is no possibility that Man, who is in his likeness, should be *homo solitarius* (solitary Man). (p. 35)

If this were as far as the explanation goes, we would be no further ahead in our understanding than persons several hundred years ago. They understood, as Brand and

Yancey pointed out, that humankind and God share the ability to reason together and that human beings attributed our creative and spiritual aptitudes to our likeness to God. But Jewett (1975) does not stop there. He returns to scripture, reading it afresh, and makes a claim that startled his readers over twenty years ago. The "first great surprise in the Bible" is, according to Jewett, that

God created Man male and female (Gen. 1:27). *The primal form of humanity then, is the fellowship of man and woman.* How different is this from the approach of the philosophers and, to a lesser extent, of Christian theologians! (pp. 36-37)

Beyond Brand and Yancey's observations that the essence of the image of God is to be in relationship, Jewett observes the "fellowship of man and woman." Most theologians and commentators I have read tend to look backward into scripture, specifically the Creation account, for their understanding of "male and female." Grenz (2000), however, takes a forward view. Looking at the whole of scriptures, he says the divine image is an eschatological reality pointing toward God's eventual unhindered reign. He views the creation narratives as foundational for the understanding that the image of God in us determines "our nature as persons destined for community" (p. 151). God creates "the first human pair in order that humans may enjoy community with each other" (p. 179). Grenz writes:

The creation of the woman is designed to deliver the man from his isolation. This primal community of male and female then becomes expansive. It produces the offspring that arises from the sexual union of husband and wife and eventually give rise to the development of societies. What begins in the Garden of Eden finds its completion at the consummation of history. (p. 179)

God reveals himself as the three-in-one Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In creation God places the divine image in us. Grenz includes the notion of historical movement, or the trajectory of grace, in this early activity of God in human history. The "image of God"

is not a quality of an individual; rather, it is a being-in-fellowship with one another in such a way as to reflect the nature and person of God to a watching world.

The Holy Spirit

When we discuss the image of God, we have to understand that we are discussing a triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Later we will look at the Son and the implications of Christ's work on earth; but first we will address the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit's coming and role shed light on the relationship between man and woman. Because of our historical, traditional preference for the male imagery of God, we often project a masculine nature onto God. If God is "male," why would he create "male and female" to reveal the divine image? I wondered what we could learn about the necessity for a "female" in this creation account. The most helpful insight came as I learned more about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

We have acknowledged that it is the Spirit of God who enters a person who believes in the saving work of Christ. John's gospel records Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus during which the Messiah tells the inquiring Jewish leader, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again" (John 3:6). Often during my research and reflection I have asked, "What does this reveal about God? Why did the three-in-one Godhead create humankind, male and female, two-in-one?" These questions underlie my reading. The works of Tournier (1957; 1981), Grenz (2000; 1995), Jewett (1975), Hull (1987), and many others have helped me in my thinking. But still, a nagging sense of incompleteness lingered.

Most writers considering the role of women concern themselves with what the Bible says about *women*. I wanted to know what the creation of women says about *God*. As we have seen, the woman was created to be a helper suitable for the man. What kind of help did

he need? Grenz (1995, pp. 164-165) suggests that it was salvation from isolation. How does this give us insight into the person and nature of the Triune Godhead?

Jesus, the uniquely begotten of God, was also sent into the world to work alone. Or so it seems. But as we read the gospel of John, we realize Christ did "nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." (John 5:19-20). Jesus' constant companion in his work in the world was God. Jesus called and taught his disciples: "Everything I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). He then explained that he must leave, but he would send the Spirit. Grenz (2000) explains Jesus' promise to send "'another Counselor' or 'helper' (Greek: *allon parakleton*). The noun 'helper' . . . refers to one who is called alongside to assist (*parakletos*). To it John adds the adjective 'another' (*allos*), which implies a similarity between the Coming One and the Lord himself" (p. 367). Jesus tells us in John 17:20 that he and the Father are one, and prays for his followers that they "may be one" (v. 21). This expression of oneness is reminiscent of the creation account that declares the man and woman will become one flesh (Gen. 2:24) and is later emphasized by Jesus (Matt. 19:5-6) and Paul (Eph. 5: 31-33).

In our consideration of personhood as a reflection of the person of God, it is helpful to consider the creation of humankind and the image of God that we bear. Why is the Creation story told in two ways? I believe each chapter (Genesis 1 and 2) has something unique to reveal to us about the Creator and humankind. In thinking about women as leaders, we may need to reconsider the nature of the Trinity. God as Father, Son, and Spirit work together, paradoxically alone yet inseparable. So it is to be with women and men. We are to work

together. God's Spirit is moving, I believe, to prompt women to serve alongside men in church leadership.

Pause for Reflection

How does the creation of woman reveal the image of God more fully? How does the woman as helper fit our understanding of women as leaders?

As you review, think about your own experience with God and other believers. Do you recognize the separate "functions" of the Godhead? Do you see the role of Spirit as "birthing" new life? Have you considered the role of the spirit as "another helper" like Jesus? Other questions and observations may occur to you as you think and as you participate in a group discussion. Record your thoughts and questions in your journal. Be prepared to share your reflections with others. Remember to ask men and women for their insights and responses.

The Image of God as Non-hierarchical

Within evangelical circles there is a debate about male headship and God-ordained hierarchy. The traditionalists or complementarians point in part to the created order as well as Jesus' maleness in order to support a hierarchical view.¹⁴ They believe that because the man was created first and because woman was told she would be ruled by the man, that men have a claim to headship. In their view, women are substantially equal, but functionally subservient. As Susan Foh (1979) expresses it, "This difference between men and women can be termed economic or functional subordination. It means that though men and women are equal in personhood, God has ordained a difference in function" (p. 206). Furthermore, since they understand "head" to mean "authority" over "source," (although one is assumed in the other), their position is that because Jesus was male, and Christ is the head of the church and man is the head of woman, then men have a prior position above women functionally. Hierarchy, they believe, is God's intention.

¹⁴ Lorry Lutz (1997) presents a side-by-side column of verses variously translated by traditionalists and non-traditionalists (p. 37). The overview is helpful to provide distinctions of interpretation. Stanley Grenz (1995) also provides a helpful overview of both positions in chapters 4 and 5.

Egalitarians, however, say that the male and female share equally in the image of God; roles in the church, they suggest, are to be determined by factors other than a person's sex. As Groothuis (1994) points out, men and women have much more in common, especially spiritually, than "the sum of their differences, and it is to this basic human spiritual dimension that the Bible speaks" (p. 106). The egalitarian position also finds importance in the fact that Jesus was male. Jesus, a man, entered a patriarchal culture and turned hierarchy on its head, instructing his followers in word and deed that in order to lead one must become a servant. For a male to become a servant was truly revolutionary. For a woman to become a servant would have gone unnoticed, since that was the cultural norm (Grenz, 1995, p. 209).

In order to discuss the notion of hierarchy, we must address not only the creation and God's initial instructions of the man and woman to have dominion together, but also the Fall (the first sin) and its resulting curse. Simply stated, most scholars historically have understood that the results of the curse to be the intention of God. More recently, however, the hermeneutic tide has turned. Grenz (2000) explains,

Because male domination is not a morally binding injunction—a result of the Fall and not an order of creation—we can anticipate that the new creation will include the reshaping of male-female relationships. With the coming of the Savior, the effects of the Fall can be overcome. Christ's redemption includes liberation from hierarchy as the fundamental principle for male-female relationship. (p. 169)

Grenz and others (see Mickelsen, 1989, p. 181) place hierarchy squarely in the place of sin rather than in the heart of God's creational intention. Hierarchy between the sexes, then, has been a part of God's permissive rather than intentional will, and, with patriarchy, belongs in our past.

What Grenz refers to as overcoming the effects of the Fall is seen throughout the unfolding of the biblical story. Even in the midst of the curse, God promised salvation with a

reference to the coming Christ, when he told the serpent "he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Christ's victory over sin and death is seen in the dual events of his death and resurrection. As Christians look forward toward Jesus' second coming, we consider the "not yet" of John's vision. In Revelation 22:3 we read simply, "No longer will there be any curse." God's activity from Genesis to Revelation, including our age, is designed to reverse the curse. I believe current scholarship regarding the equality of women—in essence and in function—is recognition of God's redemptive work and is consistent with the principle of progressive revelation.

What are we to make, then, of the disagreement over whether women and men are in fact created equally in the image of God? As we have seen, complementarians suggest that men reflect God's image more completely than women do. Egalitarians, on the other hand, acknowledge women reflect God's image equally, but make the same mistake as their counterparts. According to Grenz (1995), while the egalitarians have the better "exegetical foundation," both groups view the image of God as an individual possession (p. 170).

Grenz (1995) and Tournier (1981) agree here, noting the necessity of relationship in the development of the person. We look to the three-in-one Godhead as reflected in man as male-and-female. Once again we must raise our concern. Kroeger (1987) states that though she is concerned about the biblical status of women, and whether there is a male/female hierarchy, her larger concern is that the argument itself points us to question whether there is a hierarchy in the Trinity (p. 282). For us to argue that human hierarchy is a fact is to argue a corresponding hierarchy within the Trinity. That argument has cropped up over the centuries,

originally called the Arian¹⁵ heresy. Kroeger explains how crucial a proper understanding of this is, because if Christ is not fully God, he is not fully Saviour.

Although I am deeply concerned with the biblical status of women, one other matter concerns me more: that of the status of Jesus Christ. There are those who argue for subordination within the Godhead so that they may affirm the subordination of women. Their understanding of headship enables them to assign subordinate positions both to women and to the Son of God. Saint John Chrysostom said it far better than I when he observed that there were heretics who seized upon the notion of headship and derived from it a concept of the Son as somehow less than the Father. The heretics would argue that although the Son is of the same substance as the Father, He is under subjection. No, said Chrysostom, had Paul intended to demonstrate subordination, he would have chosen slave and master rather than wife and husband. The Apostle intended to show equality. Chrysostom asked, How then should we understand head? and answered, understand it in the sense of "perfect unity and primal cause and source." Subordination has led us again and again to a downgrading of Jesus Christ . . . (Kroeger, pp. 282-283)

I share Kroeger's concern. She points to church history and the ancient Arian debate for her current position. If we misunderstand this crucial teaching regarding Christ, then we have diluted his person and his power of salvation. There is no hierarchy in the Triune Godhead; therefore, there is no hierarchy in the creation of man and woman to reflect the *imago Dei*.

The Image of God: Spiritual and Non-sexual

While discussing the image of God and how men and women reflect his image, the question of God and sexuality inevitably comes to mind. After all, as either male or female, we tend to see the world and God through our limited, sex-and-gender oriented positions. In fact, this is not unusual, but rather to be anticipated. Berger (1970), a sociologist, asserts,

¹⁵ The substance of the Arian heresy was "a conception of Christ as being in whom the divine was immanent in a superlative degree but who was essentially less than God . . . a secondary divine but created being, intermediate between God and the world, and therefore inferior to God" (Richardson, 1969, p. 56).

"Any kind of theology will have to include an anthropological dimension. After all, theological propositions only very rarely deal with the divine in and of itself, but rather in its relations to and significance for man" (p. 49). Indeed, this study is a case in point. Women are asking about their roles in the family and in the church, and are looking to an understanding of God for the final answer. In my research, I was interested to find the dialogue over the past three decades has included much about the nature of God as spiritual, as well as emphasis on and definitions for sexuality and gender. I was mindful of Morgan's (1997) insight that "all theory is metaphor Metaphor is inherently paradoxical. It can create powerful insights that also become distortions, as the way of seeing created through a metaphor becomes a way of *not* seeing" (p. 5). How we view God can become a way of limiting how we view God. I believe the movement from the traditional to the egalitarian view of women grows in part out of thinking that shifts the metaphor of God from a largely male metaphor to seeing other biblical metaphors for God.

Before we continue, however, I will take the opportunity to present a brief definition for *sexuality* and *gender*. These terms, often used interchangeably, have similar but different meanings. *Sexuality* refers to the biological differences between a male and a female while *gender* refers to the identities, or "learned difference in behavior" (Van Leeuwen, 1990, p. 19) developed by a person of either sex in a particular cultural setting. Function grows out of either sexuality or gender. For example, only females bear children, but either males or females can change a diaper. Only males can provide sperm for a child, but either males or females can protect a child. We will say more about these definitions as we go along, but I think this initial differentiation is important for our discussion.

Two writers clearly address the question of God and sexuality and reach similar conclusions. During an excellent examination of the male imagery used for God and the fact of the maleness of Jesus, Grenz (1995) observes "the move from male imagery to a male God is ill-founded. It goes beyond the intent of the authors of Scripture" (p. 145). As Paul explains, we see "in a mirror dimly" (I Cor. 13:12 RSV). We do not understand God in his fullness. The Bible reveals God to us, however, using imagery we can in our finiteness comprehend. We must, however, avoid the trap of limiting God to our understanding.

Old Testament scholar Phyllis Trible (cited in Grenz 1995), explains that in spite of the strong preponderance "of the masculine gender in metaphors and other imagery describing God," the scriptures actually display God as non-sexual. Referring to the work of Trible, Grenz and Kjesbo write,

"There is a strong consensus that the Old Testament regards Yahweh as non-sexual." In fact, one significant point of difference between Old Testament faith and the religions of other ancient Near Eastern peoples was the Hebrew desacralizing of sexuality. In the biblical writings Yahweh is not a male god who has a goddess at his side, as in other ancient religions; Yahweh alone is God. (p. 145)

Notice the reference to the unity in the Godhead, "Yahweh alone." Among the teachings of the Judeo-Christian tradition, this is a central, foundational truth, that God is one (Deut. 6:4; Mk 12:29). The observation about the non-sexuality of God is especially important for us to understand as we get to the New Testament letters of Paul. The contexts for some of the teachings of and to women are made in cultures in which goddesses were still

worshipped.¹⁶ It is not the *sexual* identity of God that is revealed to creation, rather God's self-existence and *personal* attributes.

Wilma Ann Bailey (1998) agrees with this position and observes that in scripture it is clear that

God is a sexless being. Yet because the Scriptures frequently use male imagery and metaphor for God, people came to think of God as being male. Female metaphors and imagery for God in the Bible are frequently overlooked . . . out of ignorance or to reinforce masculine imagery . . . When Moses asks God how the Deity wants to be known, God answers not in a noun, proper or common, which required the choice of grammatical gender in the Hebrew language. Instead, God uses a genderless first-person common singular verb, "I am who I am," and "I am." (p. 19)

For women and men to recognize the spiritual nature of God is to free us from limiting our involvement as citizens in the Kingdom of God along merely sexual lines. "God is spirit," Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 5:24). Though Jesus came in a male body, the Messiah taught the priority of the spiritual. Can we do less?

During the course of my own study I have come to a slightly different perspective than I had when I began. While I certainly continue to affirm God as Creator—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—I have come to know God in a fuller sense. God is *more* than I had known before. The quality of God-in-relation sheds light and adds importance to my understanding of God, and in the way I relate to others. I have read of people who studied God and walked away because they believed Christianity was hopelessly patriarchal and hierarchical. I have come to think that much of the way we have practiced Christianity has been just that; but I

¹⁶ This discussion provides a major premise for the work of Kroeger & Kroeger (1992) in *I Suffer Not a Woman*. A comprehensive study of the culture and religion of Ephesus opens up new levels of understanding of the controversial passage (1 Tim. 2:11-15) prohibiting women to have "authority."

believe the Bible points to a different way, and the Spirit of God is getting our attention and speaking in fresh ways.

Pause for Reflection

Do you see God as Michelangelo's white-bearded figure on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel? Jesus himself tells us that God is spirit and we must worship in spirit and in Truth (John 4:24). But like the little boy who wanted to pray to "someone with skin on," we often have a mental image of a physical God. Think about the characteristics of God. Are they "male" or "female" qualities, or some combination? In your relationship with God, do you relate to God in "spirit and in truth" or as a "male" or "female" person?

What difference does it make if we look backward or forward for our understanding of women's roles in the church today? How might looking only one direction affect our decisions? How might looking in both directions affect us?

Write down some of your thoughts in your journal.

Implications of the Image of God for the Church

What implications does our understanding of the image of God have for our examination of the role of women in the church? Recently, two predominant views have come to the fore: complementarian/hierarchicalist and egalitarian/libertarian. Others have begun to speak up calling for a middle ground (Groothuis, 1994; Malcolm, 1982).

Through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives we change our values, our volitional choices, and our developing self or sense of person. It is evident that an understanding of the "image of God" is at the heart of our Christian understanding of personhood. If, for instance, a man believes himself to be "functionally above women," his attitudes and actions will inevitably reflect a certain tell-tale condescension and pride. If a woman defers to men as appointed leaders in *all* situations, she will deny herself the opportunity to dialogue genuinely with men as peers and withhold her contributions. Man is deprived of the benefit of the woman's perspective, and woman is kept in an immature state, never exercising her decision-making abilities and experiencing the consequences of those decisions. Surely this is not what any of us believe God intends.

If, on the other hand, we ask, "How do women reflect the image of God?" or "What do women reveal about the nature of God?" we may consider women's contributions in a new light. Women, as "helpers suitable" to men, share the mandate of Kingdom work (Acts 2:16-21) just as Eve shared the mandate of garden work (Gen. 1:28). Women follow men in the creational order not to indicate their subordination but to reveal a progressive understanding of God's intention for humankind similar to the way God revealed his own nature in the trinity. Women are to men as the Holy Spirit is to the Trinity: both are Helpers, equal to, of the same essence as, and designed to walk alongside their counterparts.

Paul explains in what some consider a restrictive passage that man and woman are not independent of one another (I Cor. 11:11). A man's tendency toward independence and a woman's toward dependence are both signs of immaturity; the goal is interdependence. Just as the Son and the Spirit do nothing without the Father, so man and woman work best when they work together. To be fully *person* women and men must dialogue with one another, and be able to take risks, take responsibility, and interact with mutual respect.

Sex, Gender and Roles.

What are we to think, then, of the roles of men and women? Are all roles interchangeable? Among evangelical Christians, the "line" will be drawn according to our various understandings of biblical teaching. For many, the "bottom line" is the area of leadership in the church. So, what is the difference between sex and gender, and what difference does it make in the recognition of who we are as *persons* in the community of believers?

Using the definitions given earlier, many authors use the terms *sexuality* and *gender* almost interchangeably when speaking of the biblical story. We know that biological

identities and social roles were much more distinct and prescribed in biblical times than they are now. How we think about sexuality and gender influences how we act, in and out of the church. *Women & Men: Gender in the Church* (Penner, 1998) provides one example of a book developed to explore our roles. Penner presents her reason for writing. Working with the Women's Concerns Committee (Canada and U.S.) of the Mennonite Central Committee, she and others discovered a need to address abuse in the church, and subsequently, "We heard a strong call to explore ways in which our beliefs about God and our assumptions about our roles as men and women may contribute to abuse" (p. 8). She and others were "asked to work on our theology and thinking about gender. These fundamental beliefs shape how women and men treat each other" (p. 8). Since God created us "male and female," and then declared the creation "good" (Gen. 1:31), we can assume that what has gone wrong, even caused abuse, is not God's intention. Seeking to understand, Penner and other writers addressed social structures and conclude they

have different messages for male and female bodies. We are raised to live in the world as gendered people. Because gender is so integral to who we are, it's a part of our faith. Being men and being women, we have different experiences. In the context of these experiences, we encounter God. (p. 11)

Embedded in the purpose of my study is finding out about the experiences of women in Christian leadership and a few men who work with women. I appreciated Penner's approach, and the book her team produced, intended not "to offer final answers" but "to provide a forum for discussion and a stimulus for new thinking" (p. 8). In that regard, she and I share a major hope.

I have come to appreciate the differences between sex and gender. For a decade as a single adult, I valued the friendships and collegial working relationships I had with men as well as women. Gendered roles were being challenged, even redefined during those years. I

benefited as a single, career woman in the 70s by having expanded opportunities. Now as a married woman, I value the uniqueness of my sexuality, a great gift of God, allowing me to experience both my separate personhood and a unique and lasting intimacy with another person, my husband. Through expressing our sexuality in God's designed fashion, we have been privileged to parent two children. Sexual intimacy certainly has its place! And, biblically speaking, that place is one of honour (Heb. 13:4). We are becoming "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24b; Matt. 19:5b). When understood as a metaphor, marriage presents a picture of the church as the "bride of Christ" (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). When added to the picture Jesus gave Nicodemus (John 3) of the Spirit giving birth, we now have an extended metaphor of the cooperative work of the church, or body of Christ, and the Spirit, to have spiritual children.

Over the years I have been intrigued that the English word *intercourse* connotes different types of communication, including conversational sharing of ideas (that is, genuine dialogue) as well as sexual union. Part of the mystery of marriage is found in its revelation of the kind of longing desired and intimacy acquired in our relationship with God. God created us for relationship with himself and with one another. Christ, as the groom (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:7), desires both partnership in his kingdom work and jealously guarded intimacy in relationship. Our sexuality is the means through which we express our personhood to others, most intimately to one. Our spirituality is the means through which we worship.

Gender, on the other hand, is the expression of "social structures" and roles, which change over time and from one society to another. Maleness and femaleness do not change; gender does. God has given us a limited opportunity to be involved in parenting (sexuality), a deep yearning to have intimacy with God (spirituality), and shared responsibility for cultural and kingdom work (gender).

How do we encounter God? We have said our dialogue with God is crucial to our identity as Christians and our dialogue with others is a vital part of our development as persons. We have also said that we tend to view God from our own, limited, anthropological perspective. Here we make the point that part of that identity is gendered, or prescribed by society. Just as roles in parenting may fluctuate, depending on the life situation of the parents, so I believe roles in the church may change, depending on the calling of God and the response of God's people. This will be addressed later in the section dealing with the church. For now, I will say that each person in the church has been gifted by the Spirit to work for the common good. As stated previously, none of the spiritually gifts (Rom. 12; Eph. 4; I Cor. 12) are sex or gender specific. In the church, we can only benefit by adding the perspectives and gifts of women in leadership.

The Potential Danger of Gendering God

What difference does it make if God is a male or masculine God? Surely thousands of years of tradition cannot be wrong?! The danger is obvious: we limit God, and we limit ourselves. By restricting our understanding of God to an exclusive or primary masculine identity, we limit God in person, activity, and perhaps most relevant, we limit ability to perceive who God is. According to Penner (1998), the danger also leads to a violation of the second commandment, an act tantamount to idolatry. We are in danger of creating God in our image—a masculine image. Penner writes, "God is not to be imaged as a human male or female or as any other created being. God makes it clear that Yahweh (the Lord) is not limited to human reality . . . " (p. 20).

The implications are clear: how we image God determines how we believe we are made "in his image." If God is a hierarchical male God, the conclusions of the more

traditional views may be correct. If, however, God is "nonsexual," yet personal, the conclusions are more like those of the egalitarians. I believe that Our Creator has given us in the Bible enough word pictures or metaphors for us to know God spiritually both as Father and as Mother (see Rom. 8:15-16 for the work of the Father and the Spirit). Just as our language limits us from describing God in non-sexual, personal terms, so does our limited, finite experience as created, sexual beings prevent us from understanding the infinite Spirit of Truth. Through the centuries, others have grown to know and experience God in increasing ways, and we have gained from their perspectives. This generation and those that follow will gain from ours.

The doctrine of the Trinity has found renewed interest among scholars in the 20th century.

The "woman question," specifically whether women are able to serve in leadership capacities because of their sexuality, causes us to think carefully about what the scripture teaches us about God. Research of the nature of the Trinity reminds us that the eternal God is not a solitary, undifferentiated reality. On the contrary, God is Father, Son, and Spirit—a unity-in-diversity. It is not surprising, therefore, that when God fashions the pinnacle of creation, a unity-in-diversity, humankind—as male and female—emerges. (Grenz, 1995, p. 155)

The question of personhood asks whether women are fully persons, equal ontologically and functionally to men, and therefore able to lead alongside men in church. The answer should be evident as we rediscover through the dialogue around the issue of the Person of the Trinity. The women and men who participated in this study have given this question serious consideration, and have provoked me to further reflection.

Conclusion

Central to understanding leadership in the church is an understanding of whom God calls to lead. A consideration of personhood leads to the recognition that we are created to be in fellowship with one other and called to be in dialogue at a deep level. When dialogue

lapses or when one is cut off from dialogue, we are no longer reflecting the image of God and are not operating in the full sense of what it means to be a person. To use Paul's words, this is quenching the spirit (Eph. 4:30). As we consider who we are as persons, how we relate to one another, and how we organize our churches and institutions, we will do well to keep in mind that not only are we created in the *imago Dei*, we are intended to live it out in the world. With Abraham, we have been blessed to be a blessing. We know God so that we can make him known. Because of this,

ecclesiastical structures that function according to a male-dominated hierarchy or chain-of-command model simply cannot offer an adequate picture of the triune God. Rather, the conception of God as triune is best symbolized in an organization that fosters the cooperation of women and men in all dimensions of church life. (Grenz, 1995, p. 156)

Can we as Christians in the contemporary church demonstrate God in and to the world if we perpetuate a restrictive view of gender, limiting leaders to fewer than half of the membership? I believe the answer is no. When this perspective soaks into our collective awareness, we may begin to see the wisdom in encouraging women toward full participation, even in church leadership.

Before we consider further implications for church life, however, we will look at the experiences of the participants in their families. It is here that persons first develop their notions of gender identity and personhood.

Pause for Reflection

A study in "the image of God" alone would be enormous! For further reading, see *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* by Stanley Grenz (2000), particularly chapter five, "Women in Creation." He fairly explains the two interpretations of the Genesis account and goes further to explore the Paul's commentary on creation order in the New Testament. I also recommend *Equal to Serve* (1998) by Gretchen Gabelein Hull, and *Women Caught in the Conflict* (1994) by Rebecca Merrill Groothuis. Both of these books contain well-researched arguments on the image of God. Paul Jewett's *Man as Male and Female* (1975) presents the argument that the relationship between male and female together that represents God's image. Susan Foh in *Women and the Word of God* (1979) writes from a traditional perspective. She holds that women are subordinate but not inferior, and that in fact subordination does not require inferiority. Her "excursus" on the image of God is primarily a discussion of Jewett's position, with which Foh disagrees. Surely, this is one place where further study could take you in many directions!

CHAPTER SIX: FAMILY

Christians revere the family above any other human system of relationship.¹⁷ Since the days of Adam and Eve, the family has been central to God-fearers in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. In fact, one of the primary metaphors for the Christian community is "the family of God." Our contemporary setting finds "family values" very important to evangelical Christians. During the interviews I conducted, the theme of "family" emerged, not surprisingly, in every conversation. Among the discussions, various aspects of family life came to the fore. Topics included families of origin, current nuclear families, and extended families. While all considered "family" important in their lives, even of high priority, not all persons interviewed considered their families to be helpful in terms of their development as Christian women in leadership. The family, like all the other factors discovered, both helped and hindered women.

How did we get from childhood to adulthood? How have our views of family life been shaped? This chapter "records" the voices of the participants as they discuss the role family has played in their development as persons and more specifically, how family has contributed to their understanding of Christian leadership. The chapter begins by presenting excerpts of dialogues that reveal influences of family on some of the women in their formative years. It then moves to a discussion of the participants' experiences as adults, emphasizing continued

¹⁷ I avoid the term *institution* because of the implications that accompany formal organization. At its point of origin, the family was in essence relational, not organizational. This flies in the face of common usage. One such example of the common use is Focus on the Family which states as a core principle, "We believe that the institution of marriage was intended by God to be a permanent, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman..." Again, *relationship* is the focus. As we will see in the next chapter, institutions are organizations with specific structures which change over time. The family is much more flexible, foundational, and enduring than mere structure. Granted, God "instituted" marriage as its founder. But "creation" is far different than "organization."

growth in marriage. Their experiences serve as a springboard for an examination of marriage as partnership and the relationship of marriage to Christian leadership. Finally, it outlines the implications of partnership between men and women for Christian leadership. While this chapter discusses themes discovered in dialogue with the participants, I have chosen to structure it in a somewhat chronological fashion because it reflects the process by which we develop as persons. As part of the dialogue with you, the reader, I invite you to join in the discussion with the participants and consider how your own family has influenced your growth and your current perspective on women in leadership.

I find it significant that among the participants, including those not raised in Christian homes, family life was considered more a help than a hindrance in Christian leadership. However, half of the participants identified one or more aspects of family life a hindrance. Now is a good time to remind you that of the eleven, eight are women and three are men. While all three men are married, four of the women are not. Two are single, having never married, one is widowed, and one is divorced. In the experience of each man, the family was fully supportive of his choice to enter Christian ministry. In the experience of women, however, several met with some degree of resistance, whether in their nuclear or extended families.

As I reviewed the interviews it became evident that as the women talked, their stories were deeply personal accounts of events and relationships that shaped them. Because the focus of our discussions was "women in leadership," it only makes sense that the women were speaking in "first person" accounts. When this topic came up with the men, it was slightly more removed, or "third person." The tone of the discussion was different: women could speak of "I" and "we." Men spoke of "they" and "them." Although this is fairly obvious, the

result is that men were more philosophical and dispassionate. There had never been a question as to whether it was appropriate for them to enter ministry as men. On the other hand, the women encountered ambivalence, even opposition.

Pause for Reflection

Describe your family. What significant childhood events have shaped your view about family? Are you currently single, married, single again? Do you have children? Do you live with your parents? Near them? What about your relationship with your siblings? If you are married, compare your extended family with that of your spouse. Have you considered how your family life relates to your Christian faith?

Are you, or any of the women in your family, in Christian leadership? Has your (their) experience been positive in terms of family support?

Record any key thoughts in your journal. You may want to refer to your notes, or add to them as we continue this chapter. You will hear bits and pieces of family life through the eyes of the participants, and their stories may stimulate you to think of your own.

The Formative Years: Of Grandparents, Parents, and Siblings

Teresa, Charity, and Frieda have different backgrounds with different family configurations. Teresa's childhood home is in Eastern Canada. Her parents, grandparents and extended family were particularly encouraging. Teresa has remained single, a fact which has contributed to the flexibility of her education and international ministry. Charity grew up in the Southern United States, one of several siblings including two adopted brothers. Supportive parents and a woman minister influenced her. Charity's life path has led her to complete a Masters of Divinity degree and work in three states. She is currently single and serving as Chaplain in a large medical facility. Frieda grew up in Western Canada, also in a solid Christian family. Through the years Frieda's rich and varied ministry has been expressed as a volunteer, working around her scheduled priorities as wife and mother. These women illustrate the varied influence of family in ways that help and hinder their becoming leaders.

In Teresa's case, our conversation took many twists and turns as we discussed her life experiences. At one point, Teresa commented that she "had been raised to think through things and to take initiative." When I asked her by whom, she replied, "Definitely parents and I think specifically of my paternal grandmother." She explained many of her relatives are involved in various aspects of ministry, "but specifically my parents and my paternal grandmother . . . really encouraged us always to think and to read and to explore things." Her family cautioned that there would be times when "there weren't necessarily other believers that you could talk to about a lot of questions you had." Their encouragement built into Teresa a confidence to think for herself. Both her parents and grandmother encouraged her to "think" and "explore," knowing that she would broaden her horizons, possibly further than "other believers" would be comfortable with. The message they gave was that what other people thought was not to be the determiner of her mental and spiritual exploration.

I was particularly interested at the openness Teresa described in her grandmother. Recognizing the age difference between them, I asked Teresa what it was about her grandmother that she remembers as being helpful in nurturing her own growth. She recalls, as a teenager, "reading vociferously," including the works of Francis Schaeffer. Her grandmother, a former schoolteacher, was reading the same books. Teresa would often "go and talk over things with her—ideas and directions." She credits her grandmother for encouraging "people to step out of the mold and move ahead." As you will see, Teresa has certainly done that.

Through Teresa's reading and with the modeling and encouragement of her extended family, she gained "a lot of interest in mission work" and also discovered "that God speaks, and there is a whole world out there. You don't have to be confined to the little communities

that might stifle you." Teresa's extended family offered role models of missionaries, educators, and independent thinkers. Is it any wonder that she is serving today as a well-educated missionary in a predominantly Muslim country, as a single woman? Her family seemed to understand the need to "overcome" cultural limitations, represented by "little communities that might stifle you." They challenged Teresa to think for herself and respond obediently to God. Her sense of personal security and "knowing that God speaks," both rooted in a strong extended family, have proved not only helpful but life changing for Teresa. In one sense, her family released Teresa, giving her permission to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29), and in so doing sent her out to a needy world. It sounds reminiscent of the Abrahamic covenant: Teresa was blessed to be a blessing.

Pause for Reflection

Can you picture Teresa's grandmother? Her zest for life must have been contagious. Think about your own relationship to grandparents.

Do you have a strong sense of identity in a multi-generational family? In our increasingly mobile society, many of us do not live near grandparents.

What may be gained or lost by living near or far away from grandparents? Identify the ways in which Teresa's grandmother encouraged Teresa toward leadership.

As a young teen, Charity was involved in a small church where Candy served on staff. Parents with a worldwide perspective and a church that ventured having a woman staff member influenced her life.

During our interview, Charity reflected on her teenage experience, admitting to some difficult years when she says, "I tortured my parents." She remembers, however, sitting on the porch one day and saying to her father, "'So, Daddy, what would you all do if I decided to go to seminary?' And he said, 'Well, I guess we'd do whatever we could to make that happen.'" Charity's father's response was unconditional support that carried with it a spirit of willing involvement, even sacrificial love. Since Charity's church had a woman serving on staff, she

learned as a young teenager that it was "normal" for a woman to take a leadership role in the church; furthermore, her own father was supportive of that direction for her life.

Charity also credits her parents for exposing her to a larger world, even though her life was essentially "my house, my school, my church." She told of "one of the greatest gifts they ever gave me." I was warmed by her story of her parents buying season's tickets to the cultural events in a major city, and driving 2 ½ hours each way to take their children, one at a time, to "a ballet or a concert or Czechoslovakian dancers or whatever was on . . . because they were committed to seeing that we knew that there was life outside."

Beyond the broader exposure to cultural events, Charity's parents taught her an even deeper lesson:

I have two adopted brothers, one from Korea and one from India, and I've reflected back on that. What that taught me was that we are all people and God loves us all. And I love them as much as I love my biological brother and biological sisters, and we are all siblings. I have to give a lot of credit to my parents. They are very wise. And they gifted me to see things through God's eyes.

Charity's sister also had a huge impact on her life. After attending college, Charity chose to pursue a business career. Several successful years passed and Charity found herself living in the same city as one of her sisters. Meanwhile, Candy and her family had served overseas as missionaries and visited Charity and her sister on a furlough. We pick up Charity's narrative at this point: "Candy and her daughter and my sister and I went to church . . . and on the way home my sister said, 'So what's it like going to seminary?' And Candy asked, 'Well, who wants to know?' And my sister said, 'Charity does.'"

As the story unfolded it became evident that Charity's sister had recognized God's timing in Charity's life and that her earlier desire to enter the ministry had resurfaced. She says, "It was just out of the blue and I just sat there and listened, and that kind of triggered the

whole thing about, 'Where is your joy?' and 'Who are you?' And, about a week later, I decided I needed to go to seminary. . . . It was the most incredible three years."

We see in Charity's life the valued influence of parents and siblings. Her family bestowed on her what my own mother stitched on a wall hanging: "There are two gifts we give our children. One is roots, the other, wings."

Pause for Reflection

What role did Charity's family play in her eventual seminary training? Her parents seemed to have a remarkable worldview. Think about what kind of persons they are and describe them.

Now, think about your parents and siblings. Do you consider them supportive? In what ways are you supportive of them? Have there been familial discussions that would prompt the women in your family toward leadership?

Frieda also came from a personally supportive Christian home. While all three families reflected traditional values, Frieda's family differed in that her mother did not work outside the home. Frieda evaluated the role her parents played in her personal formation. She observed that due to several factors, "from a child to where I am now, I have changed in my thinking." Frieda seemed pensive as she recounted,

In the home where I grew up, my mother was a full-time homemaker, and I realized later on that she was very influential in my thinking that women could not succeed or should not in the world of working outside the home. She would put down women. She herself was not educated [and did not do] any career thinking at all, so she would often make comments about "What's that woman doing out there? She should be at home with her children."

As a result, Frieda grew up thinking that "women were inferior and were not bright enough to do jobs." However, she says, "I was always puzzled when I would see some woman in politics or doing something in a business. I would think, 'Well, how can they do it? They must be really able to or what are they doing there?'"

Frieda explained that over time she recognized the influence her mother's restrictive view of women had on her. Even now, she says,

I catch myself thinking, "How can that woman do that? How did she get the energy and where did she get the ability to learn it?" But I know that that is not accurate. . . . My thinking has changed from thinking that women were inferior. I really do know they are capable and equal as a man to do things.

Frieda's reflections indicate she has already evaluated her family's influence on her life, particularly her mother's influence.

When Frieda married, she chose to live in a traditional family, staying home and assuming the role of homemaker and primary nurturer for her children. This is a decision she has reaffirmed through the twenty-plus years of marriage and today continues to enjoy. Our conversation revealed, however, that as a result of her reflection, she is less insistent that her choice is normative for all families. The leadership Frieda has contributed as a volunteer in local church and denominational levels results in part because of the time available to her because she does not work outside the home and because of the support of her husband. She reflects a growing number of evangelical women who believe each married woman should, within the partnership of her marriage, decide whether or not to work outside of the home.

Pause for Reflection

Have you considered your relationship with your own mother in terms of a direct influence on how you live your life? If not, this is a good time to start. Many of us have said, "I'll never do what my mother did!" only to discover that is exactly what we do. And, in many cases, our mothers provided excellent, even awe-inspiring role models. But, we are not to follow anyone mindlessly, including our own parents. Think about the ways you may be imitating your parents without having given it much thought. We are called to honour our fathers and mothers. In the areas that you affirm their example, why not take a moment to write them a thank you note? Utter a prayer of gratitude to the Lord for your parents. In the areas that you discover you need to carve a new path, do so thoughtfully and prayerfully.

Before we leave Teresa, Charity, and Frieda, think about the similarities and differences in their family situations. How has "family" shaped their experience in Christian leadership? Write down some of your observations. If you are part of a discussion group, share your observations of these three women, and then share some of those thoughts with other group members.

Having considered nuclear families of origin, we next turn our attention to marriage relationships as discussed in the interviews. Because several of the women were married, the issue of marriage arose in the conversations as a factor related to their Christian leadership.

Marriage: a Great Mystery

The Bible is literally full of stories of marriage from beginning to end, from the Genesis (1:27-3:24) account of Adam and Eve in the Garden to the Revelation (19:7-8) of the marriage of the Lamb, Jesus, with his bride, the church. Possibly the most familiar passage on marriage is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians which includes a quotation from Genesis:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ . . . For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:21, 31-32)

As we saw in the previous chapter, our relationships are one critical factor in the formation of our personhood. Marriage is designed by the Creator as a life-long intimate relationship which somehow mysteriously points us to the relationship of Christ and the

church. Paul used the term "mystery" to denote "a secret purpose of God now made known to men" (Ladd, 1974, p.387). Since the days of my own engagement I have asked God to show me what this mystery of marriage reveals about the church. I believe some of what I have learned is reflected in this study. Marriage, indeed, is important to our understanding of women in leadership in the church, although marriage is neither essential for Christian women as a life choice nor a qualification for women in Christian leadership. (See I Cor. 7 for Paul's discussion on marriage and singleness.)

Marriage is a pivotal point in the discussion of the roles of women in evangelical Christianity for two reasons. First, as "two become one" the *persons* in marriage are shaped by the interaction and dialogue with one another. Second, many take one teaching intended for a couple in the context of the household and extend it to a universal pattern of leadership in the church.

This section highlights how marriage has influenced the participants and examines whether marriage has been a help or a hindrance to leading. It also develops an understanding of marriage as partnership and explains how this relates to leadership in the church. As with other themes discovered through dialogue with the participants, I used the insights gleaned from the conversations to prompt my further reading. Their stories provide springboards for the comments that I add.

Roberta: Hierarchy or Partnership in Marriage?

You may remember that Roberta is a pastor, married with children. By the time I interviewed Roberta, she was speaking from years of ministry experience, having worked in several pastoral roles and, with her husband, raising their now-grown children. She says,

When it comes to marriage, I can speak for us, that we began with more of a hierarchical model, and we changed it almost for our survival because my husband found that if he made some decisions without my agreement or he didn't take notice of the kind of red lights that I saw or hesitations that I saw, he made some poor decisions. He came to see that, in fact, we go back to the Genesis 2 model. The woman was given to be the helper and that meant she actually brought something of value to the man. And so the man would be pretty stupid not to treasure and pay attention to what she brought as gift to him.

Roberta told me that she and her husband had help along the way from "a wise couple" who were "like mentors to us." An older couple, they shared their own pilgrimage in marriage. They had come to understand their marriage as "a sort of a walking alongside each other." They, too, discovered the hierarchical model "may in some couples be necessary to get certain things done, or if there is a crisis." Roberta gave an illustration:

If there is a fire in the building, then I think the person who sees the fire first doesn't stand around negotiating "about our roles, dear." You start issuing chain-of-command. And you issue those commands to the first person you see . . . Now that's a crisis. But that's for survival. So if you see that there is danger, you act and you dictate. You say, "Get out of here!" And there's no time to discuss why or where you're going or what clothes you're bringing. It's, "Get out."

Such times of crisis come, and there are "moments when a hierarchical kind of chain-of-command, being dictatorial is appropriate." Roberta thinks those moments are rare, saying, "On the scale of human events, it's probably .01% of occasions." She cautions, "I think what goes wrong is to use something which is a survival mechanism in a crisis situation and then apply that to the whole of life." The result can be "certain kinds of distortions of human behaviour." If a crisis mode of operating is "transferred to the whole of life, it's going to be a dysfunctional pattern and can end up in all kinds of aberrations." Roberta's point was well made. Hierarchy may have a time and place, but she and her husband learned from an

older, wiser, mentor couple that a marriage is designed for two people "sort of walking alongside each other."

Pause for Reflection

Notice the shift in decision-making style. For Roberta and her husband, the hierarchical model did not work because "he made some poor decisions." They had to make a change "for our survival." The survival of a marriage is very important. How did they come to recognize their need for a change? How did they make the necessary changes?

Think back on the discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in the previous chapter. If we are to understand the woman was to be a helper to man in the same way the Holy Spirit is to be a helper for Christ and his disciples, this turns the notion of "hierarchy" upside-down. With Paul, I agree the mystery is great!

This may be new thinking for you. If so, I suggest that you read Genesis 1-2, Matthew 19:4-6, John 14-16, and Ephesians 5 (the entire chapter!). Prayerfully consider "the mystery."

The Notion of Chain-of-Command

I found Roberta to be a thought-provoking woman. She had obviously wrestled through some difficult days in her own life trying to reconcile her life with scripture. I wanted to know more of her story. If hierarchy doesn't work in the everyday-ness of marriage, how are decisions to be made? Roberta's view of marriage structure changed from a formal top-down view to something more flexible. She explains, she and her husband have learned to

take the equality to the decision-making level as well, because *we are not an institution. We are a partnership.* [italics added]. . . We choose to only go forward on a major decision, on a decision that affects both of us or the family, if we have both come to a point of agreement. If one of us is hesitant, we wait until we are in agreement, one way or the other We can just see that that principle works for greater harmony between us; it works for us both being able to be freer in contributing our respective gifts.

Roberta spoke from her experience as she explained, "We are much more likely to get a better-made decision that way. [We are] much more likely to sense what God is saying." She then referred to Psalm 133, in which "God commands a blessing 'when the brethren dwell in unity,' to use the old version." Roberta spoke with conviction, adding, "When his

people dwell in unity—I think that unity is a stronger goal, and it is one that God says has commanded his blessing, than hierarchical order."

Roberta talked about the "chain-of-command." In military or business language, we understand it to refer to the top-down flow of authority in organized, institutionalized settings. Roberta, however, made a point of saying their relationship was not an institution, but a partnership. Some evangelical Christians do believe marriages and families operate under such a hierarchical chain-of-command. It might be illustrated like this:

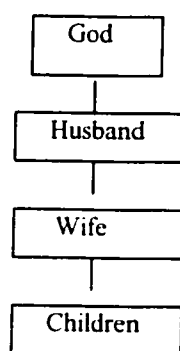


Figure 1. Chain-of-Command Model¹⁸

¹⁸ In this study, I tend to refer to family as traditionally organized in a biblical model (husband, wife, and children). Although I recognize that many families today do not conform to this model, I use it because it is the commonly held ideal of most evangelicals and of my respondents. Even in this group, some had experienced divorce; others have alternate family configurations. While some readers may find relating to this model difficult and painful, I hope that it serves my purpose to illustrate relationships between men and women and God.

What Roberta and her husband discovered was more like this:

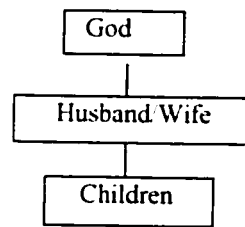


Figure 2. Partnership Model

Let's extend this from the family to the wider circle of church work. In my interviews, several observations pointed to "mixed messages" given to women. Teresa and Candy observed that all ministry options were open to them as children and high school students. Teresa ran into obstacles for leadership as a single woman. Candy was restricted from paid ministry because she was married. Alicia separately commented that as a woman, she felt that most men treated her "like a child." When hierarchy, or chain-of-command, is implemented in the family, the relationships seem to take on a formal structure that limits interaction and equality. If family is a metaphor for church, and we transfer leadership models, consider what happens when we transfer either a chain-of-command model or a partnership model.

Let's see what happens as children grow up in the two models.

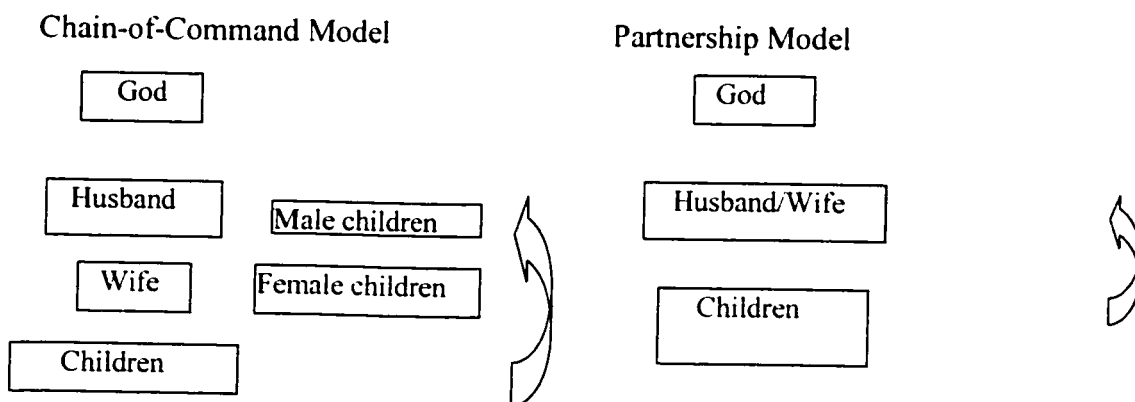


Figure 3: Comparison Model

In the model on the left, male children are allowed to jump the chain to leadership, surpassing their own mothers. Girls join their mothers in the third tier. When this hierarchical pattern is held, women are never allowed full status as persons alongside men, and more alarmingly, they are prevented from direct access to a relationship with God, their standing being considered "under" their husband's. This should send theological warning signals through our homes and churches. In the model on the right, both male and female children move together toward a level position.

In homes and families where men and women regard one another as partners, they provide a climate—a culture, to return to the original metaphor of both the garden and society—allowing both to grow. They provide expansive role models for their children. Indeed, they encourage their children to become mature through interdependence.

I got the distinct impression that Roberta and her husband had learned the art of unity over time, and that the two had "become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This word picture, I believe, is more accurately illustrated in the partnership model.

Candy: Relationship or Career?

Ironically, that desire for a "one flesh" relationship almost backfired on Candy in terms of her marriage and ministry. Her evangelical upbringing included teaching on marriage and the family. As a young woman committed to full-time ministry, she was advised to marry someone also "called." She remembers, "When I was growing up, we were always told, 'pray for your spouse.' I prayed from a little girl on that God would lead me to the man he had for me, that he would be somebody supportive of ministry, who would be called like I am." She says no one told her then she would have to choose between marriage and ministry. Sadly, she recalls, "I was even told I would be unequally yoked if I didn't marry

someone in ministry, because I was called to ministry." Candy was referring to II Cor. 6:14, which counsels that a believer should not be "bound together" with an unbeliever. As Candy now knows, the verse refers to core beliefs, not to ministry calling.

As a young woman, Candy knew her calling. She also desired to be married. She was embarking on an all-too-common journey of frustration resulting from the mixed messages she received from well-meaning people around her. Hull (1987) addresses this artificial choice between "occupation or relationship," reminding us that childbearing is not a "career but—after the child's birth—is the establishment of a new relationship" (p. 161). She bases her observation in scripture, acknowledging the importance of marriage and family.

Genesis 1.2 make it clear that in marriage two persons commit themselves to become as one, but while this is a very serious choice, the resulting relationship will not completely occupy the couple's time God commanded man and woman to rule as well as to multiply, to work at an occupation as well as to be in a relationship. This general occupational mandate includes no indication of any delegation *by gender* to specific spheres of oversight . . . one cannot effectively argue that all women must engage only in child-related occupations, anymore than one could argue that the only suitable occupation for all men is farming. (p. 159)

Returning to Candy's story, we see how this tension, choosing marriage or career, played out in her marriage:

So I married someone who was called to ministry, and, as a consequence, I had to quit being a professional minister because he was the one who could be hired. And churches even told us early in our career, they were getting "two for one."

Candy recounts feeling taken advantage of by a church policy that expected a wife to continue doing ministry without benefit of salary. She was further "shocked" when they returned from the mission field and were invited to speak at their "home church." Candy says,

When we were introduced, it hit me so hard, because "your husband's been a missionary in [South America] for four years and we want him to come talk." I worked twice as hard as he did, probably, because I had my ministry there. He had to be downtown at the convention office all day long, not that he didn't work real hard, but I had additional [family] responsibilities, and then they introduced me as, "You remember. Candy helped with the children's ministry here."

Here she speaks with surprise, bordering on anger. "I started the children's ministry there! But I wasn't a paid minister, because my husband was the paid minister." No doubt you can sense the confusion and disappointment in Candy's words. She and her husband, both called of God, both serving in a foreign country with ministry responsibilities, and only one recognized as the "missionary." The church sent mixed signals. They both encouraged Candy toward ministry, particularly as a young person, and prevented her from being recognized as an equal partner with her husband.

It is within marriage that the relationship and the respective roles of the husband and wife are worked out. When the husband and wife leave the private domain of the home and extend their relationship into the church and broader community, other people's expectations come to bear. So it was with Candy and her husband. They chose to marry one another partly because of their mutual commitment to full-time Christian service and their desire to work together. The reality, however, was that the Christian community in which they worked did not allow for them to work side-by-side as partners. Rather, the church and mission board insisted that the husband be the salaried professional minister and that the wife be the volunteer. As Hull (1987) is quick to point out, volunteerism is very important in the life of the church. She calls it the "unrecognized career" (p. 37). However, if two people in a marriage are called into service, it seems as if they could be hired as a team, which is beginning to happen in some spheres, or could be hired each part-time for different ministries.

The services of each would be provided, the family would have adequate income, and the children would have access to both parents.

This is a notion recommended by Tournier (1981) in *The Gift of Feeling* (pp. 46-47). Although his premise includes work beyond ministry, the principle of each parent working part-time still applies. The barriers to this notion are largely cultural and psychological, in that we still view the man as the "primary breadwinner," as reflected in the relative salaries paid to men and to women, and our traditional concept that the wife is to "help" by staying home rather than by working outside the home. In our urban industrialized societies, we need to look back less than one hundred years to realize that our lifestyle is a fairly recent historical innovation. Families worked together on the farm, both husband and wife laboring as workers and parents at home.

Pause for Reflection

Have you heard the expression that when a church hires a married man with a competent wife, they get "two for the price of one"? I certainly have! Recently, however, as we have developed an increasingly professionalized ministry, the man's job as "staff" and the woman's role as "homemaker" have served to separate the involvement of some wives. They do not feel the need to assist the husband "at work." This is certainly understandable. After all, few spouses would go to the office to help out at work. We in church, however, have long understood that we are all to "minister" and that couples may be called to work together. How are we to think about the role of the minister's *wife*? What about the role of a minister's *husband*? What about remuneration? Does it matter if only one is paid? In what way does salaried work reflect its value? Identify some of your attitudes toward marriage and ministry.

Roberta, Esther, and Patricia: Marriage Holds Two People.

Two other women in the study share the situation with Candy. Both Roberta (whose story we have heard in part) and Esther are married to theologically trained, experienced ministers. Interestingly, none of the three husbands was currently working in a church-related position at the time of the interviews. Candy's was about to enter the chaplaincy; Roberta's was completing further studies, and they are planning on a ministry venture together in the

near future; and Esther's is currently working in a secular helping profession. All three husbands are supportive of their wives' calling and vocation. Each family has been through seasons of transition. Each family began married life with the husband as primary wage earner and professional minister. Over time, each has experienced seasons during which the wife's salary was the primary income for the family.

Patricia's experience in marriage and ministry, however, is different in one key respect. She laments, "I found that my marriage was a real obstacle . . . My husband didn't *not* support me, but he didn't support me. Do you know what I'm saying?" Because her husband was not actively supportive, the marriage became a limitation to Patricia's ministry. Her poignant comment, taken from a much larger conversation, highlights the need of a woman to be valued by her husband for who she is and what she does. It also points, I think, to the need to expand the "tent stakes" of a marriage. When Dr. Maxine Hancock (1999, March) reminisced about the "defining moments" of her own marriage with husband Cam, she observed, "Our marriage was big enough to hold two whole people. Most marriages hold 1 ½ people." She meant that in most marriages, the man is allowed to grow fully and express himself in all dimensions of his life. The woman is often restricted to the private domain with its limited options and opportunities.

If men and women are called to grow as persons as they relate to one another, could it be that the difficulties caused by role reversals in the marriages of Roberta, Esther, and Candy were not so much hindrances to growth in the marriages but were tensions that, like exercising muscles, caused the marriage to grow stronger? Each of the three couples saw in their marriage the opportunity to contribute beyond their family to the kingdom of God. In each of these marriages, the partners worked through obstacles as they came, and because in their

homes the husband and wife shared the same view, over time they came to recognize that they were equally called, gifted, and equipped to serve. Each couple was willing to work out their situation together because of their "successful relationship."

Patricia, however, did not get a sense of value and worth in her ministry from her husband. Though he treated her with respect as an autonomous person, he did not engage in her work through active support or partnership. Their marriage relationship suffered, as they grew more independent of one another.

This brings us back, almost cyclically, to the question of personhood. In order to discover and live out of a sense of personhood, one enters a dialogue of the "I-thou" relationship. The most intimate of this type is marriage. When a Christian man and woman enter the marriage covenant, they do so in the eyes of their Creator. Consider once more the notion of what it means to be "person." Again, I quote Tournier (1981) in *The Gift of Feeling*:

Finally the person is man and woman together, and not man alone. In his fine book *Le désir et la tendresse*, Eric Fuchs recalls the saying of Jesus, "Have you not read that the creator from the beginning made them male and female . . . ?" He explains that in Jesus' language the expression "from the beginning" does not only express anteriority in time, but "signifies symbolically the primal will of God", his "founding will". Thus the foundation of the person—the "image of God" who is himself the person *par excellence*, and the harmony and fullness implicit in the notion of the person – is the indissoluble complementarity of man and woman. For procreation? – Certainly, when he says to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth . . ." But he goes on, "and conquer it" (Gen. 1.28). Is not the whole of history and civilization embodied in that command? Man and woman are to build the world together—not a masculine history filled only with the vicissitudes of an endless race for power, nor a masculine civilization which asserts the priority of things over persons. (p. 131)

While marriage is the *means* to grow persons toward maturity, marriage was never intended to be the purposeful *end* of either the man or the woman. Rather, together the man and woman fulfill the original cultural mandate in the larger world.

The Helper and the Head

Two terms have emerged repeatedly in the literature, and their understandings parallel the different views presented both in the literature and among the participants. While I will not go into length about either, both merit mention. The terms *helper* and *head* and are often used to describe the relationship between a wife and a husband, and are sometimes extended to all women and men in general.

We first encounter *helper* as a description for the woman, or the wife, in Genesis 2:18. Some argue that because of the creation order (the male first) and because of this term *ezer*, the woman is subordinate to Adam. This position requires "special pleading" according to Hull (1987), who explains that "those who wanted to teach that the last-formed life form (humankind) was the culmination of creation, while teaching that within that life form the first-formed would take precedence wanted it "both ways" (p. 181). Hull's study of the Hebrew word from which we translate *helper* has led her to understand the terms as

someone who is strong. Of all the times the Old Testament uses this word, most of the uses refer to God. For example, Psalm 121 describes the Psalmist's helper (*ʿezer*) as being "...the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (v. 2). If in the many instances where *ʿezer* is used of God we gave it the subordinate meaning that has traditionally been used in the case of woman, what heresy we would perpetrate about the nature of God! No, *ʿezer* does not indicate subordination or subservience. (p. 182)

Following this argument, Hull concludes that the biblical pattern for marriage is "the two 'become one flesh,' not 'the two become a hierarchy.' The two now side by side should carry out God's order to multiply and to oversee the world together" (p. 182). Based on this understanding, egalitarians argue for the partnership model in marriages.

The second term is *head*. If a woman is to be the "help" to man, what is a man to the woman? The term *head* is most often used because it appears in the Ephesians 5 passage

containing Paul's instructions, or what were known as the household code. The debate over the term stems from the Greek *kephale*. While some translate *head* to mean ruler, others suggest, based on strong hermeneutic grounds, that the more accurate definition is source.¹⁹ Paul Stevens (1986) cautions against what he calls "the problem of headship," warning that this "hot issue" carries two obvious dangers: (1) the "heresy of false headship"; and (2) the "heresy of no headship at all" (pp. 108-118). He devotes a chapter to this discussion, giving attention to the "parable of headship," that calls for "husbands and wives . . . to be like Christ and the church" (p. 126). He challenges each couple to work out their roles as a couple, asserting, "What God wants is not mass-produced Christian marriages, but many unique parables of his wonderful covenant with the church" (p. 127).

Pause for Reflection

Hull (1987) and Stevens (1986) are but two authors who present excellent discussions on these terms. I recommend that you find these or other resources and familiarize yourself with the larger discussion. You may want to use one of these books as a resource for personal or group study.

Think about the notion of the Holy Spirit, the Helper, coming as a *paraclete*, one like Jesus to walk alongside us. (See Chapter Five.) What do you think of Steven's observation that each marriage is a parable of the divine covenant? If you are married, do you think of your marriage in those terms?

Some Benefits of Singleness

Four of the eight women who participated in this study were not married at the time of their interviews. Two have chosen not to marry, one is divorced, and one is a widow.

Singleness as a lifestyle choice is both honorable and biblical. In fact, when we read Paul's

¹⁹ Perriman's chapter "Disputing the Excuse for Abuse" (Kroeger & Beck, 1998) offers an additional perspective on *kephale* asserting that the term metaphorically means neither head nor source but "most prominent" or most representative (p. 216). His understanding is helpful, and provides yet another reason for you to pursue the meaning of the term *head* as it relates to the marriage relationship.

letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 7), we find him not only preferring the single lifestyle for himself, but also recommending it to others.

Both Teresa and Alicia expressed benefits that accompany singleness. Teresa commented that her singleness provided flexibility in her work. She has moved to follow her call to missions many times. Her single status allows her to move with relative ease. Alicia has benefited by the freedom of singleness, but says she is open to marriage. At the time of our interview, she was involved in a "serious relationship," which she suggested might lead to marriage. Her dialogue with me provided an opportunity for her to articulate some of the changes in perspective she has considered in recent years.

In terms of extended families and the church, single adults contribute valuable support to one another and to others. As a single adult for many years, I spent much of my spare time (time that my married peers simply did not have because of family commitments) involved in church-related activities. As a woman, my perspective on committees and church staffs offered an appreciated balance to the largely male groups.

Fortunately, in the past two decades, both men and women are being encouraged to achieve a "healthy personhood," not depending on marriage to achieve success (Wood, 1977, p. 40). With this emphasis on personhood, Wood counsels single adults to become the persons God created them to be and contribute actively to the church.

Pause for Reflection

For a biblical perspective on singleness, read I Corinthians 7, especially verses 7-9 and 25-40. Consider Paul's specific teaching on singleness, marriage, remarriage, and widowhood. Is any of this new to you? How does this fit with your current views? What benefits might singleness provide in the development of the *person*?

Think of people in the Bible who you know to be single. Identify their contributions to the Kingdom of God. In what way was their singleness a factor?

Married, with Children: Providing a Model of Ministry.

We certainly cannot leave a discussion of marriage and family without mentioning our children! By now it is evident that Christian marriages value biblical admonitions, including "be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28). Of the seven women who participated in the study, five have children, believing "children are a gift of the Lord" (Ps. 127:3 NAS). While I cannot recount all of our discussions, I will share some highlights regarding their views on children. Each mother in the study gave her role as parent a very high priority, and each willingly set aside years of her life to devote to childbearing and child rearing. The participants reflect the views of both traditionalists and egalitarians, that is, in some cases the mother chose to stay at home to provide primary care for children while in other cases the responsibilities were more evenly divided. Among the women, each balanced her calling as mother with her calling as Christian, and in the process modeled "kingdom work" for her children. As Lorry Lutz (1997) said of her years of ministry while her children were young, "They claim today that our involvement modelled a ministry commitment that has encouraged all five to become workers for the kingdom of God" (p. xiv). We will hear from the participants varying approaches to child-rearing, then see how each contributed to their role as leaders.

Frieda is the "stay-at-home mother" in the group. Before she and her husband had children, they volunteered together to lead the youth ministry in their church. Our conversation shifted back and forth between her role as partner in ministry with her husband and the more general question of women in leadership in the church. Frieda obviously

delights in her children. Being a mother enriched her ability as a leader. She says women can be leaders

in our home with our children and with the friends and other people that come into our home We can be influential with other young mothers or other women, other people that we come into contact with. It doesn't have to be in a structured way that we are leaders and be involved outside the home, although it can.

During the years that Frieda stayed at home with her growing children, she developed leadership skills that have transferred to other activities in church and related ministries. She talked about the time and energy required to be the mother of young children, noting, that for many women "there is a different phase in their life before they have children. They might be more involved [in church]. Or later on when their children are grown and gone." But, Frieda observes during the child raising years, women "often want to be home more with their children." In retrospect, Frieda says, with many of us, that children "just grow up so fast and then they're gone" Children are people "right in [our] house that need to be nurtured and tended." Frieda's experience leads her to counsel other women to take advantage of opportunities in and out of the home.

Frieda has given us a lot to think about! She involved her children in her ministry activities; she used her home and family as a base for ministry; and as her children grew older she arranged her personal schedule to be home with them more often. Frieda reflects a commitment both to her family and to the kingdom of God. She seems to follow the priorities Anne Ortlund (1977) recommends: first, making God the number one priority of your life; second, commitment to the church, the Body of Christ; and third, the needy people of this world (pp. 28-33).

Pause for Reflection

In our contemporary cocooning of family life, encouraged in evangelical circles, we sometimes live by a set of priorities different from those listed by Ortland. I have often heard "God first; family second; career third." The church is not even on the list! Has this been your experience? I was quite surprised several years ago to notice a trend among young families to skip the Sunday evening worship service in favour of a "family night." What could be more valuable than worshipping together with the larger family, the spiritual family? I began over time to see that this was more than a local trend. A few years ago, in fact, I was asked to write an article for a Christian publication about the demise of the Sunday evening worship service. What I found in my research was interesting. Churches that provided expansive programs for children were growing in their evening attendance; those that provided only worship services in the evening were dwindling in evening attendance. To what degree do we as Christians believe it is important to include our children in worship and ministry? To what degree do we think we need to entertain and amuse them? Give this some serious thought. In a culture experiencing entertainment overload, this is no easy dilemma.

Roberta's children also influenced decisions about her schedule. She had one of the most challenging ministries I have heard about. She was told that her "ministry is wide." At one point she said, "I was minister of four congregations, different systems of government, different denominations . . . and I was also teaching at a theological college." The closest of the four churches was 30 minutes away, then continuing on to another 15 minutes, then 30 in a circuit. During our discussion about her children, I asked, "What about family? How did you manage a family?" Roberta grew quite pensive at this point. She knew she was doing an interview for a research project and answering not only for herself, but that her responses might influence others. I appreciated her thoughtfulness. "I really would not like to see women in ministry when their children are very small. I'm thinking about being pregnant, having babies, and then pastoring a congregation. I know I'm not supposed to feel anything negative about that, but I do." Roberta explained that she did not begin to pastor until her children were older. By then, she and her husband were able to balance their schedules to care for the children. She remembers,

I had a lot of evening meetings and my husband was a teacher at the school where the children attended and we lived only five minutes from the school. He was always home by 5:00. And he was home most evenings. So if I had to go out after supper, he was there. Almost always one of us was there . . . I made it my policy to be home by 3:30 in the afternoon . . . and I had supper at home with the family.

She arranged her evening meetings, with rare exceptions, for after the dinner hour.

Roberta's choice was to be home with her children while they were young. In later years, we see an example of both parents *parenting*. I am continually surprised at the number of times I have heard fathers say they are staying home to "babysit the kids." What mother would refer to herself as a babysitter for her own children? The statement reveals an attitude that suggests the "babysitter" is the temporary help, rather than a parent. Both Roberta's and her husband's career decisions were worked around their family commitments. This is an example of the ideal of complementarity and co-parenting suggested by Van Leeuwen (1990) and Tournier (1981). Roberta chose to stay home when her children were young, and as they got older, both she and her husband made their schedules fit their family. Upon reflection, I realized Roberta's call to preach did not come until her children were old enough that going back to school was not a hardship on the family. And, like Joseph to Mary, Roberta's husband accommodated the call of God in his wife's life by making unusual adjustments for her sake.

In these two families, Frieda's and Roberta's, we see two different models. Both exemplify women in Christian leadership who are married, have children, and consider their roles as mothers to be a high priority.

Children in Traditional and Feminist Thought

After speaking with each of the participants, I was struck with how "traditional" all their values and even their family structures were. At the same time, I realized that several families were committed to the principles proclaimed by biblical feminists, equality and mutual respect for women and men, including the opportunity for women to follow God's calling wherever it may lead. But what about the children? I was both encouraged and disturbed. First, I was tremendously encouraged to find that each of the married women "laid down their lives" for their children, at least for a dedicated season. Many of the husbands took an active part in the nurturing and childrearing process, although all marriages of the participants considered that task as primarily belonging to the mother. I was disturbed, however, to find in my reading that this is not the case in much of our North American society.

Secular feminists seem to have taken the step of equality with men further than their forerunners of the late nineteenth century would support. Many of the early feminists were married women with children, pushing for social and political equality for women. By the

time Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* (1961), women were "suffering from 'the problem that has no name,' namely boredom, restlessness, and a diffuse dissatisfaction with their lives" (Fox-Genovese, 1997, p. 228). In chasing individual pursuits, many women have decided that the real hindrance to their personal fulfillment is children.

For me, this was most unsettling. Fox-Genovese (1997) articulates a contemporary perspective on women who think they need to go beyond the family to find fulfilling lives:

Today, women's "problem that has no name" is children. Children, not men, restrict women's independence; children, not men, tend to make and keep women poor. Few but the most radical feminists have been willing to state openly that women's freedom requires their freedom from children. (pp. 228-229)

The women in this study did not see children as a burden restricting their personal freedom. Quite the contrary, they viewed their children as a delightful gift from God. As evangelical Christian women, we understand true personal meaning and fulfillment come only and ultimately in relationship with God (Foh, 1979, pp. 223-231), not in causes nor even in families. If women (and men) are created by God to be in relationship, then we must ask in relationship to whom and why? Ann Graham Lotz (1997) asserts that life without purpose or direction is just existence. She asks

Is your life spinning around aimlessly in a self-preoccupied existence with no real purpose or meaning or focus? How do you get your life focused? Do you long for a sense of purpose, a clear-cut direction, a goal to live for that makes living worthwhile? Then submit to the Creator's voice—His Word that reveals His specific and personal plan for your life. (p. 20)

Lotz says even she has had doubts about the direction for her life. As the mother of young children, she felt she was without direction. During the busyness of childrearing, she felt her life "beyond my identity as a mother and wife was somewhat aimless and empty. I became convinced there was more to life than I was experiencing" (p. 20). Her search for meaning sent her to search the scripture with other women.

Through the daily study of His Word, God increasingly focused my life on Himself. Whether teaching my class of five hundred women or mopping up spilled juice or preparing and serving meals for my family or speaking to an audience of ten thousand evangelists, my whole life has become focused in worship of God as I desire to know Him through His Word, through life experiences, through relationships, through responsibilities and opportunities and difficulties. As a result, He has filled my life to overflowing! (p. 21)

Like Lotz, the women I talked with figured out their life passages one day at a time.

They persisted in steering their course God-ward. They discovered that parenthood only enriched their relationship with God and their ability to serve in leadership.

Pause for Reflection

Are you a parent? Did you make a conscious decision to have each of your children? Were any of your children surprises? What life adjustments were necessary for parenting? What have you learned about the nature of parenting that has given you clearer insight into the father-heart of God? Do you feel your children get in the way of your personal fulfillment? Do you believe your children are a gift and blessing from the Lord, even on the difficult days? Are both you and your spouse actively involved in parental responsibilities? What does it mean to "lay down your life" for your children? If your children are grown, what life lessons have you learned that you are able to share with parents of younger children?

As a child, how did your parents divide parental responsibilities? Were both mother and father involved? Was your mother the primary nurturer? What role did your father play? How did their parenting influence your choices as a parent?

Take some time to think through these questions and others that may have come to mind as you read the previous section. You may want to write down some thoughts in your journal.

What Do the Men Have to Say?

Marriage has been described as the on-stage drama for a man and the entire production for a woman. How did the men interviewed respond to questions about women in leadership, and their relationships to their families? Both the men and the women were concerned about faithfulness to a biblical understanding. Both were concerned that families were responsibly cared for; and both were concerned for the health and growth of the church. As I explained at the beginning of the chapter, it is interesting to note that during the interviews women often responded with reflections from their own personal experience. The men, however, steered

the discussion toward observations of women involved in ministry with them rather than their own families.

Carl and I discussed his own family only briefly. He and his wife were together during his ordination, and to this day she considers that ordination her own. As a couple and as individuals they are active in various types of ministries within their local church and beyond. Rather than spending a lot of time talking about his family, however, we got quite involved in a discussion of family from a biblical perspective. Carl has studied and taught extensively on the subject. I asked him what he had observed as a result. He told me that "the issue is very simple, as complicated as it appears." After his research he discovered it "boils down to one of two things":

Either one goes with a particular reading of what creation is all about, namely that God built into creation a hierarchy in which men are designed to lead and women are designed to follow, and you read everything in the Bible as an outgrowth of that. Or, you set the Galatians [3:28] text up as the paradigm, that God intends to have this multi-ethnic, multi-socio-economic, and bi-sexual body in which there is mutuality and everybody brings to the table what they offer, through the spirit of God. It's basically that. How do you read the Bible?

I very much appreciated Carl's concise conclusion. For him, the essential question is, "What is the program of God here?" Carl has stated succinctly the heart of the arguments for woman's role in both home and church. If you have not already done so, perhaps now is a good time to read afresh the passages he mentioned.

I asked Carl about his understanding of the family from a biblical perspective. He explained at some length his understanding of the creation passages commenting, "Eve is the hero [*sic*] of the story. Not Adam." According to Carl's interpretation, the woman, Eve, rescues the man from isolation. It is her move toward "disruption" of the relationship, sin, that causes the story to be so tragic. Gratefully, we look back on the story to find that what the

enemy intended for evil, God worked for good. The true Saviour was promised even as the consequences of sin were pronounced (Gen. 3:15b).

David, a pastor, is concerned that while he believes male leadership to be the biblical model in both the home and the church, he sees a problem with the exclusive male leadership that has emerged in the church he pastors. The problem is that the church does not have the benefit of women's input in decision-making. "I see very gifted and godly women, and I don't think we've created good structures that allow their insight and their input to inform godly male leadership." As a pastor, David has observed the involvement of many women over time. Some of his comments will surface later in our discussion of the church.

From David's interview I was left to wonder, if men and women do not lead together, that is serve together on deacon or elder boards, at what point is a woman's perspective gained? Do the men who are married talk things over with their wives? Or, do the men lead in isolation of women's counsel?

Louis views women's involvement through his educator's eyes. He very much values the contributions that women make and expresses his disappointment that women are not more involved in higher levels of Christian education, including roles as teaching faculty and serving on boards. His primary observation regarding women in Christian leadership and the family is that women with young children will continue to be reluctant to serve on boards and other voluntary functions unless men begin to encourage their wives to go while the husbands take up the slack in the home. Louis observes it has been typical for men to go out during the evenings, leaving the wife to tend the children, but rarely is the reverse true. He says, "I think a lot of it has to do with life stages I think that for women who don't have infants . . . why shouldn't they be involved, and why shouldn't the husband take care of the duties in her

absence? That's only fair. That may be a paradigm shift for a lot of men." While Louis acknowledges there may be other reasons that women hesitate to serve, he believes that women's responsibility to provide primary care for young children is a significant hindrance. He concludes that Christian schools, particularly at the post-secondary level, continue to have too few women in leadership roles.

After speaking with Louis, I was reminded of the practical, if not theological, imbalance among evangelical Christians to think that children need mothering more than they need fathering or co-parenting. I believe families will benefit as men become increasingly involved in their children's lives and as women become more meaningfully involved in the church.

Pause for Reflection

Read Genesis 1-2 and Galatians 3:28. Familiarize yourself with the content. Begin to ask God to give you a fresh understanding of these texts, in order to give you a clearer insight into the relationship of men and women in the family, in the church, and in society as a whole.

What do you think of what was said by Carl, David, and Louis? Do you find instant points of agreement or disagreement with their comments and your views?

Family as a Metaphor for the Church.

As I mentioned in passing earlier, the pattern established in the family is extended to apply to the pattern of the church, as illustrated in Paul's metaphor in Ephesians 5. This is the central argument of "The Church as a Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church as Well," a booklet by Vern Poythress (1990), sponsored by The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. This is a pervasive argument and has some merit in that the marriage relationship is established as a metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ. The metaphor of family is certainly one of the common metaphors in scripture. As we have seen, God is our Father. He called out Abraham to be the father of a

great nation. We are called "sons of God" and "brothers to all other Christians" (Poythress, 1990, pp. 9-10). The problem, however, comes when we use the metaphor of family exclusively to mean the husband/wife relationship and do not extend the metaphor to include the family as siblings. This biblical metaphor announces that we are all "sons." The metaphor of family is not intended to separate us by gender. Renewed hermeneutic regarding accurate translation of terms that used to be gender specific and those that were all-inclusive is helpful at this point. We can be grateful to biblical feminists for their encouragement to study these terms and improve contemporary translations. We must return to scripture and read carefully the passages intended for us all. The apostle Paul gives us an early indication of this sort of understanding when he quotes the Old Testament and changes "sons" to "sons and daughters" (see II Cor. 6:18 and II Sam. 2:14).

Lutz (1997) in *Women as Risk-Takers for God* traces the "historical obstacle course women faced" throughout church history (p. 31). Her observations and conclusions may surprise you. She cites chilling accounts of centuries of authors who reflect the historical tendency of "the control and rule of men over women." This control, says Lutz, dehumanizes both men and women. To some degree almost every culture in the world reflects a negative attitude toward women (p. 28). Unfortunately, in many contemporary evangelical homes, this tendency translates into an expectation of prescribed roles for men and women. I believe this limits our ability to respond to the creative purposes and calling of God. As Christians, we want to believe we are living according to the Word and will of God. We look to our historical traditions to guide us forward. But are we living according to the law of sin and brokenness or of salvation and wholeness? The records throughout history assert that "God

appointed different domains for men and women." and, says Lutz, perpetuates "this lie of Satan" (p. 31). This is not easy for those of us with traditional backgrounds to read.

To return to the family metaphor, I think it is important for us as Christians to recognize that our families are disintegrating at the same rate as the rest of the North American culture. If we who are committed to live our lives in submission to God and in mutual submission to one another cannot be faithful to our marriage covenant vows, what does that say about the family as a pattern for the church? We need to do some very serious corporate soul-searching about this. We have designated the home as the domain of the woman and said both the home and the church are to be led by men. With this as our "traditional" pattern, we have increased divorce and declining church membership.

What does this say? Consider that in most churches, only men are eligible to be pastors, elders, or deacons. The obvious result is male only leadership. Women are left to join together in auxiliaries or helping agencies, isolated from the men. Each denies the other a fuller perspective. This, I believe, is a dangerous pattern. Perhaps it is time to ask what God meant when he evaluated his incomplete creation, saw man alone, and said, "It is not good that man should be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). While I do not intend to be offensive, I do intend to "provoke one another to love and to good works" (Heb. 10:24 KJV) and "to stimulate one another to love and good deeds . . . encouraging one another" (Heb. 10:24-25 NAS). The kind of deeply personal, reflective, biblical, and prayerful examination that I suggest calls for us to encourage one another. It is not an easy process now, nor has it ever been.

As we discussed in the previous chapter, the relatively recent observation among theologians that the image of God has to do with relationship and togetherness may be

glimpsing a new dimension of God's intention for leadership both in the family and in the church. The triune God knew that a human being should not be alone, not in the home and family, not in the community, not in the church, and not in the Kingdom of God.

I have intentionally tied this discussion of the family to the church because the women and men participating in the study saw marriage and family as a strong helping factor toward their own ministry efforts and leadership experiences. In addition, leadership in the home is often the model for leadership in the church. We will return to this notion in the chapter on church and related structures. For now, it is enough to say that there is a very strong relationship between the family and the church.

Conclusion

The women and men in the study were gracious to open up their lives by telling me their family stories. I am richer for it. Is family a help or hindrance to women in Christian leadership? Among the eight women participants, each considered family as largely helpful, although five identified at least one hindering element. If anything, the study is slightly skewed at this point in favour of family as a helping factor because all of the women interviewed are leaders. I am left wondering about the large numbers of women excluded from leadership. How many of them have not been invited because of church leadership which views a "male only" model as the biblical norm? How many women do not involve themselves because they believe the home and family to be their domain, while any public venue, including the church, rightfully belongs to men? How many women have attempted to follow the call of God in their lives and were discouraged by others—their own families and other men and women—along the way?

All participants were committed to the biblical ideal of marriage as one man and one woman in a lifetime monogamous relationship. Although one of the participants had experienced divorce, she recognizes that as less than God's intention. All agreed that the Bible is the basis for determining our beliefs and practice about the family. But the contemporary debate of "traditional" and "egalitarian" family was reflected in their relationships. Many of them alluded to, or openly discussed, difficulties in coming to terms with "fleshing out" a relationship based on the Bible. I am reminded of a bumper sticker proclamation: "Christians aren't perfect. Just forgiven." These women and men renewed my conviction that families grow together, find security and intimacy in relationship with one another, and learn how to love and forgive first in the home. As we learn deep lessons there, we are more prepared to extend our lives and our love to the church and the world.

Pause for Reflection

What do you think about the notion that marriage and family provide our primary metaphors for the church? In what ways is the marriage metaphor different from the sibling metaphor as they provide insight for men and women in leadership? In what respects does your family provide a strong pattern for church leadership? In what ways does your church reflect the pattern of a healthy family? How does our cultural upheaval around the family affect our understanding of church leadership? In what ways do a husband and wife reflect the image of God? In what ways does a church image God to the world?

CHAPTER SEVEN: TWO UNDERLYING THEMES—PAIN AND POLICY

The church is confused about what women can and cannot do. (Foh, 1979, p. 247)

When I first began my search for answers, I asked, "What happens in Christian institutions that seems at odds with the essence of the Gospel?" Eventually I focused on the question that gave rise to this study: "What factors help and hinder women in Christian leadership?" Situations I had encountered and stories I had heard from others led me to believe that as practicing Christians we often act one way in our individual lives and act quite differently in our corporate, institutional lives. But as I thought about the life of Jesus, he was consistent. What I observed was hypocritical, even in my own life. What was wrong? The failure to recognize Christian women as equal partners in leadership illustrates one example of the incongruity between what we say and what we do.

My personal pilgrimage led me to ask questions, observe carefully, study scripture more diligently, and pray more desperately. The Lord led me to many reassuring texts urging me to "Fear not!" (a very common biblical theme) and more specifically, to "Remove every obstacle out of the way of my people" (Is. 57:14 NAS). What, I began to ask, was there to fear? And, what obstacles needed to be removed? I proceeded, encouraged in my spirit and wondering what lay ahead.

Chapters seven and eight are linked by their shared focus on the church and its structures. This chapter deals with the two underlying themes discovered through conversations with the participants and confirmed in other research: pain and institutional policy. By institutional policy I mean the policies and process that move an organization into

the structures necessary for its perpetuation (Gardner, 1990 p.10). In this chapter I speak specifically of the institutional church (Moberg, 1962). This section has been difficult for me to write because it contains, or reminds me of, the portions of conversations that produced the most pain, frustration, hurt, and anger among the women. In some interviews, we entered the sort of rare dialogue in which people share the gut-wrenching stuff of life. But I approach these two chapters now with a sense of hope, even excitement, because the extended dialogue among evangelicals about women in ministry has convinced me that we are addressing many of the issues that caused pain in the lives of women and the structural concerns that proved to be a hindrance for women. If we as evangelical Christians begin to recognize the women of God as persons created fully in God's image—gifted, called, prepared, and sent—to serve alongside men, we are on the threshold of unleashing a great force for the kingdom of God.

These two chapters report on the discoveries made during the dialogues as women spoke about the helping and hindering factors evident in structural settings, specifically, Christian education, missions and the local church. Most of these factors found expression in a denominational framework. All of them reflected the inevitable influence of organizations over time, in that the process of institutionalization had left its mark. Because of the permeating presence of institutionalization, we will look at that process before we consider local fields of service, the focus of chapter seven. First, however, we pause to diagnose a recurring issue in the lives of the women.

Pain: A Place to Start

During our conversations, I heard several women speak of the pain involved in growing to this point in their lives and in their ministry. I was surprised at the emotions welling up in the participants. Hurt. Anger. Frustration. Confusion. Disappointment. Pain.

Perhaps I should not have been surprised, for these are the emotions that marked an earlier decade of my life.

Entering the Ed.D. program came toward the end of that decade. Discomfort and pain had led me to the place of further searching. I had come to a place of acceptance and forgiveness in many areas of my life. But I needed new dimensions of knowledge. How I found the program is another story, one I consider a miracle in itself. Encouraged by the biblical admonition to "Ask, seek, and knock" (Matt. 7:7), and assured that our God is the God of all truth regardless of where we find it, I began a long, formal process of asking questions of myself, my acquaintances and many authors. Eventually, I became convinced that I needed to hear from other "real, live women." What they had to say, the factors that helped and hindered them in Christian leadership, is the "stuff" in this study. This interlude is the melancholy melody of their message interwoven with pain.

Pain: A Common Symptom

When I think of the privileges and blessings enjoyed by the women in this study, I find it almost absurd to talk about our pain. Yet, the pain is neither absurd nor petty. Their pain is in fact shared by many other evangelical Christian women. "Pain in the church and a search for understanding " (Toews, Rempel & Wiebe, 1992, p. 1) is the reason for writing the book *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy*. The authors say the book is "the story of people struggling to understand the role and ministry of women in the church, and often of women struggling with the church's resistance to their calling to and giftedness for ministry" (p. 2).

Later Toews and colleagues give five pages to the discussion of pain among women called to ministry in the Mennonite Brethren Church, recognizing they are

searching for new and clearer understanding because many women are crying out for healing from the pain of rejection and exclusion from ministry. They are profoundly aware of their spiritual giftedness. They report clear calls to church ministry. They hear a "yes" from God, but a "no" from the church. The contradiction between their experience with God and their experience in the church is intense. More and more women are speaking of their pain and anger. (1992, p. 8)

Having found a new home among Mennonite Brethren (MB) several years ago, I have often been encouraged by their commitment to the community of believers. A people of strong biblical beliefs, MBs often re-examine, through extended dialogue, their practice in light of new insights into biblical truth. Where they discover they have fallen short in practice, they strive to adjust their behaviours. Toews' and colleagues' book is the result of one such continuing dialogue.

One of the characteristics of the feminist movement is that the personal becomes political (French, 1985, p. 442). Briefly, this means that the experience of one woman is claimed as the experience of a few, then of many others. At some point, one woman begins to take action, and may even take up a cause on behalf of others. You may recall that Roberta had initially not been able to identify pain in the lives of some women because what she first encountered was their anger. She discovered, however, that underneath this anger was deep pain. In the case of one of the participants, it was the deep pain of a friend in seminary that sparked her into action. During our interview, Charity recalled the pivotal incident one night in, of all places, the dorm laundry room, where she found her friend "sitting between the washer and the dryer on the floor," crying. Through sobs, her friend told Charity she was "training to be a pastor. And the professors at my seminary are telling her, 'You are wasting your time. You are never going to be a pastor. You know, women aren't pastors.' And she feels called to be a pastor."

Charity had been taught during her youth "you can do all things through Christ" (Phil. 4:13). She said she claimed that verse for her life, believing it was "how all members of my denomination operated." Although Charity had never felt called into the pastoral ministry, her friend had. That night Charity found herself "sitting in the floor talking to her, and she [was] just crying because she thinks she cannot do what God is calling her to do." The strength of Charity's reaction surprised her: "I was just infuriated. I was absolutely infuriated. And we talked about what is honestly God's call, and who is that man to tell you what God told you to do? The Bible never told you to go check with Joe Blow." Part of her frustration was Charity's awareness that a local church endorsement of her friend was a requirement of the application process. The professor was not only challenging the young woman but also the church that had already affirmed her. Notice that even in their hurt and anger, these two young women spoke of "what honestly is God's call." Their deep concern was that a Christian was being hindered from following the discerned will of God in her life.

Another young woman found healing in a theological college. In contrast with Charity's experience, Alicia studied in a supportive environment. Having faced deep pain resulting from a difficult relationship, Alicia was challenged by some of the faculty to allow God to minister to her. "God really got my feet wet," said Alicia. "He was laying the foundation in that first year, taking me [through classes that were] very biblically oriented, and some psychological." Alicia was challenged both by people and course content to "Look at your past. Where are you wounded? Where are you vulnerable? God is meeting you in those places. Go to those places. God will meet you there."

For Alicia, the challenge proved significant, because she had

been shying away from those places of pain because they're painful and terrifying. What I have found in the last five years is that when I go ahead and

faithfully walk into them, God meets me there. And, that's where he brings healing—in those very vulnerable places.

For many women entering ministry, church leadership is a very vulnerable place. I have often thought of a book I read during my decade of disappointment, *Inside Out* by Larry Crabb (1988). This book assured me that I was not alone in my experience of disillusionment, anger, hurt, and pain. I recognized that Jesus absorbed pain, then conquered it with love, even toward those who were literally killing him. I began to see that the pain in my life was caused by events and people who "know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). And it became a place for me to go deeply into the pain and begin to forgive at even deeper levels.

Pain: Signal in the Church Body.

Physically, pain is the body's signal that something is wrong. To understand the body as a metaphor for the church (Eph. 4: I Cor. 12) is instructive here. Some observations of Brand and Yancey (1987) may prove valuable:

A body's health can be measured in large part by its instinctive reaction to nagging, chronic pain. Management of pain requires a delicate balance between proper sensitivity, to determine its cause and mobilize a response, and enough inner strength to keep the pain from dominating the whole person. For the Body of Christ, the balance is every bit as delicate and as imperative. (p. 276)

While we may not be able to ignore our own pain, over time we tend to "lose interest" in the chronic pain of another, and may even move toward resentment and a "deadening of sensitivity" (p. 276). I believe in the evangelical community, regarding women in leadership, some have born their pain silently; others have begun to advocate on behalf of a larger group; and still others are turning a deaf ear. We may fail to recognize the anger, hurt, and pain of women in leadership as a God-given signal to pay attention to what is going on in the body of Christ. I've been amazed at how many times I have heard phrases like, "We are in a leadership

crisis." As I look around, I hear mostly men looking for male leaders; and I see women who are capable, but ignored, exempted from leadership *because* they are women. I have also seen women refuse to take opportunities afforded them because they feel unqualified as women. Gratefully, I think of other situations where women are recognized for their gifts, honoured in their calling, and making significant contributions to the kingdom of God.

Pause for Reflection

Personal reflection provokes not only thought but emotion. How are we to deal with the emotions that well up within as we confront our own or others' pain? Poetry can be a powerful tool for expression. Consider the range of emotions in the Psalms. Consider the lyrics of Miriam (Ex. 15:21) and Mary (Lk 1: 46-55) in their wonderful songs.

This section on pain may have caused you to remember a hurtful situation. Some pain may take the form of "groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26) and may be given over to God through intimate and unarticulated prayer. Some, however, may provide a stimulus for poetry. Take pen and paper, some time, and pour out your expressions of pain. While the particular context is women in Christian leadership, your emotions may lead you to another source of pain. Be sensitive to your own spirit as you write. Allow God to minister to you, mindful that the "Spirit helps us in our weakness" (Rom. 8:26).

The following is a poem I have written dealing with my own emotional pilgrimage.

Pain—the Interlude

Between the questions and the answers
Pain
Between the rejection and the acceptance
Pain
Between the silence and the tears
Pain
Between the hope and the fulfillment
Pain
Between the sorrow and the laughter
Pain.
Between the Garden and the Cross
Pain
Between the Abandonment and the Victory
Pain.
Pain.
The threshold
Of acceptance, tears, fulfillment, laughter Victory.
You endured the Garden and the Cross.
I will endure the pain.
You will wipe my tears.
Together we will dance in Joy!

Pain and Institutional Policy

What is the connection between pain and institutional policy? To approach an answer, I will tell you a story. During my seminary years I was privileged to meet many people already actively engaged in meaningful ministry. One was a woman, whom I will call Susan, who attended the same church I did. In time we developed a friendship. She was about twenty years older than I, and her personality reflected the richness that comes with a life well lived. I enjoyed the times she shared her life experiences, including ministry. She surprised me one day, however, when in the middle of relating an incident she paused to comment on its impact. "Where it is institutional," she said, "it is not Christian." It was such an unusual thought, and came, it seemed to me, from out of the blue. I remember being struck by the emotion of the moment. Sadness. Deep sadness.

Susan had been actively involved in a variety of roles at both the local church and denominational level. Over the years, she had encountered something that seemed to counter the essence of the gospel. Her conclusion was thoughtful and decisive. There was nothing bitter in her tone or gaze.

Often since that day I wondered what had happened that had so deeply wounded this wonderful, godly woman. What she referred to was not a single incident—rather a series of incidents, even a way of life. And, she decided, it was not Christian. Did she leave the church? No. Did she forsake her faith in Christ? No. She had encountered the reality of the deadening process of institutionalization as it sucks the life out of the vitalizing gospel. It was as if she were mentoring me, telling me of the wonderful events I was to anticipate and also warning me of some indescribable danger that lurked ahead. I was not to learn about it first hand for over a decade.

The Organized Church and the Process of Institutionalization

As evangelical Christians, we continue to look to the Bible for guidance for today and the future. It is difficult, however, to allow the Bible to speak directly to issues of women in church leadership, because our church structures are very different than they were 2000 years ago. Though the church began as a loosely knit group of Jesus' followers, the church today

is a major social institution It consists of all organizations which directly seek to kindle, renew, and guide the religious life of people. It includes the roles and statuses of the person in such groups, their ideological values, goals, and group-related activities, and all the social structures and processes related to religious worship, prayer, association, and other activities in ecclesiastical organization. "The church" is therefore synonymous with "organized religion." (Moberg, 1962, p. 1)

The local church is but one arm of the institution. Today local churches are often part of multiple levels of organization, beginning with the local church and moving to associations or districts, national bodies, and denominations. When we speak of the "church" as an "institution," we may in fact be referring to multiple organizations simultaneously. As with any organization, groups at each of these levels reflect the structures and policies necessary to keep them operational. I want to pose the question: how did a vibrant group of believers 2,000 years ago develop into the "organized religion" we know today?

Church history records the movements of Christianity since its inception, tracing the variable forms of structural organization. In *The Social Context of the New Testament*, Derek Tidball (1984) helps us to understand contemporary church structures. He likens the growth and change of organizations with those of a person. While we can easily "trace a person's development from babyhood through childhood to the prime of youth . . . the progressive thinning of the hair" and other human changes, "we are less familiar with the process of ageing which takes place in organisations " (p. 123). Tidball refers to a process introduced by

Moberg: the five stages of church development. (See Moberg, 1962, pp. 118-124.) Moberg traces the first stage of emergence through the second stages of formal organization, on to the third featuring statesmen as leaders and structured programs. Moberg identifies the fourth stage as the institutional phase in which the bureaucracy has developed to the point of self-interest and leadership is now self-perpetuating. The fourth stage signals a lack of the vibrancy found in the earlier stages of growth and is characterized by little spontaneity in worship. If uncorrected, says Moberg, the church moves into its final stage, "disintegration or decline." This fifth step is identified by a lack of responsiveness by the machinery of the institution. Moberg's descriptions sound a death-knell for the church in this stage. Either emotionally invested participants lead internal reform, or life seeps out until the church collapses.

While structures are necessary, institutionalization, says Tidball, refers to structures "when they have ceased to function in the best interest of the movement they are supposedly serving" (p. 124). We must ask whether Christian organizations which exclude women from leadership are continuing to function in the best interest of Christianity. It seems to me the question of women in leadership comes from the collective expression of emotionally invested leaders attempting a renewal from the inside. For our discussion of women in leadership in the church, this point is crucial. Are the current structures that exclude women necessary for the growth of the church or a result of self-perpetuating institution caught in stages four and five of an aging process? Tidball rightly says institutionalization is "the name for the way in which free, spontaneous and living movements become structured and inflexible" (p. 124).

Notice in Moberg's sequence that the fourth stage warns that a lack of vibrancy leads toward a deadly lack of responsiveness by the machinery of the institution. Machinery is the metaphor used by Moberg for an institution. It strikes me that what is missing throughout is dialogue on a grand scale. How can dialogue be interjected into a bureaucracy? In 1924, Max Weber observed the consequences of bureaucracy, one of which is "the dominance of a spirit of formalistic impersonality, *sine ira et studio*, without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm" (1990, p. 15). Within Christian institutions, the dynamics of bureaucracy subtly take over the dynamic of the life of the relationships within the organization. The task takes precedence over the people. Or, as some argue, the masculine tendency (things) takes over the feminine (people). The parallel is that when genuine dialogue is missing, organizations as well as individual persons "die," to return to Howe's (1963) insight. The solution for dying organizations, says Moberg (1962), is for emotionally invested participants to lead internal reform. Evangelical feminists are calling for such dialogue and reform.

Pause for Reflection

Think about the difference between relational dynamics you have experienced in Christian organizations. Are you aware of some relationships that seem characterized by a formalistic impersonality? If so, in what settings do you find them? Are you aware of relationships characterized by more vibrancy? If so, in what settings do you find them? Do you find a correlation between the notion of institutionalization and the kind and quality of relationships? If you are involved only at the local church level, you may not be aware of the dynamics of the larger organizations with which your church is affiliated. If that is the case, talk with someone who is, and ask them to help you understand the relationships within the organization.

In what stage of growth is the institution of which you are a member? Do you see any signs of movement from one stage to another?

This may take some time. Record your thoughts, observations, and questions in your journal.

Institutionalization, Hierarchy and Women: Why Women Repeatedly Re-emerge

How does the pattern of institutionalization affect women in the church? Roberta Hestenes, while addressing the North American Professors of Christian Education in 1993, observed that "women played crucial roles in the initial pioneering stages of religious movements, only to be replaced by men as the movements became more 'respectable'" (as cited in Grenz, 1995, pp. 37-38). The three-stage institutionalization process noted by Grenz is somewhat different from Moberg's (1962), although the processes follow the same pattern. First is the charismatic phase. During these early days of revival movements women serve as evangelists, church planters and teachers. Second comes the credentialing phase, which reflects a desire for respectability and often includes a push for credentials in higher education and ordination. In this phase, women were practically if not politically, excluded. Third is the bid for full institutional respectability with its "marginalization of women" (Grenz, 1995, p. 38).

Maria L. Boccia makes the point that "When leadership involved the charismatic choice by God of leaders through the gifting of the Holy Spirit, women are included. As time passes, leadership is institutionalized, the secular patriarchal culture filters into the Church, and women are excluded" (as cited in Grenz, 1995, p. 37). The process of institutionalization requires that prospective leaders satisfy requirements of the institution, and traditionally Christian institutions make decisions excluding women from leadership. Boccia's comments suggest two questions. First, do we recognize the gifting of women and the call of God on the lives of women for leadership? Second, what is the source of patriarchal leadership? Boccia refers to patriarchal culture as secular rather than biblical. As we have already seen, patriarchy is part of our biblical, historical past—not present and not future. But for some

reason our church history has continued in a pattern of male dominance. Some have said it is because of a principal of "male headship," they believe to be biblical. Referring to "imaginary roles" required by "male headship," Hull (1987) calls this a "true account of a false idea" (p.206). When a bureaucratic organizational leadership model of hierarchy (Weber, 1990, p. 6) is added to a patriarchal model of male predominance, the combination leaves no room for women in leadership. But women historically have been involved in leadership. Certain historians are raising a difficult issue: "They not only want to learn why men have traditionally dominated church life, but why women leaders repeatedly re-emerge" (Grenz, 1995, p. 37). Many observe the answer in the cyclical pattern of institutionalization which first welcomes, then removes women in leadership.

As we noted earlier, one of the contributions of evangelical or biblical feminism is to call into question the notion that hierarchy is biblical. Are we as evangelical Christians ready to forsake part of our tradition as we determine that it is not what God wants for our future? If our desire to please other people (for example, other church organizations or secular institutions who honour credentialing and professionalization) takes priority over a desire to hear and follow our God who leads in surprising directions, then we need to acknowledge that the source of our leadership patterns and policies is human, not divine. If, however, we desire to please God, then we must allow the Holy Spirit to lead. Grenz (1995) presents a challenging conclusion:

If male dominance is linked historically to institutionalization and the bid for cultural respectability, then the traditional practice of the church is not necessarily an indication of God's will but may well be the result of sociological and cultural forces. And if female involvement emerges among renewal movements, only to be replaced by male leadership as revival gives way to institutionalization, the contemporary call for a mutuality of men and women in ministry may be a manifestation of the Spirit's renewing work in the church today. (p. 39)

These voices challenge us to consider whether the question of women in leadership is related to cultural processes only or if it is a work of spiritual renewal by the Holy Spirit. As we continue to work and pray for God's will "to be done on earth as it is in heaven," (Lk 11:2), we may well be surprised, even amazed, as the Lord calls women to serve and to lead.

The Larger Sphere of Church Organization: Denominations.

The word denomination may, for non-church goers, speak of the value of a dollar bill, whether it be a twenty, a ten, or a hundred. What is the denomination of the bill? The term denomination simply means a category for organizing. While many of us are familiar with its designation for money, not everyone is aware of its use for churches. The rise of denominationalism in the United States "became an effective means of organizing the churches in a nation where there was not state-sanctioned religion" (Leonard, 1990, pp. 26-27).

Whatever the early days of the denominations in America and in Canada, the contemporary fact is that they are highly organized structures. Over the years as the denominations formed, merged, dissolved, and continued their organizational mutations, the issue of women's roles surfaced repeatedly. John Stackhouse (1999), in his treatment of the character of Canadian evangelicalism, observes several themes in a contemporary comparison "between evangelicalism in Canada and its counterparts in the United States and Britain" (p. 199). Stackhouse observes:

The vast majority of evangelicals had espoused the principle of male leadership in both spheres [church and family], as had the Christian church and Western society generally for centuries. But a number of emphases within evangelicalism had always placed this principle under stress, and when Canadian society changed dramatically after the Second World War, and even more dramatically after the 1960s, the traditional evangelical understanding noticeably began to give way. Evangelicals, as we have seen, characteristically

expected laypeople to serve with vigour in "religious" work at home and in "the foreign fields" of missions. (p. 202)

Stackhouse notes that "the primary evangelical zeal for evangelism that pressed towards an attitude of 'all hands on deck'" (p. 202) encouraged women's involvement at home and abroad. He adds his voice with others who observe that "time of revival and missionary enthusiasm tended to blur—if not completely eradicate—the gender line in the interest of 'getting the job done'" (p. 202). After years of service, "it was often women missionaries returning from abroad who most sharply questioned the gender patterns they encountered again at home. And men who had served with such women and had seen the fruit of their work were often the first to agree with such questioning" (pp. 202-203).

Stackhouse as an historian acknowledges the breach between women's roles in society and in the church. He says while some denominations have opened the way for women to be fully recognized as leaders, others have reverted to an earlier, even stronger stance limiting women's involvement to traditional roles. In denominations more open to women's contributions, women's voices will be part of the shape of the church of the future. In others, women's voices may be excluded from the decision-making process. During dialogues with the participants, I discovered diverse experiences with similar obstacles. We explore those in the sections on church, education, and missions.

Pause for Reflection

How are decisions made regarding leadership in your church organizations? Do you know what the guidelines for leadership qualifications are in your church? In your association or denomination? Are you aware of whether the local and federal or national policies agree? Do you know when and by whom the policies were made?

I have been pleased during my research to discover many denominations are discussing the question of women in leadership. Some have yet to settle the policy issues. Most denominations offer guidelines, and the decisions regarding leadership rest with the local congregations. Consider asking for a copy of your church or denominational guidelines.

Prepare to discuss your observations about the process of institutionalization in your study group.

For further reading on this issue, I suggest you read the books by Grenz with Kjesbo (1995), Stackhouse (1999), and Lutz (1997).

A Personal Observation of Institutionalization

Many years ago when I felt called by God into full-time Christian service, I depended on the local leadership to help me, a then sixteen year old, understand what was happening in my life. I had no sense of a particular career in church work, but I did have an overwhelming sense of God's spirit calling me to respond by giving all of my life to him. My church experience up to that point had left impressions on me of what possibilities there might be, from local church worker to foreign missionary. I somehow thought I might go overseas one day. Ten years later, I had still not left my home state. With high school and college completed, I had begun a job working as a secretary-receptionist in a denominational office. During the same time period I became active in the single adult program. The experiences of work and church provided a kaleidoscope of opportunities for leadership ranging from local church committee membership to Steering Committee chairperson of a state-wide single adult conference; from typing conference programs and collating packets to leading seminars at national conferences. Again, I felt the call of God on my life. It was time to take another step.

Friends had begun to ask me when I was planning to go to seminary. The thought had never occurred to me. But with the question in the open, I started to think seriously about it and pray for God's direction. Within a matter of months I had enrolled in seminary and began preparation for a calling ten years in the making. Because my sense of direction was toward Christian education, I enrolled in the Master of Religious Education program. For me becoming a pastor was not an issue. But my days at seminary in the mid-to-late 1970s introduced me to the reality of women seeking to follow God's calling into numerous fields. These were the early days of opening doors for women in ministry in North America. I remember attending conferences that featured women as keynote speakers. By 1978, I left Texas to become a missionary, but not overseas. I moved to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan to work in a small Southern Baptist Church. My cross-cultural experience begun, I soon became involved in Canadian church work and lost touch with what was happening in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in the Southern United States. The largest protestant denomination in North America, the SBC was about to enter one of the biggest tests of its life.

Meanwhile, my own life entered a series of monumental changes. I met and married Warren, a Canadian. We moved to his home province, British Columbia, where we both became quite involved in church life with another Baptist group. Warren eventually joined a church staff as associate pastor. I worked actively as a volunteer. Within two years we had taken an extensive tour of Europe and Israel, visiting many Christian churches, meeting missionaries and seeing their work first hand. We then moved to the San Francisco area where Warren finished his Master of Divinity degree. Then, Chelsea was born, and we became parents. What was I, a single, educated, career missionary going to do as a married, mother, wife of a pastor-to-be? The role changes were mind-boggling. But, the changes in

my life allowed me not only to experience different aspects of life, but also to relate closely to and observe other women in a variety of roles. I had been a single, career-oriented woman; I was now a stay-at-home wife and mother. I had attended theology classes with men preparing for ministry; now I attended luncheons and evening classes with wives of ministers. I had prepared and presented conferences and seminars for single adults; now I attended workshops for helpmates.

I lived on both sides of the fence. And, as you can imagine, I was interested to meet women in the ministry preparation track. How was God calling other women? Where did they plan to invest their lives? How could we wives fulfill our calling to serve God and be faithful wives and mothers? These were heavy, heady days. Culturally, the women's movement was in full swing. Women's profiles increased in education, business, and church work.

By 1984 we had returned to British Columbia. And the conservative backlash against women in Christian leadership had begun. Only, I didn't know it. By now our son Erik had arrived. I was absorbed in our little corner of the world, taking care of two preschoolers and helping Warren with church work. I was quite involved in the association of churches. Women worked side-by-side with men. Only in retrospect did I realize that men held the long-term, paid positions and women were volunteers or hired for short-term assignment.

What I did notice, however, was the higher the level of organization on the institutional flow-chart: more men were prevalent in the meetings. For example, in local church leadership, women were present on all committees, leading many of them, teaching Sunday School, running the missions programs, the children's programs, and other ministries. Rarely were women included as deacons or elders in the local church. When associations

gathered together, the leadership was predominately male. And, at the denominational level, the number of women involved in leadership was minimal. What was going on?

It soon became evident that women were not likely to be involved. The obvious, most accepted reason was because women had to be home with the children. When the children were young, I understood that. But when they were self-sufficient? Why could the father not stay home? A second reason often given was that the wife had to work. Were the husbands not also working? At this point, a third reason emerged. The meetings were held during the day-time, and regional board meetings sometimes last two-to-three days. The men present either had jobs with great flexibility (for example, real estate) or they were pastors, and their churches gave them time away from local responsibilities to attend such meetings. This, predictably, resulted in a preacher-dominated meeting. Laymen and women were not likely to have similar time off. The preachers were filling the committees and the boards of the very agencies that were designed to oversee the ministries they were leading. While in one sense the arrangement was logical, in another it was fraught with conflict of interest. Lip service was given to how to make meetings more attractive to lay men and women, but in practice little changed. The institutionalization process has set in. Leadership was self-perpetuating. This was my introduction to the inevitable reality of institutionalization.

At the time I saw it as a problem to be solved. When I broached the subject, others seemed alternately interested or nonplused. Some encouraged me to raise the concern so it could be addressed; others told me I had encountered the equivalent of an immovable object and that I should just accept it. At the time I was unaware of the force of the cultural winds of change regarding anti-institutional sentiment in general and in church life in particular. Meanwhile, I was aware that increasing numbers of women were attending seminary and

earning degrees equivalent to the men in professional ministry positions. They entered seminary hopeful that they would one day be allowed to serve in salaried church positions.

Ordination, Authority, and Priesthood

How would the degrees or credentials earned affect women? As we saw earlier, becoming more professional and developing some system of credentials is important in the process of institutionalization. One distinction participants in this study noted is that earning the *degree* as an individual is not the same as being *credentialed* in terms of the institutional process. While leadership can be exercised in volunteer positions, some women in the study believe they are called to pastoral ministry, including professional positions. For evangelicals, an important requirement for pastoral ministry is *ordination*.

Ordination itself has come under great scrutiny as a sticking point regarding women in ministry. Foh (1979) acknowledges the "biblical picture is not well-defined," saying the more basic question is "what ordination means" (p. 232). A traditionalist, based on her understanding of scripture, Foh believes ordination is reserved for men alone. By contrast, Hull (1998), a biblical feminist,²⁰ says, when we search the Bible for a definition of ordination, "we find a perplexing fact . . . even the scholarly experts do not know what ordination meant in New Testament times" (p. 214). The generally accepted understanding of ordination, as expressed by Foh, is "the recognition of the specific gift(s) that a person has for a specific task in the church. Ordination does not confer authority or anything else; it is the

²⁰ Hull explains the terms: *Traditionalism* and *traditionalist* designate "the view that women should not be in positions of authority or leadership over men, should not be ordained, and in religious matters should not teach men. This view also places wives in a position of subordination to husbands . . . therefore, traditionalism indicates a hierarchical, patriarchal view of church and society. In contrast, many terms are used to describe the position that women are equal partners in ministry and marriage, and equal members of society: egalitarian, equalitarian, Christian feminist, evangelical feminist, and biblical feminist. . . . The emphasis of those who subscribe to equality of all persons is on servanthood rather than on assigned positions or prescribed roles in life" (p. 55).

church's recognition of what God has given" (p. 233). Both Foh and Hull proceed to explain their perspectives on ordination with predictably different results. Personally, I agree in this instance with Hull who concludes her discussion on ordination by asking some tough questions, including, "If the Bible does not mandate ordination as a qualification for the pastorate, why should we today" (p. 216)?

Hull (1987) ends her consideration with an assessment of the current situation, followed by a final appeal to scripture:

How tragic that women's ordination has become a major point of division among Christians, when no one today can say for sure exactly what ordination meant in New Testament times. . . . If we are faithful to Scripture, we must affirm the priesthood of *all* believers. . . . Since Scripture includes women in the priesthood of all believers, why should we feel surprised if women feel led to one of these specific areas of "priestly" service? As with men, women, too, can heed God's call to a particular "ambassadorial post." (p. 216)

Among the participants I interviewed, I found both a commitment to scripture and disagreement on whether women should be ordained. Among the women participants in this study, experiences vary.

Esther said her calling has been to Christian education, not to pastoral ministries. For her, ordination has not been a personal issue. For Candy, who serves in a pastoral capacity on a church staff, lack of ordination has not prevented her from doing the tasks set before her. She wants other women to know that "it is better than it was but they are going to have to carry on the—I don't want to say fight, because it really is not. I refuse to fight because I don't have to earn what I already have—and I am already ordained by God." Candy also observed that ordination is not a biblical requirement for ministry, but a cultural one. Roberta's ordination came as a surprise to her. She described her ordination interview, and her candid responses. She fully expected to be rejected. However, the men on the committee were listening to see if

she would answer honestly about her personality strengths and her call by God to preach. They were pleased with her courage, and granted her ordination. Teresa was privileged to be ordained in the country where she serves, an honour bestowed only rarely to women. She hopes she will not be the last. Finally, Charity is beginning ministry as a Chaplain. One of the professional requirements is ordination by the sponsoring denomination. She was not optimistic that her denomination, caught up in a conservative backlash, would ordain her. Again, she was pleased with the courage of her local church which recognized the work of God in her life and ordained her to ministry.

These women, educated in Bible College or seminary, and many ordained, are professionally credentialed to serve on church staffs and in other pastoral posts. What do the men I interviewed have to say about this? If men were to be defensive about any aspect of this study, I expected this would be it.

Carl's observation is that women are called and gifted to serve equally with men. He believes the church will benefit from more involvement by women at leadership levels, including that of lead or senior pastor. His view sees the authority of the church resting in the whole congregation who in turn delegates authority to the pastor, who may be either male or female.

David, however, sees the situation differently. He believes that women's input is valuable, and even laments the lack of involvement in his current church structures. Yet he believes in the traditional position that men have been given authority over women. He is in the difficult position of having few capable men come forward for leadership in his church and believing that women ought not to be given leadership unless it is under the authority of a man. For David, the question is an issue of biblical authority. He said,

I think our society—the world in the biblical sense of the world, under the control of Satan—does one of two things. Either it goes to the political model—it goes to tyranny, the total domination of people—and it controls people and things through that, or it goes to total democracy—we're all equal, denying any authority, any God-given authority. In our culture, and in our society, the dominating theme is that authority is bad, that we're all equal, that we all have rights.

David agrees that we "all have rights," but he rejects the notion that there is no authority structure. He says, "Satan's best lies are half-truths," because they contain partial truth and are held up, or presented as truth. "The half-truth is that there is no such thing as God-given authority. We're to be in submission to political authorities, because they're God-given . . . and I think that God describes some God-given authorities in the church."

David had raised a key issue. He is, of course, correct in that God does give authority. But to whom? To leaders? Yes. This is a central point in our discussion. On whom does authority in the church rest? Again, traditionalists and egalitarians part company. While both agree that God gives authority to the church as a collective group of believers, who in turn submit to leaders, traditionalists argue that only men qualify for the lead positions and egalitarians argue that God may appoint whomever he wills, male or female.

According to McNeal (1998), the "proper backdrop for understanding the nature and role of church leaders is the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers" (p. 1727). Central to evangelical beliefs (Phillips & Okholm, 1996, p. 166), the priesthood of all believers came up in my conversation with Candy. This, she believes, is a crucial point in affirming women who are called by God. In our conversation she referred to the New Testament teaching: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Peter 2:9).

While the organization of the early church was very unstructured initially, during the thirty years or so recorded in the book of Acts, some leadership emerged as we saw earlier. McNeal (1998) has pointed out several significant aspects of early church leadership which could well provide guidelines for us today.

The early simple organization developed into a wider range of leaders. Pastors and bishops (overseers), elders, teachers, and deacons exercised leadership in local churches, while apostles, evangelists, missionaries, and others moved about from congregation to congregation performing their ministries. Leadership in the early church was based on giftedness. Congregations recognized the gifts given different ones by the Holy Spirit. The leaders' authority came from the ratification by the local congregation of the individual's gifts, ability, spiritual maturity, and doctrinal integrity. The practice of ordination grew out of the simple laying on of hands that signalled a public setting aside of leadership from the church to fulfill certain tasks. (p. 1727)

He observes that the leader's authority came from the local membership who gave their approval, recognizing gifts, ability, maturity, and integrity. These guidelines rightly yield to the selection by the Holy Spirit who speaks both to the individual and to the congregation. The authority is not resident in "male leadership" or "headship" of the man, but in Christ, the Head of the Church. If a local church discerns God calling and leading a woman into any aspect of leadership, the church has the authority of God to ratify her.

The result of the institutionalization process for women is that in most cases women have been excluded from multiple layers of dialogue within the church and its many organizations. Where decisions are made without input from women, they reflect an imbalanced view of the situation. Even when men in positions of responsibility talk with women apart from the decision-making settings (for example, elders discussing issues with their wives), the input the men bring to the dialogue process is inevitably filtered through their male perspective. What many are calling for in the church today is a recognition that women

have been silenced and the church would benefit by reinstating women's voices in leadership and in the decision-making process.

A Lingering Question

"Call me sexist if you will but I still think there is some truth in that if you have men, you will probably also have women. If you have women, you won't necessarily also have men." David's comment is hardly unusual. I have heard variations of it for years. The question seems to be, not whether women can or should lead, but can men follow? Is this a stumbling block for Christian men in our generation? Does this demonstrate the lack of mutual submission in the church resulting from taking the male headship model to our current extreme? How can men say they are disciples of Christ if they are not willing to follow the leadership God appoints?

Hull (1987) acknowledges "the false allegation that the entrance of women into full participation in the church will result in the loss of male participation" (p. 217). The reason often given for men leaving is that women can be difficult. I have to agree with Hull that while some women in leadership may be "difficult types" I have seen "my share of bossy, squabbling, aggressive, fractious, and even emotional men" (p. 217). Still, women and men are expected to submit to such male leaders. Hull recommends

We must think more carefully about this allegation that the entrance of women into full participation in ministry discourages male participation. If indeed men do fall away after women begin serving, whose fault *is* that? If men become inactive when women become active, could the problem be not with the women's arrival on the scene, but with the shallowness of the men's commitment? We are engaged in spiritual warfare, not spiritual détente. We need all the Christian soldiers we can get! (p. 217)

With Hull, we are left to wonder what those who fear women in leadership in the church really fear? Is it the women? Is it change? Is it loss of control? I am not advocating a

quota system for women in the ministry. I am saying we need to listen to what the Spirit of God is saying in our churches, discern whom God has gifted, equipped, and called, and then respond.

Spiritual Warfare?

Both Hull (1987) and David have mentioned that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. As David noted, Satan is involved in lying to the church and the world and has been since the beginning. He is "a lion seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). While I certainly do not want to give the enemy more credit than he is due, I would be remiss to discuss the church and kingdom of God without recognizing the activity of the evil one. The crafty devil still seeks to destroy the church. Is pitting women against men merely a continuation of the human battle of the sexes? Or is it part of a scheme of the devil, part of spiritual warfare? Paul tells us we do not war against flesh and blood, but against powers and principalities of this dark world (Eph. 6:12). Is the movement of recognizing women as equally gifted and called part of the redemptive activity of God who is reversing a curse?

We need to address these questions seriously before we try to settle the issue of women in ministry. The question is not one of women's rights or of men's privileges or even of justice. It is a question of how we as believers work together under God. The following chapter focuses on three opportunities for such an endeavour.

Pause for Reflection

These discussions may provoke some unsettling questions. Make a note of them in your journal. If you are part of a prayer group, consider introducing this issue as an item of prayer.

Study Ephesians 6: 10-20 regarding spiritual warfare. Consider the result of the curse and that the "curse is to be reversed in the kinds of relationship we experience in the church" (Phillips & Okholm, 1996, p. 78).

CHAPTER EIGHT: EDUCATION, MISSIONS, AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

Education, missions, and the local church presented numerous opportunities for leadership among the participants in the study. Among the eight women, seven attended post-secondary Christian educational institutions, four had foreign missions ventures, and all had extensive local church leadership experiences. Though their experiences varied, common themes emerged through the dialogues. Again, I found the experiences contained elements that helped the women develop leadership as well as some ingredients that hindered, discouraged or opposed them.

This chapter explores the experiences of women in each of these three venues as the fields of service for their leadership: education, missions, and church. In the first section on education, we consider that Jesus initiated Christian education for women, hear the experiences of the women and observations of two of the men in Christian education, and consider a historical perspective. Next we turn our attention to the world of missions, remembering the involvement of the participants in missions and blending their experiences with a brief consideration of some policies and historical perspective. We then view women's leadership in the local church. The most common venue for leadership among the women in the study, the local church gives mixed messages to women today. This section ends with a reminder of the importance of interjecting dialogue and a consideration of calling and ordination in ministry.

Christian Education: It Began At Jesus' Feet

Since Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to the Teacher, women have drawn near to learn more of him. In probably the most familiar passage, Luke 10, we find an account of the tension between Martha and Mary, and Jesus' own resolution. Jesus allowed women to come to him and learn directly from him (Stagg & Stagg, 1978, p. 118). He welcomed Mary and affirmed her choice. A later exchange between Martha and Jesus provides a glimpse into a profound moment when Jesus tells her, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Jesus spoke with women just as he did with men, revealing to them the intimate truths of the Kingdom of God.

Education Among the Participants

For the participants in this study, formal education was important. Of the men and women interviewed, their formal levels of training varied: one with high school graduation; one with Bible College training; six with masters level degrees; three with earned doctorates. Formal education is not the sole factor in a life of maturing and leadership, but it is clearly a strong factor. How has formal Christian education helped or hindered the women who participated in this study to become leaders? From the accounts of five women we find a blend of positive and negative responses.

The Women Speak: Remembering Student Days

Charity and Candy recall their experiences in one seminary and include some of the recent history of the schools in their denomination. Candy graduated over fifteen years ago; Charity in the early 1990's. Candy says that while her experience in seminary was positive, the reactive changes of the past decade are negative. Charity explained her position. Candy begins, by recalling

When I was there, it was [considered by some] the liberal seminary. That's why I enjoyed it so much, because I was not stomped down as a woman in ministry . . . It has now changed. My seminary . . . has become the very fundamentalist seminary where "the little wife" stays at home and that's "biblical and godly."

Charity recounted that the seminary redesigned their programming to disallow women into their school of theology, and "they stopped offering MDIV programs to women." She sighed, "And I got out just in time." Candy, referring to the inability of women to pursue training for the pastorate at her alma mater, disagrees with the seminary's decision and believes that it is biblical for women to serve as pastors.

These two women speak with sadness. They have been hurt, seen other women in pain, and are finding ways to express their frustration. These two women are making efforts to improve the situation for girls and women who follow them in ministry. Candy continued, with decided determination in her voice:

This is why I wanted to do this interview. This is what the young women are coming up through. It's more blatant than it was. At least they played the game when I was in seminary. They don't even play the game any more. The option is not there.

Our conversation continued. I was interested in the perspectives of these intelligent, articulate, sensitive women, so I asked about whether church tradition and culture were factors in the decision to exclude women from some studies in their seminary. Charity said that there is no longer "the opportunity to converse about it." She then explained that there was a sudden change of leadership in the seminary, and "the professors who stayed after [the current president] came, who were willing to kind of confront him about the kind of changes they were making, are gone and not by their own choosing." Charity laments the way dismissals happened, expressing that in her view "there was nothing Christian about the way those professors were treated." Both Charity and Candy expressed disappointment and

disillusionment with these decisions and actions of leadership in their seminary alma mater. It has, they said, dampened the value they placed on their own relatively positive educational experiences.

Reflections from Candy and Charity dealt with the relationships they experienced at seminary in addition to the academic, theological knowledge they pursued. Lasting impressions of internal political bickering, even in-fighting, have marred their memories of years that were also filled with times of spiritual growth. Both of these women maintain a high level of faith that God will ultimately resolve conflicts such as they experienced, and each remains committed to her life's calling to serve in a pastoral ministry.

The next participant we hear from, Teresa, was intent on interaction in her post-secondary experience. You may remember that her family frequently engaged in dialogue and taught her to think carefully and independently. She was looking forward to a Bible school experience that would enlarge the theological conversation for her. Though in a different part of North America, would her experience be similar to Candy and Charity's?

Teresa did not attend seminary, rather she chose to pursue post-secondary study initially in a Bible College in Canada. She attended for one year and began to get the message that while women were encouraged to study, their options after graduation would be limited. During our conversation, Teresa was hinting that barriers were being put in her path. I did not quite understand what she was saying, so I asked if there had been warning signs along the way that as a woman there would be things she could not do. She responded, "I think that I got [limitations] both as a woman, and as somebody in the arts. So it was for not fitting into the standard regimented structured way of doing things."

Notice that her response, too, hints of the stifling effects of institutionalization not only on women, but on the expressions of artistic persons as well. We spoke about her involvement in the arts briefly, and then returned to her Bible school experience. During this part of the conversation, her desire to enter missions came up. We discussed stumbling blocks and stepping-stones. Listen to Teresa's observations:

I was interested in missions since I was young, probably 10 or 11 or something. I know by the time I entered high school I was pretty clear that that's what I wanted to do. But I was also very interested in music and that also was the direction I was going, and I could never see the way the two could fit . . . When I went to Bible school, I went more with the intention of looking more at ways I could develop in the music side and in Bible knowledge, but I wasn't ever thinking at all of pastoral types of ministry.

Teresa, as a young adult, was pursuing theological and practical education to equip her for work in missions. After one year, however, she left because neither the music nor the Bible programs of that particular school were challenging. Perhaps more disturbing, however, was her observation that "you weren't allowed to ask any questions." She remembers discussions in which teachers basically said, "'The other side says this, but we won't go into that because, you know, it's wrong.' And no explanation of why." Because of her disappointment in getting neither the training nor the invitation to theological dialogue she had hoped, Teresa concluded her choice of Bible school "didn't meet any of my musical or intellectual or spiritual needs."

With that, she said rather forthrightly, "I ended up in university." I was curious about the rest of her educational pilgrimage, because Teresa is an intelligent woman! Since she left that Bible school, she has studied formally in three countries and has five earned degrees,

including a Ph.D. Her experience at the Bible school illustrates the result of monological²¹ thinkers filling teaching posts in theological schools. Perhaps her story will encourage others to search out settings that encourage genuine dialogue.

I was curious to know how Teresa believed that being a woman factored in to her further studies. I was surprised at her matter-of-fact response, "It wasn't an issue." Then I wondered if being a woman had been a problem in her ministry pursuits. She continued,

I would say so. I specifically have avoided the Christian Educational circles since [Bible school]. In the first week I was [on the foreign mission field], I was asked to take on leadership things in the church and within the first few months I was leading numerous [ministry events] . . . They wanted me involved in leadership. And so, I would say, I wasn't involved in leadership types of things in North America for various reasons.

She was initially hindered from leadership in North America yet encouraged abroad. Teresa is today an experienced minister involved in church planting overseas. How did she complete her preparation for serving in missions? If not Bible school, where? Teresa believes her personal study, reading and "working with people who can act as your mentors" are valuable.

While we in evangelical Christianity generally recognize the value of Bible school and seminary training, these stories from Candy, Charity, and Teresa tell us that formal education also has its down sides. My own experience in seminary proved valuable, and much more helpful than harmful. I attended seminary in the early 70s. During those years, several regional revivals swept North America, from California to Saskatchewan. My experience

²¹ Howe (1963) differentiates between "monological" and "dialogical" thinkers (p. 10), noting that while dialogue offers hope and growth, monologue does not because it is characterized as "prejudiced, intolerant, [or] bigoted" (p. 10). Teresa's experience which discouraged questioning interaction is monological.

was influenced both by spiritual renewal that typically encourages women's involvement (Boccia, as cited in Grenz, 1995, p.37), and the encouragement brought by the cultural feminist movement. In short, it was a good time to be a woman entering the ministry. However, these years later, I have lived with and witnessed the stultifying effects of institutionalization and a backlash to the feminist movement. Some of those effects are being expressed by women in this study as well as in the literature.

Frieda's experience follows a different path from the other women. She attended Bible college and recalls:

I went for two years after high school I was going for personal Bible knowledge and growth in my understanding in who God is. And I think because I was there, growing in that knowledge, [that] led me to that choice to want to be influential.

Frieda did not begin Bible school intent on pursuing leadership; rather, her experience in Bible school opened vistas of opportunity and challenge for her. She believes her options were open. "I could do anything, but I also didn't have any goals to be a pastor." Frieda's Bible school experience helped her grow in the way she had hoped, in Bible knowledge and in her faith.

As I considered the interviews so far, it became apparent that only the women who were preparing for pastoral ministry experienced a sense of frustration. With this in mind, I was curious to finally talk with Roberta. You may recall that Roberta embarked on a seven-year search to clarify the inner voice she perceived to be that of God calling her into preaching. She recalls that while she had a very clear sense of calling and direction, other seminary students in her class did not. She did not attend seminary in North America, although she has subsequently ministered here. Our conversation led us to contrast seminary training designed to prepare people for the professional ministry, with other types of religious

study designed for lay persons. Roberta supports both types, but has concerns about persons studying for the ministry who may not have a clear sense of calling.

Our conversation continued to highlight an interesting notion. In Roberta's homeland, seminary training is only available for adults who have proved successful and responsible in society. She mentioned that there is "no such thing as a 25-year-old pastor," pointing out that youth is often accompanied by personal and spiritual inexperience and immaturity. She thinks North American evangelicals could learn something from that pattern of education. Once a person, man or woman, has proved responsible in life, and heard a clear call from God to become a minister, then he or she should enter seminary. According to Roberta, much heartache in ministry (both pastoral and congregational) could be spared if only mature adults were admitted to ministry. I think her point is valid. Some would argue that the young are eligible for ministry based on I Timothy 4:12, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young." Roberta's point is not about age, however, but about spiritual maturity. I think even Paul would agree!

Here I will venture a final observation from the comments of the women participants. The women chose to pursue different types of Christian post-secondary education. One type, typical of Bible colleges and some universities, prepares students with a general education presented from a Christian worldview. The programs are not necessarily designed to equip students for professional ministry. The second type, seminary or theological training, is post-graduate education and is geared specifically for persons who are preparing for professional ministry. The line drawn regarding women in leadership seems to be precisely at this point. Not only do some evangelicals not want women in authority, they do not want them in professional ministry. It is interesting to consider this alongside Weber's (1990)

observation that "bureaucratic administration means fundamentally the exercise of control on the basis of knowledge" (p. 14). For women, this means if they are excluded from theological training for professional positions of ministry, they will consequently be filtered away from positions of influence in the decision-making boards and agencies, largely populated by male ministers. Weber asserts that "bureaucratic organizations, or the holders of power who make use of them, have the tendency to increase their power still further by the knowledge growing out of experience in the service" (p. 14). As Roberta noted, young men are often given preference in professional placement in ministry over more mature and equally qualified women. If continued, this pattern will continue to prevent women from engaging in the kinds of knowledge that grows out of experience. While some argue that women want to take "power" away from the men currently in leadership, I contend that women want to respond to the call of God in their lives for service. The more we as evangelicals encourage them toward educational and experiential knowledge, the better for all of us.

Pause for Reflection

Take some time to think before you proceed. Compare and contrast the experiences of the women. What was the essence of each positive and negative experience? Have you, or someone you know, had similar experiences? Are you aware of current trends in theological education for women?

Consider your own experience. What influenced you to pursue the education you did? In what ways was your education valuable? How did it equip you for life? What aspects of your formal education either misled or hindered you? How do you view persons with more or less formal education than yourself? Do you defer to others who have "expertise"? Do you look down on persons with less education? How do you evaluate people's life experiences in terms of their ability to "teach" you? What is the relationship between formal education and credentials for a secular task as opposed to roles within the church?

What is the relationship between educational knowledge and experiential knowledge? How is each valuable in the church? How important is it that both men and women gain such knowledge?

Educators' Observations

Both Carl and Louis are professionally involved in theological education. They, of course, had observations about women as students and as ministers. One of the paradoxes I encountered is that while women are prohibited from pastoring congregations, they are often allowed, by the same groups, to teach in theological settings and serve on boards that oversee pastoral positions. Women are valued as workers in the church and as teachers, particularly of the impressionable young. But how do groups justify allowing women to serve in some positions and not others? I asked Carl about the fact that women teachers in theological study may train pastors but cannot be pastors. Carl responded,

It's interesting to see how different people in different schools deal with that issue in different ways. You know, some would say, "Well, what a woman can do is teach in Christian education, or in missions, or something like that, but not in Bible and theology." So you tend to set a hierarchy on your faculty. Others will say, "Well, here's the thing. The institution isn't the church. It's parachurch." They're not really exercising authority over men in the church context, you see, and therefore, it's okay. It would seem to me, if you really want to be consistent, you'd say women can't have authority over men anywhere. At all, anywhere. Not in business, not in industry, not in labour unions. Nowhere.

Carl's explanation was not only helpful; it echoed the experiences of several of the women participants. Carl's comments point to the "stained glass ceiling" (Sharn, 1997, p. 01A), the church's version of the cultural reality known secularly as simply the glass ceiling (Grint, 1997, p. 201) in which women can go so far—and no further. In some evangelical churches, all prohibitions against women in leadership have been removed in theory (theology) if not in practice. Yet, if we hear what Carl is saying we will recognize that the patriarchal tendency toward hierarchy influences even the curriculum within a theological college. For example, Bible classes and theology courses are on a higher plane than Christian education courses, therefore, women can teach Christian education but not theology. Why? It

is a question men and women are asking, and I believe churches and theological colleges need to address.

My conversation with Louis regarding women in Christian education was also very enlightening. I sought Louis' participation because of his well-known support of women as full participants and partners in Christian education. He said of women in leadership in his own denomination,

It is improving, but it is not exactly where it should be. The Conference made a statement . . . which reaffirmed the 1981 resolutions regarding ordination of women, which it prohibits. But on the other hand, it still encourages women to minister in the church in every function other than lead pastor There is a significant shift with baby boomers now becoming lead pastors . . . and there is much more openness for women, not only in ministry, but actually in being ordained.

Louis sees a shift in attitude toward women in leadership approaching with the arrival of baby boomers to key leadership positions, particularly pastors. The issue of women's ordination continues to be a sticking point. In a related denomination, women are ordained, allowed to be lead pastors, and have at least two colleges with women presidents. Louis then told me of another evangelical group that does allow for the ordination of women. He attended one of their conferences in which the featured speaker was the female president of a Christian college. Louis' conclusion is that women's involvement is "to their benefit," speaking of the valuable contributions of women in Christian colleges. He is hopeful that his own group of churches will continue to expand opportunities for women in ministry, both in Christian education and in the pastorate.

Women in Christian Education: A Brief Historical Perspective

As I reflected on the comments from the women, as well as the observations from the men, I realized once again the cyclical effect of history. What can we learn from history

regarding factors that might help and hinder contemporary women in Christian education? It has been fascinating for me to read of the struggle of Christian women.²² Several parallels between the mid-1800s with our current era struck me. In retrospect, we recognize that North American women 150 years ago were pioneers in higher education. Education, including theological education, has been made increasingly available to women. Today it is almost inconceivable that women were not always allowed educational access. But, in the current evangelical backlash at least one seminary is refusing women's admission to pastoral studies; and, as we have read, seminary professors are again actively discouraging women from preparing for specific kinds of ministry.

Another account (Handy, 1976) offers a wider view of the women's early involvement, mentioning the courage required by many women over a century ago seeking higher education:

In the early years of the young republic very few occupations were open to women, and in legal status they were often treated as servile and incompetent. The churches generally supported the cultural conventions of the time concerning women, and interpreted strictly the dictum of the Apostle Paul that they should keep silence in the churches. It took much courage and determination on the part of the pioneering leaders of women's rights to lift their voices against long-standing customs of society and church. Important breakthroughs came in the field of education; one pioneer was Emma Willard (1787-1870), the founder of Troy (New York) Female Seminary in 1821. Catharine Beecher (1800-1878), one of the remarkable children of Lyman and Roxana Beecher, led in the establishment of Hartford (Connecticut) Female Seminary, which became a significant model and example. Mary Lyon (1797-1849) combined deep religious concerns with high educational objectives in the founding of Mt. Holyoke (Massachusetts) College in 1836-7. Meanwhile, the place of women in the churches was slightly improved by the new measure of Finney, for they were at least permitted to pray aloud in mixed assemblies. (p. 183)

²²See "Women in Church History" in Grenz (1995, pp. 59-62). for a good overview of women in theological education.

Women have indeed come a long way! Handy, a historian, notes that women have had "courage and determination" and that the church generally supported the "cultural conventions of the time" (p. 183). In our previous discussions we observed that we ultimately come to a crossroads in our experience where we must decide which way to turn. Notice, too, the dates mentioned by Handy. These are times when slavery was legal in the Southern United States and women did not have a vote. These were "cultural conventions" long since changed. The dialogue between Christianity and culture is continuing. In addition, Handy commends the women as "pioneering leaders," and does not condemn them for heretical or unbiblical actions. Christians in our contemporary situation may learn much from obvious parallels as we pause to consider our relatively recent history.

What the historical patterns and our current situation suggest to me is that we need great spiritual discernment to read the signs of the times and listen to the voice of God. In the past decade, much has been written about prayer for spiritual renewal and revival among Christian groups. Do we know what to expect if God answers those prayers? History tells us that as the Spirit of God renews his people and revives his work, women are called into increasing service and men welcome their presence as participating partners. Perhaps our individual and collective dialogues with one another and with God will help us in this discernment process.

Pause for Reflection

What does the process of institutionalization mean for women pursuing education and following the call of God on their lives to enter ministry? Are women to continue to be excluded because of this process? Is it time we recognized the process as potentially threatening to the church and its mission? If so, how do we proceed? Think about these questions as you continue reading. Record your thoughts in your journal.

Women in the World of Missions

You may recall the comments from Teresa and Candy. These are the two women who serve(d) as foreign missionaries. Candy had many opportunities for service, but she had no title, and when she returned home, she had limited opportunities to share because her husband was the recognized missionary. Teresa, on the other hand, encountered difficulty as a woman because of the opposition of male missionaries from North America, particularly the United States, in her field of service.

During our conversation, Teresa told me that in her mission organization, single women could lead, and even start a church, but "as soon as they marry a man or raise up a male disciple, that person should take it over." Teresa also said, "A woman is only allowed to [lead the ministry] until it gets started and then the mission sees it is doing well, and brings a man in to take it overOnce I was ordained, they had to deal with [my leadership] in a different way." I discovered through dialogue with Teresa that she exemplified a conflict between being "a woman" and "being ordained." The policies of the mission agency considered these mutually exclusive.

Prompted by the insights of these women, I began doing some research on women in missions. My own heritage was rich with stories of women involved in missions. Teresa and Candy's experiences echo more than a century of mission practice. Handy (1976) observes that while women's auxiliaries supported mission work, women were "denied significant participation in the making of missionary policy[and] were granted little official recognition" (p. 184). So, I was both surprised and saddened by the attitudes I discovered in the history of mission. Lutz (1997) provides a historical viewpoint:

Probably one of the saddest accounts of how the attitude of church leaders limited and affected women's roles in ministry is the story of twentieth-century

missions in North America . . . By 1929, 67 percent of all foreign missionaries from the United States were women and over forty women's mission boards had been formed. Women recruited single missionaries, sent them out to work primarily with women and children, financed them and organized national prayer movements. The World Day of Prayer was founded by the Federation of Woman's Boards and the Council of Women for Home Missions in 1919. (p. 35)

On the surface, this does not sound like a sad story. It marks the growth of missions and the involvement of women as obvious leaders in the movement. Lutz continues:

But leaders of the mainline churches resisted this movement, opposing the appearance of women in public meetings, and their assumption of leadership roles in churches on the mission fields. In his landmark book on the history of women's mission societies, R. Pierce Beaver writes, "The church has always been the bastion of male arrogance and power, and the men were most reluctant to share control and ministry with the women."

The mainline missions boards began increasing pressure on the women's organizations to merge. The chief spokesperson for the women's missionary boards, Mrs. Helen Montgomery asked, "Are men ready for it – are they emancipated from the caste of sex so that they can work easily with women, unless they be the head and women clearly subordinate?" Evidently not. (p. 35)

The pain and institutionalization mentioned in the previous chapter are both evident in this excerpt recounting the systematic exclusion of women and the takeover by men. As I said earlier, this section on Christian organizations has been the most difficult to write; and, I believe it is because I now see that what I once perceived as male prerogative I now see as sin. I admit I am reluctant to pronounce such strong indictments against Christian men. History, however, has a convincing voice in the dialogue.

We have just read that mission fields have long been places where women were very involved in leadership. Teresa's and Candy's experiences overseas bear out Stackhouse's (1999) observations that women who have served in foreign missions expand our notions of

what women can do well.²³ I remember several years ago hearing a returned missionary woman speaking in our church on Sunday morning. In her introductory comments she mentioned that during her assignment in South America she preached, baptized, and taught regularly. Upon her return to the United States, however, she was prohibited from preaching. She smiled graciously and commented to both the pastor and the congregation that she very much appreciated the opportunity to visit our church, step in the pulpit and "share." She preached a wonderful sermon.

Teresa's concern for missions is not so much for the Christian women serving overseas, but for those women to whom they minister. Teresa had strong counsel: "If women are not fully free in Christ, then we have no gospel of freedom to share with others." In many countries of the world, women have access to places men simply cannot go. This is particularly true in cultures where men and women live in separate spheres and women's movements in open society are restricted. If women are not allowed to serve as "full-fledged missionaries," who will take the gospel to those countries? Teresa has been involved in missions almost twenty years and has seen the cultural pendulum swing. Parachurch mission organizations reflect the same tendency as denominations to move forward then pull back in terms of allowing women to lead. Teresa observes, "I couldn't find any that would accept a single woman to go to the Muslim world." Eventually, however, Teresa did find a supporting agency. Ironically, within a few years, they adjusted policy, "stating that women cannot be involved in any level of leadership in team leadership or in church leadership." She continues

²³ Two authors who support full equality for women in church leadership have cross-cultural experience as well. See Groothuis (1994) and Malcolm (1982).

to lead, however, having received an informal exemption from her field supervisors and experiencing support from her local ministry team.

Three observations surface as I consider the role of women in missions. First, the phenomena of institutionalization and male leadership are prevalent, leading to mixed messages and misunderstanding for women. As Christians, women are encouraged to follow the call of God in their lives; as women, they are bound by policies of exclusion. Second, women are persistent! Even if they have to keep moving, they will find a way to do the work to which God has called them. Over one hundred years ago, women started missions' agencies. Today, women like Teresa still trust the Lord to make a way where there is no way. And, third, women bring to mission causes, the "primacy of persons over things" (Tournier, 1981, p. 127). Teresa's concern for the needs of other women is an illustration of this and points to the need to actively pursue women for leadership in mission organizations.

Pause for Reflection

Do you, like me, find the historical tendency of female-initiative and male-takeover surprising? What has been your experience regarding women in missions? Have you heard women missionaries speak of their overseas experiences? If so, how were their experiences overseas alike or different from ministry experiences in North America? Write an entry in your journal recording your response to women in missions.

Women's Leadership in the Local Church: "It Is No Minor Matter"

The questions central to this study find fullest expression in this section. While many women find adequate opportunities to use their gifts in a variety of leadership roles, the most challenging questions still surround the positions of leadership at the "highest" levels of the local church, specifically deacons, elders, and pastors. This final section will introduce us to the experiences of the women participants as they relate to church life. All of the participants have been actively involved in church life for many years and have found varying levels of

fulfilment and frustration. In this section we will hear from several of the participants, consider women as leaders, consider what role dialogue plays in the calling and ordination of women, and summarize the current disagreement among evangelicals regarding women in leadership.

If the women I interviewed were generally optimistic about their roles in marriage, they were largely frustrated with their roles in leadership in the church. In a marriage, two people must face one another day-in-and-day-out and learn to love one another "warts and all." Genuine dialogue can work. This is not true in the contemporary church. With time and distance between us as Christians, we in North American churches are able to attend Bible studies and worship services with regularity and still remain aloof and superficial. We can wear our "Sunday clothes" and our "Sunday smiles." We avoid genuine, life-giving, life-shaping dialogue. While it may appear to work for a time, that sort of religious experience is simply inadequate to sustain what God intended for Christian community to produce in the life of his people and may become an empty "form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:5).

How have women leaders been helped or hindered through their experiences in church life? The responses of the women reveal that the local church provided encouragement for their growth as leaders and presented obstacles. Among the female participants, each began as a volunteer, most as teenagers. Their early experiences were overwhelmingly positive, which accounts for the encouragement they had to continue in church-related activities. This speaks to the importance of the message we teach our children, boys and girls together. We have already heard some of those stories. All six who were Christians as teenagers were active in their churches; all have been involved in volunteer leadership; three have never been

ordained but have served in paid positions; three have been ordained and served in paid positions; one of the ordained women has served as lead pastor.

Frieda: An Encouraged, Traditional Leader

Frieda expressed the most contentment with her church relationship, saying, "I have only had encouragement, very little criticism or competition." Frieda recognized there are difficulties in the church but affirms, "in the church setting maybe you can do something about it." She spoke of the ability of people to work things out through dialogue which brings understanding.

She recognized relational difficulties within the church, and was optimistic that common spiritual commitments will overcome any temporary problems. In retrospect I realize Frieda holds a traditional viewpoint. Her theology of women in ministry currently recognizes male leadership as primary in both home and church. Her experience fits with her expectations. Her frustration level regarding women's roles in the church is relatively low. She has never personally experienced a call on her life to professional or pastoral ministry. Frieda proved to be the exception among the women who participated in my study. I respect Frieda's observations.

As I discovered during the interviews, other women's expectations were different, even though most grew up with traditional expectations. Several have shifted their views to an egalitarian stance, while others are somewhere in between. Each has come to a place where she expects that women will be able to work side-by-side with men in church leadership. The temptation at this point is to say, "Okay, women. Line up your expectations with the reality of the situation." While that might lower general frustration levels, it will not work. Why? Because, in each case, the women in the study have become convinced on biblical grounds

that God's desire is that women and men work together in the church. If the equation is to change, they say, it is our practiced reality that is out of line with God's intentions. Our expectations, they say, are biblical.

If Frieda is the exception, what do other women have to say? How are their experiences different? I thought about the similarities and differences among the women. As mentioned in previous chapters, most of them are married. Most have children. Several are married to husbands who are or have been involved in paid church ministry. Most of them were involved in church as children and teenagers. Each of the women is gifted in significant leadership abilities. All have multiple leadership experiences. They share much in common. What, then, are the contrasts? The single biggest difference is in the area of "calling." Frieda has never experienced what she considers to be a call of God on her life to "full-time Christian ministry." Six of the remaining seven have. The frustration they expressed came at the points where they have been hindered or prevented from pursuing a deep, personal response to the call of God in their lives. I began to wonder, at what point did these women feel "called"? At what point were they prohibited from pursuing their calling? How do we in the church define leadership and determine leaders? We will address these questions after we hear from the other women.

Teresa: Experienced Colliding Realities

Teresa, now living overseas, grew up in an evangelical church in Eastern Canada. She returned from a year of university and re-entered church life as a young adult. Of her pilgrimage into leadership, Teresa remembers holding a variety of leadership roles in the church and community when she was in high school and university. She says, "I started and directed an orchestra at church and I started a children's prayer meeting . . . I had never

connected that before . . . listen to that. Here I am saying music, worship things and prayer way back then."

This was a moment of realization for Teresa. We both acknowledged something significant had "clicked" for Teresa as she briefly paused to consider her own words. We had been discussing her current responsibilities in mission work, including music, worship leading, and intercessory prayer. Yet, until this conversation she had never related her present leadership roles to the opportunities she had in younger years. This was truly a discovery in dialogue for both of us. The gifts and talents she had been given as a young woman were being cultivated in the life of the church for later ministry overseas. We continued our interview, and she said of her adult experience:

So I found myself part of a denomination that didn't allow for a lot of change and didn't allow for women to be involved with leadership. So once I sort of got out of that age where they were encouraging the young people to do some things, then I really found myself hampered.

Teresa's experience highlights two colliding realities. The first is simply, in her words, "you know, a woman in leadership," indicating a resistance to permit women in leadership. The second is that her church did not allow for "a lot of change." We have already noted that change is inevitable in any culture. One question we would be wise to consider is "How are we to respond to change?" Teresa's experience was in a church that did not readily allow for change. She told me that she had been involved in teaching a Sunday School class to girls in her church which she describes as "very small town conservative church, which is finally now making some changes." It has taken over twenty-five years for those changes to come. Looking back, Teresa found both that her experience impeded her own growth in leadership, and that the local church had a negative influence on the girls in her class.

People complained and . . . the elders came and told me I wasn't allowed to have classes where students were allowed to ask questions. Actually, I was teaching the senior girls on the role of women, biblical things about women, and allowing them just to ask questions and the elders came and told me I wasn't allowed to do that. So that actually was a very specific stumbling block. And very specifically those who were in the class have told me 20 years later that that specific thing is what alienated them from the church. So, there's that. It had quite an effect on a lot of young women . . . that definitely was a stumbling block.

She paused, and then added, "It's hard to say things are just a stumbling block. I mean the Lord puts things there to help you sort of get around them."

Notice Teresa's attitude. She was hesitant initially to tell me of any stumbling blocks. As we talked, however, it became obvious that certain events in her life had been barriers. The story of teaching Sunday School in a local church was one such example. As a Christian, Teresa has learned over time that the Lord works through difficulties for our eventual good and for his glory (see Romans 8:18-31). I believe Teresa is right: God does work toward good. I wonder, however, if the discouragement from church leaders for women to ask hard questions is in fact an obstacle that we need to remove (Is. 57:14b). Hull (1987) suggests that it is (p. 29).

Through a frustrating, painful experience of rejection of her early leadership attempts, Teresa learned perseverance. Male leaders who did not endorse her efforts diverted the dialogue Teresa was developing with younger women. Some of those women have had difficulty with the church for two decades. She is grateful that some of them are now returning to church life.

Esther: Trained Up as a Child into Leadership

Esther, like Teresa, received encouraging messages as a child regarding her future in the church. Now an active leader in several levels of Christian education, Esther looks back

fondly on childhood memories in church as a starting place. She recalled how the story of Samuel (I Sam. 3) had influenced her. She wove Samuel's story into her own.

He had a dream in the night, and he was waked up with a call to himself, his name, and Eli helped him interpret that as the voice of God. From very early in my life, I've sensed God's direction in my life . . . my primary relationship would be to live my life before him.

Esther's early church experience is filled with memories of Bible stories illustrating "how God placed his hand on individual people." When asked whether her church was part of the process in her becoming a leader, Esther responded, "Yes, but not in unusual ways." She explained that her church had very active programs for children and youth. They were all encouraged to take initial small steps of leadership, like "standing in front of the group and reading, for instance, [and] missions trips, where we were encouraged to go and try new things."

Esther's experience reflects many opportunities to be involved "in front of people," in a setting that the church viewed as youth leadership. The church not only equipped girls and boys alike in all aspects of Christian education, but also gave girls and boys the same opportunities for leadership experience. Esther made a point of mentioning that her experience was neither unique nor special in her church. Notice, too, that her story of the call of God roots her understanding in a biblical story taught to all children. The story of Samuel, though of a young boy, was understood to be applicable to boys and girls alike. With this as background, all children and youth were given opportunities for growth. Esther continued in active leadership for many years. Hindrances came later for her.

Candy: Discovers Contrasts Between Impressions and Reality

Perhaps the strongest voice regarding the role of women in church leadership came from Candy. Like Esther and Teresa, Candy grew up in an active church environment. She, too, was taught as a child that girls as well as boys could grow up to become Christian leaders. I must admit I was surprised initially by the candour of her comments so early in the interview, but quickly realized her emotion conveyed strength of conviction. Her comments came very early in our interview. When I asked why she was so interested in the subject of women in Christian leadership, she responded,

When I started out in ministry it was the impression that . . . all doors were open to women and God can use you to go anywhere you want to go to do anything you want to do. The reality was quite different, and it was very hard to understand why that was the impression given—and to be quite blunt—why they didn't say you had to [be a man] to do most things, and the Bible did not mention ever needing that part to be able to function as a Christian leader. I just think it is real important.

Candy's comments mention the contrast between the "impression given" and "the reality." This is one cause of frustration mentioned earlier. The dissonance resulting in women's frustrations seems to be found in the teachings of the church, not just in the minds of individual women. Is the church teaching one thing and doing another where women's involvement and leadership are concerned?

Candy's pilgrimage to leadership included active participation as a teenager in church leading, among other things, worship services in prisons. She married a minister, served on a church staff as both volunteer and paid staff, has served overseas in missions, and now serves in a pastoral role.

She is grateful that her present church, including the senior pastor and other staff members, recognize her gifts and her calling. As a church, they choose to avoid much of the

controversy swirling around them regarding women in ministry and focus on ministry to their congregation and community. It is when Candy looks beyond her own situation to the future of younger women and girls that her anger is stirred. She also made a point of telling me that although she is not ordained, lacking ordination has never hindered her from doing ministry. She says of ordination, "It's not even in the Bible." She was referring to the confusing lack of definition of the act of ordination. She continued:

I've always said that as long as ordination does not stand in the way of ministry, I will not make it an issue. But the day it stands in the way of ministry and what I am called to do, it will become a very significant issue in my life. And I think it is really important for young women to know they have an option . . . they can still function in [leadership in] a church with the right pastor. That's the key. The right church, with the right pastor.

Candy has highlighted two additional significant factors: local church leadership and ordination. She credits the whole congregation including the leadership for recognizing her gifts and calling. She also asserts that lack of ordination has so far not hindered her involvement in ministry. Her comments lead us to consider the role of a pastor and the relationship of ordination to calling and to leadership. As I noted earlier, only three of the eight women interviewed have been ordained. Both of these issues, the role of the pastor and ordination, are related to matters of congregational governance and structure. While evangelical churches strive to follow New Testament principles of leadership, we must recognize that biblical hermeneutics and culture play tremendous roles in shaping our understanding of the church today. And, as we have already noted, evangelicals do not agree.

Roberta: Don't Obliterate the Differences Between Men and Women

Having served as a pastor in several settings, Roberta has the most experience from which to draw in terms of leading a local church. We will consider some of her observations

regarding calling and ordination later in this chapter. For now, however, I want to highlight an interesting observation Roberta made during our interview.

Very much aware of her status as a woman in a predominantly male field, Roberta believes that being a woman is an asset to her ministry. Of her contributions to leadership, Roberta says on the top of the list is her "style of leadership, given that I have a high relational agenda." She wants decision-making to be "consensus-based as far as possible." A number of people said they had never experienced that kind of leadership before. Generally, people responded favourably to Roberta's leadership, and "a number of people went on to implement" a similar style in groups they led outside the church setting. Why? Roberta explained that not only did the people like being involved in the process, they also "liked knowing the person." I asked Roberta to say more about the kinds of decisions that were made by consensus. "The big things," she replied. For example, whether a particular project is "compatible with what we believe in."

Roberta has no illusions about women in ministry. She realizes that men and women bring "differences" to the task. Like many evangelicals, Roberta speaks of basic differences between men and women. Her comments raise the question as to whether these "differences" are intended by the Creator, or, as many suggest, are the result of socialized behaviour. She explains, "I still think that we need to pay attention to the fact that men and women are made differently, and there are some jobs that seem to be better suited to each gender. . . . I don't want to obliterate the differences." Roberta believes the combined strengths of men and women benefit the work of the church. She sees a problem, however, when women think they have to imitate men to be pastors: "I think on the downside, that where there has been a drive for women to almost act like men, to dress like men, because . . . they figure that's the way to

be accepted. That's the way to be treated as an equal in this role." Roberta was concerned that women recognize a need to be "bi-cultural—that is they need to learn the language and the means of operating in a man's world as well as know how to [operate] in the women's world." Men, she asserts, "don't have to be in two worlds. That's always the case if you've got people who are in a minority culture."²⁴ Roberta returns to her original point, that men and women are different. "So I don't want to obliterate the differences."

Genuine dialogue between men and women in the church requires that each learn the language of the other, becoming able not only to speak, but to listen for mutual understanding. I agree with Roberta that the pattern has been for women to learn to speak a "man's language," but the reverse is not true. It is time to change that tendency.

Patricia: Leadership by Survey or Scripture?

The position of senior pastor is the most contentious in this discussion; but it is by no means the only contentious position. Many evangelical churches still hold that no woman can serve as deacons or elders because they are women. In one situation, the practical problem with this approach came clear. Patricia told me in our interview that her church does not allow women as deacons. During a season of evaluation in their church, surveys were taken. One of the results indicated that women were not being ministered to. When the reason was traced to the fact that all the deacons were male and were, in essence, ministering only to the men, the deacons decided that the situation was both unfortunate and unchangeable.

I asked whether the decision to have male deacons had been made on biblical grounds. She recalls the church had a lengthy discussion, and then took a vote whether to allow women

²⁴ Judy Rosener (1995) addresses this cultural issue as one factor contributing to the "culture clash" between men and women (p. 220).

as deacons. The vote was tied. What happened? Based on tradition and an attempt not to cause dissension, the decision was made to carry on with the status quo. In our conversation Patricia offered a simple yet pointed solution: If the needs of women are not being met by the all-male deacons, and if women cannot be appointed deacons, then by all means appoint women to minister and just call them something else! It sounds funny, but it is a wonderful, practical solution. Her suggestion implies that someone needs to be made responsible to carry on the task, and an "appointment" seemed appropriate.

Pause for Reflection

Think about the ministries of the various women participants. In what ways does your church situation compare or contrast with those mentioned? Are young girls and boys being encouraged toward Christian ministry, including leadership?

How are hard questions received in your church? How are decisions made? Do the leaders in your church follow a consensus model of leadership when possible? Are the needs of the women and the men being met in your church?

If you do not know the answers to these questions, you may want to initiate a dialogue with leadership. Record your reflections.

Women as Leaders

During the past three decades the subject of leadership itself has received much attention. Coinciding with the women's movement, many studies on leadership examine trends in leadership and women's involvement. Broader than the scope of this study, the research on leadership provides some helpful insights for us as we consider women in the church. One such study indicates that women managers are characterized by "being more open with colleagues and are consensus builders who encourage wider participation in decision-making" (Bass & Avolio, 1994, p. 201). You may have noticed the similarity between their general observation of women leaders and Roberta's comments about her experience in the pastorate.

The same study contrasts this style with "the old command-and-control style that has dominated US corporations, not coincidentally led by male managers" (p. 201). What has been missing, according to Bass and Avolio, "is the inclusion of a broader range of leadership styles that directly impact on motivation, effort, and performance" (p. 202). While I recognize that the church is not a corporation, we have already identified the church as an institutionalized organization. As such, we have adopted many of the characteristics of corporations in our culture, including a predominantly male leadership style. Perhaps the collaborative effort of men and women leading together in our churches would put us well on our way to "prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12a), which, in Paul's letter, sounds strangely like the contemporary recommendation that we "impact motivation, effort, and performance."

Interjecting Dialogue

We have said in this study that dialogue can serve a revitalizing function in relationships and in organizations. One group of researchers examined the nature of renewal of religious life. Among their findings, they discovered a process for decision-making, beginning with dialogue. The "Dialogue/Decision/Action/Evaluation (DDAE) model" identifies dialogue as the valuable starting point (Cada, Fitz, Foley, Giardino, & Lichtenberg, 1985, pp. 128-129) for rational planning and decision-making. Designed for leaders to ask the question, "How does the group understand and value its situation?" dialogue initiates a process for articulating problems and perspectives of each person involved in the process. I think this step will improve any decision-making process; I especially think it will help men and women understand one another as the process "encourages the expression of diversity in unity by bringing the unique individual frameworks into a common vision" (p. 134). When

women's voices are not heard at this critical juncture, the subsequent decisions and actions cannot accurately reflect their perspectives.

Calling, Ordination, and Dialogue

Giftedness and calling are two different things. But they are closely connected. I think it is simply incredible or incredulous that someone would separate the two so far as to say, "Well, you can have all the gifts that you would need for a particular ministry, but God isn't going to call you to that." Why would the Holy Spirit then give you those gifts, if there isn't going to be the potential even for a calling? (Carl)

As we approach the end of this chapter, we revisit the issue of calling and ordination. You will recall that as a missionary, Teresa was ordained by her local congregation. Her supporting agency was not sure how to deal with that sign of authority on a woman. Roberta, also ordained, has worked in several different denominations in several levels of church pastoral leadership. Among the differences she experienced, one of the most obvious was moving from a denomination that allowed women in lead pastor positions to one that did not. She explains, "The difference in atmosphere is huge. It's like night and day. I think that there is a subtle effect that the glass ceiling has." As she contrasted two denominations, she referred to the one open to women in all positions as being more respectful.

It just means that I can be here as a person. Even if I'm not trying to be senior pastor. It's like a fuller acceptance of me as a person and a minister. At the other one, you've always got to make sure that somebody else is on top. And so therefore, there is a game that is played out.

Her comments reflect the institutionalized male leadership prevalent in her group of churches. Roberta further observed, "If a woman is really better suited to an associate position, I think that is where she should be. But I also think that there are some men who are better suited for an associate position but because they are men, they are given authority prematurely."

Roberta's comments raise several issues ranging from hierarchy to personhood and from playing by the rules to discerning maturity. And, I think, they bring us to the focus of the study. One of the factors that hinder women from leadership is an attitude that says men must "be on top." That attitude prevents some women from ever pursuing leadership, either because of early messages explicitly telling them they are not biblically qualified for leadership or because of a psychic prison that encloses a patriarchal environment.

Roberta and I, of course, are not the only people raising questions of women in church leadership. Clarence Boomsma (1993) acknowledges the persistent dilemma, that while we "recognize the right of women to equality in society," the church continues to struggle with women in leadership:

The issue we face is whether we must continue to prohibit women from serving the church with their gifts as elders and ministers. *It is no minor matter.* On the one hand, to disregard the supposedly clear teaching of Scripture in order to allow for the ordination of women would be to violate the authority of the Bible. On the other, to continue to limit "the privileges of full communion" of the women of the church, unless plainly restricted by the Word of God, is morally unjust. (p. 104)

Boomsma's book, not surprisingly, addresses the issues raised in his question. He explores the scriptural instructions, and concludes that women find full redemption and equal status with men in Jesus, the Risen Lord.

We may reflect on the significance of the amazing fact that after his resurrection Jesus chose to reveal himself first to the women who came to the tomb and then commissioned them to bring the good news of his resurrection to his male disciples (Matt. 28:7, 10; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:9; John 20:2). This commissioning was the more remarkable because in that day women were not considered qualified to bear legal witness. (p. 63)

Notice Boomsma lists references to the work of Jesus in all four gospel accounts, a significant fact in itself, as well as the fact that Jesus' actions were specifically counter-cultural. With many contemporary authors, Boomsma notes the New Testament

writers, particularly Paul, point to Eve as "the primary spoiler of the creation by being deceived and thereby introduced sin to the world" (p. 63). Foh (1979), for instance, points to Eve's action as one of only two reasons given to defend her argument against women's ordination to the ministry (p. 238). But Boomsma does not stop there:

If Eve was the first to spoil the original creation. Eve's daughters at the tomb are the first to herald the coming of the renewed creations. If Eve was cursed for her sin to be subordinate to Adam, by the Christ event Eve's daughters are reinstated to their pristine role of partnership and equality. (pp. 63-64)

For many in the church who agree with the conclusion reached by Boomsma, indeed the curse has been reversed. Women are freed to live fully in partnership and equality with men in the church. And some of the men who observe and share those ministries say, like the men on the road to Emmaus, "some of our women amazed us" (Luke 24:22). However, not all agree with Boomsma.

What are we to do as Christians who find ourselves in disagreement over something so central as church leadership? Boomsma (1993), while acknowledging lack of consensus in his own denomination, points to their recommendation: "In this dilemma the Synod of 1990 decided to permit each congregation to use their discretion in utilizing the gifts of women in all the offices of the church" (105). Unfortunately, the decision of the Synod did not solve their problem, rather, "the response to the decision has resulted in a severe crisis in the church " (p. 105).

Like the churches Boomsma (1993) mentions, other local churches are thrown into crisis when they are faced with this decision. What causes the crisis? In many cases it is an individual woman who hears the call of God on her life to serve in a ministry capacity that in our contemporary structures require ordination; or, the church recognizes a gifted woman capable of serving the church in leadership capacity traditionally reserved for men, like elder

or deacon. In either of these cases, the call of God in the life of the woman and the endorsement of the local church is at issue. Another denomination struggling with this issue passed a similar resolution to include more women in leadership positions, although excluded "their ordination to pastoral leadership" (Geddert, 1992, p. 2). A decade after the initial decision to encourage more women in leadership, Geddert observed little progress. He suggests that the reason may be that "we are (collectively) far behind sociologically where we are theologically. While we have affirmed, theologically, the giftedness of women for positions of ministry in the church (except senior pastoral ones), we have had trouble accepting it in practice" (p. 2). Among other considerations, Geddert states, "We (especially we men) need to work at making women more comfortable in using their gifts in ways that are already open to them in the church" (p.2). He also recognizes that churches and denominations are "on both sides of this questions." Lorraine Dick (1992), an associate pastor, counsels her readers "We shouldn't part company over this" adding that "if we encourage women's roles in the church to change, it will also bring a change to the ministry of men" (p. 15).

I have said I experienced the call of God on my own life at age 16, and ten years later friends and fellow church members began to ask when I planned to pursue ministry preparation. Prompted by the dialogue initiated by others, I remembered my previous and on-going dialogue with God. Soon enough I was on my way to seminary. What is the call of God? While many authors discuss the issue, two approach it from helpful but different perspectives. The classic work by Oswald Chambers (1935), *My Utmost for His Highest*, describes the call of God as "not for the special few, it is for everyone" (p. 14). Chambers points to the passage in which God asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then

said I, Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:8) (p. 14). While this book is today considered devotional reading, the entries are excerpts of addresses given by Chambers to students in Bible college. Today, men and women read and are encouraged by his words. The call of God and the response of Isaiah portray a type of the dialogue we have with God: God initiates, we respond. Chambers emphasizes the importance of developing an attitude of mind and heart wherein we can hear the voice of God. As critically important as that is, there is more involved in the contemporary issue of being called for church leadership in a structured, North American church.

Stanley Grenz (2000) provides an extensive discussion in his *Theology for the Community of God*.²⁵ Two elements are evident in the biblical paradigm for ordination: "a divine personal call and the confirmation by a local fellowship" (p. 565). He observes ordination as

The act by which the community recognizes and confirms the presence of this call, as well as the Spirit's endowment, in a particular individual. Hence, ordination serves the Spirit's intent to provide gifted leadership for the ongoing work of God's people in service to his purposes in the world. (p. 565)

To the human elements, Grenz adds the work of the Spirit in the ordination process. In a subsequent work designed specifically to address *Women in the Church*, Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo (1995) "tackle this argument head-on" (p. 199). Giving extensive consideration to both the traditional and the egalitarian views of scripture, Grenz and Kjesbo explore ordination in the context of the broader questions concerning the representative office (p. 200), the authoritative office (p. 210), the nature of leadership (213), women and teaching authority (218), and women teachers and ecclesiastical authority (222). In the end,

²⁵ Grenz (2000) provides a thorough discussion regarding "Leadership for the Community" (pp. 557-570). Included are issues of various offices and the nature and significance of ordination.

they conclude that on biblical grounds, women are in fact eligible for any position in the church, including the ordained pastorate. In so doing, however, they go further to advocate "a revised understanding of the pastoral office," calling for a "shared leadership" that fosters "the use of a variety of differing leadership gifts" and "promotes the contribution of many persons on the basis of their differing perspectives" (p. 230).

Grenz and Kjesbo (1995) provide an alternative to an individual pastorate, male or female, and suggest a shared-leadership model. This seems to me more consistent with the way God worked throughout the scripture, than the hierarchical, individualized approach often idealized by our evangelical churches. I agree "we have done the entire people of God a disservice if we merely give women access to the power structures of the church while maintaining unbiblical hierarchical organizational patterns" (p. 230). I also recognize that this observation raises new questions. Those will have to wait for future study.

As we conclude this study, we consider some of the implications of the discoveries in dialogue for women in leadership. The next chapter considers possible perspectives that could lead toward transformation.

CHAPTER NINE: TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

True understanding comes from reflecting on your experience. (Bennis, 1995, p. 56)

For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Prov. 2:6)

How can I make meaning from the experiences of eleven women and men as they discussed with me in separate conversations their perspectives of women in Christian leadership? This, of course, has been my guiding question as I developed this study. Now, however, I ask another question: how can I take what I have learned and observed, with the resulting change of perspective, and encourage you (and me) to engage in further study and action? The purpose of my entering formal graduate studies was not only to gain understanding for myself, but also, hopefully, to add to the extended dialogue in the Christian community.

In this chapter we will consider the nature of transformation and its relation to women in leadership. Next we will review the major themes of the book, identified through the layers of dialogue, focusing on the lessons I discovered as I interacted with the participants. Finally, along with each review, I will present some implications for further study and suggested action.

Transformation as Change

Several years ago the toys called "transformers" hit the market. When my son was younger he had several small cars that turned into hero robots, boats that turned into airplanes piloted by tiny formerly hidden pilots, and many others. He delighted in seeing the change as an inanimate vehicle suddenly took on "life" and began to save the world. I remember at the

time thinking that a term I had associated primarily with a biblical concept, transformation, should suddenly be used ubiquitously for a toy. Now, it seems, the word is used in educational and inspirational books of every description. Transformation is no longer a term I identify solely with the scripture; yet, both in its contemporary and biblical usage, transformation speaks not only of change, but positive change moving in a direction of a preferred future.

Transformation is both an individual and a corporate concept. Like the rippling effect of concentric circles formed by a pebble tossed in a pond, change starts small and slowly. Imagine a small child on the edge of the pond watching her paper sailboat bounced in the newly formed waves. Unaware of the pebble, does she know or care where the waves came from? There are waves in our churches. Some believe the "pebble" at the center of the question of women's leadership is the secular feminist movement and should be discounted as irrelevant or dangerous. We must, they say, resist the current and ride out the waves. Others are convinced that, while the question may have sprung from that movement of the 60s, its ripple effect into the new millennium is permitted by God and should be fostered. Still others think the entire issue originated in the heart of God and is part of the redemptive work moving us toward the restored wholeness lost in a primordial garden. For them, the secular movement is simply a wind of the Spirit (see John 3:6-8) unrecognized by those watching the waves. Regardless of its source, the question of women in leadership has consumed much time and energy in the evangelical church and ripple effects continue as concentric circles, in the form of enlarged dialogues. The pond, and the church, will be changed.

I would like to suggest three aspects of transformation for our consideration. First, the sort of change we are dealing with involves personal, relational, and corporate questions.

Second, transformation moves through apparent chaos to order. And, third, the nature of transformation for the Christian is understood to be in a specific direction: movement toward the image of God, the trajectory of grace.

Personal, Relational and Corporate Transformation.

Thinking back on the conversations I had with the women and men in the study, I was conscious that each wanted to be living a life pleasing to God. Each had experienced change in her or his life in various ways over the years. Each was aware that the issue of women in church leadership had grown beyond questions for the individual and had become a question for the church.

All of the participants reckoned with issues in their own lives. Inevitably these issues involved other persons and dialogues with them. In time the individuals came to new understandings and changed the way they perceived certain biblical passages and, as a result, changed the way they acted in relation toward others. As we have read, sometimes these changes occurred in families; sometimes in churches or others settings.

Patricia, Teresa, Carl, Roberta, Louis, Candy, and Charity have become convinced over the years that the God of the Bible is leading the church to change from its traditional understanding of leadership as exclusively male to a more egalitarian understanding which recognizes that God is calling women to serve alongside men in leadership. Interestingly, as their individual lives were changed by their understandings, so were their closest relationships. You may remember Carl and his wife were ordained together. Roberta and her husband worked through a hierarchical marriage structure that did not work for them and arrived at a partnership that enhanced their relationship, their family, and their ministries. Among these seven, their fields of leadership range from pastor to educator, and from

chaplain to missionary. Their transformed views result in transformed lives, relationships, and ministries.

Alicia and Esther have fairly recently been able to articulate their developing perspectives and acknowledge a combination of slight trepidation and hope as they move in uncertain territory. Both come from a traditional background and now believe that women are equally saved, called, gifted, and sent into ministry, including leadership. Their dialogues reflect openness to others as they continue to work through the implications of equality in different areas of their lives.

David and Frieda both acknowledge having given some serious consideration to the issue of women in leadership. David adheres to a male-in-authority perspective, believing it to be biblical. While he is aware of what he calls "a crisis of leadership," he is not prepared to say that God would call women to serve in those positions. David does encourage women to use their gifts in the ministry of the church including many leadership positions. Frieda expressed concern that some women seemed to be frustrated with what they perceived to be limits imposed on them because they were women. She has not experienced that frustration, but with expanding dialogues with women and men, she is open to the possibility that God may be moving to call women into increasing leadership. Frieda's commitment to God has stimulated her to use her gifts in a variety of leadership capacities. Both are watching the winds of change around them and continuing to think and evaluate.

As I reflected on the lives of these eleven people and the sundry processes of change in their lives, I was struck again by the similarities of transformation. Transformation comes slowly, and it requires work, involving both God and persons. Each individual worked strenuously through mental and spiritual issues before arriving at new conclusions. Some, as

noted, have not changed their minds. Transformation, at its centre, involves changing one's mind.

The apostle Paul spoke of transformation often in the New Testament. Perhaps the most commonly known verse is simply "be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom. 12:1-2). Transformation in the biblical sense, however, is part of a larger process. As theologian Stanley Grenz (2000) explains, transformation begins at conversion, and continues throughout the individual's life:

The saving work of the Holy Spirit in an individual does not end at conversion. This event is only the beginning of a process of transformation into Christlikeness which extends throughout our days. We speak of this ongoing process as "sanctification." In the strict theological sense sanctification is the Holy Spirit accomplishing God's purpose in us as Christian life proceeds. Or viewed from the human perspective, it is our cooperation with the Spirit in living out in daily life the regenerations, justification, freedom, and power which is ours through conversion, so that we grow in Christlikeness and service to God. (p. 440)

Notice the work of the Holy Spirit as initiating the process. For the Christian, the primary relationship is that with God through the Holy Spirit. Transformation involves learning to hear the voice of God (John 10:16). Notice, too, the process involves "God's purpose" as our lives "proceed." The work of God is ongoing. We choose to respond in cooperation with the work of God in our lives (Phil. 1:6), often "in fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), and we are moving in faith toward renewal, with the end that we become like Christ, who is the image of God (Col. 1:15). These instructions from Paul to the early Christians were written to churches, the people as a group, not to a single individual. We would do well in our individualistic society to reclaim the community dimension of church life. This in itself is an implication of this study—that the Bible is written for the people of God, not just to individuals. Yet, individually we are responsible for what we hear. For women, that means

each must listen for the voice of God in her life, respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as consistent with the written Word, and trust God to help her "change her mind." We have heard the cliché, "It's a woman's prerogative to change her mind." While transformation begins with a holy grappling with issues and changing one's mind, it is certainly no whimsical action. Nor is it a grappling in isolation. As you will notice by the development of the themes, each individual learns to develop a sense of who she is in the context of her relationships with other people and with God. Transformation occurs as her relationship with God, led by the Holy Spirit, prompts her to new considerations.

With any change of mind comes a casting off of old ideas, attitudes, and behaviours accompanied by new ones. Paul says to the Colossian church,

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. (Col. 3:9-10)

These verses are parallel to those of Galatians 3:28, except to the Galatians Paul added, "neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." These earliest of Christians had to grapple with the notion that *in Christ* they were much more alike than different, and they had to treat one another with truth and love. Today, sociologists are teaching us that men and women are much more alike than we are different. And those who advocate women serving alongside men in leadership tell us that our differences enhance our ministry.

Imagine for a moment a very early congregation. Consider the ethnic, religious, socio-economic variety of the backgrounds of the believers mentioned in the Colossians 3 verses above. What "old practices" might have had to fall away in the church as an individual

came to grips with the fact that he or she was "just like" someone from another group? I expect no small amount of relational upheaval and chaos were experienced.

Transformation from Chaos to Order

I believe transformation is often difficult, in part, because change brings a type of chaos. The existing balance is shifted. A few years ago I was introduced to the concept of "chaos theory" (Wheatley, 1994, p. 21). What intrigued me were the paradoxical notions that "fluctuations are the primary source of creativity" and in time an amazing order emerges from apparent chaos (p. 20).

Wheatley explains that scientists are observing

a level of quantum interconnectedness, of a deep order that we are only beginning to sense. There is a constant weaving of relationships, of energies that merge and change, of constant ripples that occur within a seamless fabric. There is so much order that our attempts to separate out discrete moments create the appearance of disorder. We have even found order in the event that epitomizes total disorder—chaos. (p. 20)

I wonder if, lifted out of the historical continuum and examined in isolation, the current upheaval in some evangelical churches regarding women in leadership would resemble such chaos. But, when considered in an historical perspective, we easily recognize the recurring cycles of women involved in all levels of leadership, and see the emerging patterns of order in a larger picture, the eternal kingdom of God.

Interconnectedness and weaving of relationships sound more like a reference to human beings and organizations than it does science. And that is where Wheatley makes her observations about human team experiences and leadership. From scientific theories, Wheatley has drawn helpful lessons for organizations. She sees a similar dynamic of apparent disorder in the work she has done with teams, during which she noted "In the interest of getting things done, our roles and tasks moved with such speed that the lines between

structure and task blurred to nothing" (p. 22). Her observations sound like those of male and female evangelicals in the nineteenth century who worked side by side, with roles and structures overlapping (Handy, 1976, p. 184). Citing Max De Pree, former CEO of Herman Miller, Wheatley (1994) tells us this sort of "roving leadership" is indicative of informal leadership, "the indispensable people in our lives who are there when we need them" (p. 22).

I thought about the conversations of women I interviewed who persisted in doing the work of ministry, in spite of the fact that they did not receive titles or recognition. Women throughout church history have demonstrated their ability "to create the leadership that best suits its needs at the time" (Wheatley, 1994, p. 22). I also thought of women in leadership when Wheatley explained why these leaders may not be recognized formally: we are trapped "in a hierarchical structure that is non-adaptive; but at the level of the living, where the people are, we know who the leader is and why he or she needs to be there" (p. 22).

As we consider moving toward transformation in the church, we acknowledge women's continued involvement and leadership are essential, and we know why they need to be there. The question continues to be not whether women will lead, but whether they will be recognized as leaders. I suspect part of the reluctance to acknowledge women in leadership is the need of existing leaders to cling to control. Wheatley (1994) observes we have confused control with order, warning, "If organizations are machines, control makes sense. If organizations are process structures, then seeking to impose control through permanent structure is suicide" (p. 23). Helping people grow toward maturity in Christ is the goal of the church; growing is a process.

While Wheatley's observations are targeted for organizations generally, I suggest that the application to churches as organizations is particularly pertinent. The church (*ekklesia*) is

by definition a people called by God (Unger, 1974, p. 204) in process of transformation. The direction of change is eschatological—future, not past. We, of all people, should be prepared to change what needs to be changed and heed Wheatley's counsel that to impose control through permanent structure is suicide.

Transformational Themes

Many of my observations have already been discussed. In an attempt to present them in an organized fashion, so that they could be considered somewhat systematically, I analyzed the dialogues with the participants and placed them in groupings by theme. The primacy of the Bible and the nature of hermeneutics served as a foundation for the mutual commitment of the evangelical Christian participants' views. The role of two cultural factors, patriarchy and feminism, highlighted the question of women in Christian leadership. A sense of personhood explained that an individual's understanding of God and her relationship to God was crucial in her identifying primarily as a Christian, then as a woman. The influence of family as a factor that in many instances helped and in some cases hindered women was explored. Pain and the policy of institutions provided an interlude and backdrop for examining the fields of practice of women in leadership: education, missions, and the local church. These considerations pointed to some changes that must be addressed as we together move toward transformation in Christ.

Warren Bennis (1989) tells of a greeting often used by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "What's become clear to you since we last met" (p. xiv)? A former pastor of mine used to inquire, "What have you sensed God saying to you?" The two questions have similar meanings and purposes. Both imply a level of reflective understanding, insight, or revelation; and both invite genuine dialogue. The work poured into this project has "cleared up" much

for me, and often I have sensed the Spirit of God speaking to me. By now you may have made entries in your journal and discussed some of the ideas in the study with others. I hope you continue to do so. Again, while you may choose to simply read the text, it will prove valuable for you to think through the implications and consider new courses of action.

Dialogue: An Invitation to Transformation Through Mutual Understanding

The motif of dialogue was among my significant discoveries in this study. Through dialogue with God and others, the participants shaped their lives and their worldviews. Some have been hindered, others helped, by the quality of dialogues around them. Genuine dialogue with others can bring a sense of self-discovery and open vistas of understanding in the life of another. Being cut off from dialogue causes serious damage. One familiar metaphor for the church is "the body of Christ." Perhaps we can quicken the lives of our churches by applying Howe's (1963) definition of dialogue to the body of Christ:

Dialogue is to love, what blood is to the body. When the flow of blood stops, the body dies. When dialogue stops, love dies and resentment and hate are born. But dialogue can restore a dead relationship. Indeed, this is the miracle of dialogue: it can bring relationship in to being, and it can bring into being once again a relationship that has died (p.3).

The literature speaks much about women being silent and silenced. How do we break the silence, and honour people enough to hear them? We invite them into genuine dialogue. In our families and in our churches, we can begin to observe who is involved in the dialogue. In some cases, men may need to initiate an invitation to dialogue. In many cases, women will need to take the risk and speak up, interjecting their voices appropriately in the dialogue. This may take several forms, some of which we will consider as the chapter develops.

Women in the church have been welcomed into many levels of dialogue throughout church history, but in recent years many have been eliminated or excluded. Christians have long recognized that our primary relationship with God is with One who speaks. God invites us into dialogue. Howe's (1963) definition encourages us that dialogue can restore a dead relationship. The purpose of dialogue is to connect or reconnect people. Christians understand that sin separates, and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23). Scott Peck (1978) shares an interesting perspective on the connection between lack of dialogue and sin when he observes that lack of dialogue preceded and may have precipitated the first sin (pp. 272-273). He says after the tempter approached the couple, Adam and Eve could have returned to God in their regular meeting place and asked God to reconfirm or to explain the original instructions. Peck even suggests that Adam and Eve could have set up a debate between God and Satan. But, he says, they avoided the debate, and stepped out of the will and relationship with God and each other. How many times have misunderstandings, presumptions, and lack of dialogue destroyed relationships? Risk-taking dialogue with God and others can begin the reconciliation and healing processes.

The Bible, the written record of divine activity and revelation, both results from and reflects continuous, on-going dialogue with God and the people of God. How do we understand what God is saying about women leadership? We make meaning through the hermeneutical principles we employ, and in biblical literature, scholars are expected to adhere to principles of research and interpretation that discover the original meaning and communicate it accurately to a contemporary audience. With evangelical Christians, I hold a

"high view of Scripture" (Hull, 1987, p. 26).²⁶ What we do recognize, however, is that our interaction with God, with one another, with the Bible, and with scholars and church history produces a climate of dialogue through which we gain a more expansive understanding of God and of humankind. The central question to hermeneutics becomes "How shall we then read?"; the answer is "As many ways as there are students of the text!"

If each of us is asking, "What does the Bible say?" and drawing different conclusions, why? Van Leeuwen (1990) pinpoints the issue for women in leadership: "It is on hermeneutical issues, not the issue of Scripture's infallibility per se, that subordinationists (those who believe in male headship) and liberationists (those who believe in gender equality) really differ" (p. 235). To continue the dialogue about women in the church, we must acknowledge that we are not disagreeing over whether the Bible is true, but rather over how we understand the Bible. We need to "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb. 4:16), asking the Spirit of God, "What are you trying to make clear to me?" We also need to recognize that we may reach different conclusions, as have so many throughout church history. Then we must decide whether we will continue the dialogue, or allow lack of it to separate us. I have come to believe more strongly that as a church we separate from one another too easily, focusing on our differences rather than allowing us to sharpen one another through a broader understanding and maturity that comes with recognizing different perspectives. I believe the question of women in church leadership has given the people of God an enormous opportunity to test our conversational skills and allow the Holy Spirit to

²⁶ Hull (1987) explains a "high view of Scripture": "The Bible is the inspired, trustworthy Word of God written and as such stands as the true revelation of God's message, regardless of any human reaction to it. . . . A high view of Scripture affirms that the Bible texts have been proven authentic and considers them completely reliable transmitters of God's message. However, a high view is not to be locked into wooden literalism. (p. 26)

bring unity even in diversity. The path of genuine dialogue will expose disagreements, and may heighten tension for a season,²⁷ but the prizes of mutual understanding and reconciliation are goals worthy of the intermittent discomfort.

Finally, hermeneutics contains a directional element: "the emancipatory thrust of the gospel, a trajectory of grace" (Hancock, 1999, March). We are called, as Grenz (2000) says, with a view to the end in sight: "The doctrine of last things provides insight into our own age. It issues a call to action in the present. And it indicates how we ought to live in light of the end" (p. 650). "Eschatology sets forth the worldview framework for the church's mission in the contemporary age" (p. 652). As we begin to see scripture as God's progressive revelation moving us purposefully through a seemingly chaotic history toward a predestined conclusion, we can begin to pray, with Jesus, "thy kingdom come" (Luke 11:2).

Pause for Reflection

Think about people who are influential in your life. Analyze the kind and quality of dialogue you have with them.

Think about someone with whom you have a difficult relationship. Consider how to invite him or her into genuine dialogue with a view toward mutual understanding.

Consider a Bible study on *words*. Read the Bible looking for demonstrations of the power of dialogue.

Find and read books written by female biblical scholars.

Think about people you know who teach the Bible. (You may be one of them!) Do you know what their tools and perspectives are concerning biblical hermeneutics? Ask some of them to explain how they use hermeneutics, especially regarding their understanding of women in Christian leadership.

²⁷ I am grateful to Maxine Hancock (1999, March) for this expression she used during a seminar. Describing the stages of her marriage, she explained a period of time during which she and her husband Cam had to "learn a new language" and develop conflict resolution skills. Seeking a new balance in their relationship, they experienced "heightened tension for a season." Their marriage was strengthened in the process.

Culture in Transition: Standing at the Crossroads

Our North American cultural setting provides us with our particular crossroads. Will we choose to walk in ways "of the world," or will we choose to walk "in the Spirit"? How do we determine which is which? Before we can attempt to answer such questions, we first begin to recognize the subtle yet thorough effect of culture on our ability to think about our own actions. The women and men who participated in this study led me to the realization that we are acting out of our "patriarchal past," and that while the period of the patriarchs is a valued part of our heritage, the current expression of patriarchy as systematized male privilege must be examined in light of our growing scriptural understanding of "oneness in Christ." Secular feminism, the first persistent movement to question patriarchy itself (French, 1992, p. 17) has taken on various forms in the past three decades. While evangelical Christians greet feminism with mixed reviews, we do recognize advances to women in particular and society in general attributed to the feminist movement. One of the many contributions of secular feminism to biblical feminism is that it provides the church with a new way of seeing. We now recognize the church has viewed history through a male lens, and we either did not realize it since we viewed "masculine" as "normal," or we thought it was acceptable since we have a "masculine God." The latter notion, while supported through biblical masculine imagery, presents only a partial view of God and is at odds with the pronouncements throughout scripture that "God is Spirit, and we must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). God, the infinite Spirit, is revealed through personal qualities and characteristics in ways we as human beings can understand and with which we can relate. While our tendency, indeed our only possible vantage point, is to view God through human eyes (even as we are aided by the Teacher, the Holy Spirit), we are prompted to "see" a larger God if and as we look through someone else's

perspective. Women scholars are adding their voices to the hermeneutic discussion and helping us understand more about the nature of God.

In many respects my own view of God has been enlarged through this study. One aspect that continues to challenge me is my own preference for male terminology for God. Years ago I learned to pray the names of God. I addressed *Jehovah Jireh* for instance when I asked for or thanked God for a particular provision. God is my Provider, and I give thanks. In my personal experience, both my parents provided for our various needs. I did not equate provision with "maleness." Today some evangelical scholars are encouraging us address God as Mother (Hiebert, 1998, p. 146), reflecting the feminine imagery for God in the Bible.

Culture also provides us several metaphors for understanding our social environment, including our church life. Culture helps us find our way in the world by giving us a sense of stability and identity. At the same time, however, culture may limit us by becoming a psychic prison (Morgan, 1997). Women and men who participated in this study found that experiences with people from other cultural persuasions caused them to evaluate their own cultural experiences in a new light. Why do Christians in one culture organize themselves differently than Christians in another? Exploring cultural questions through dialogue may help us to increase our understanding of women in leadership.

Pause for Reflection

Study Christianity in a culture other than your own. Discover key expressions of the gospel that differ. Analyze, "What makes this cultural? What makes it Christian?"

Think through your worldview. Contrast a Christian worldview with another worldview.

Take one issue, women's involvement for instance, and trace it through the differing views. If you are not sure where to start, I suggest an overview like "Browsing the Worldview Catalog" (Phillips & Okholm, 1996, pp. 19-37).

Talk with Christian women in leadership in secular endeavours. Ask them to compare and contrast their experiences in leadership in their secular pursuits with those of their church activities.

Read a book or an article by a biblical feminist. Several appear in the reference list. Practice "seeing" your life, your family, and your church through "feminist" eyes. Identify at least one aspect in each sphere that you could benefit by this perspective. Example: Keep a listening log during a church meeting. In one column, place a mark for each time a man speaks. In the other, mark each time a woman speaks. Tally. Who enters the dialogue of your church?

Transformed Personhood: Bearing the Image of God

Ultimately, to be transformed is to be changed into the image of God. Perhaps more than any other, this is at the heart of the study. Recognizing that "male and female" are created in the *imago Dei*, we can ask what the creation of woman reveals about the person of God. Historically the church has developed a limited understanding of God in part because we have individualized the concept of the divine image, focusing on masculine traits. As result, we have excluded women from active dialogue and meaningful contribution in the direction-setting work of the church. We have not honoured our fathers and our mothers by heeding the wisdom of both. As women, we need to take the responsibility given to us by Christ to speak the truth in love and to begin to move forward to focus on the kingdom. As men and women in the church, we can treat one another with mutual respect, rather than resorting to distancing concern and deference.

Coinciding with the third wave of the women's movement (Van Leeuwen, 1990, p. 239),²⁸ women are discovering the full meaning of person, and theologians are exploring the nature and image of God. We have understood the image of God in a dualistic, Greek mindset. Only in the past fifty years, and most intensely in the past thirty, have biblical scholars explored the image of God as God-in-relation. Though as Christians we are Trinitarian in our view of God, we have been divided in our view of humanity. Brunner (1952) credits Luther for being the only person he knows of to recognize the wording of Genesis 1:26, "image" and "likeness" of God, as normal Hebrew parallelism,²⁹ or two ways of saying the same thing.

What is "the image of God?" How do I as a woman bear the "image" of a "male" God? I have been struggling with this difficult inner dialogue for several years. While reviewing my transcribed notes of the interviews, my own journal entries, and some of the books I had read and researched, I came again across Brunner's instruction on the image of God. Brunner (1952) writes:

So far as I know, Luther was the first, and the only person, to notice that there are these two fundamentally different conceptions of the *Imago* in the Bible; he defines the distinction as the *imago publica et privata* (WA., 42, 51). Actually the Fathers and the medieval theologians did distinguish the two ideas, but from the point of view of exegesis they were mistaken in dividing them between the two words Tzelem and Demuth in Gen. 1:26, whereas Luther understood these two expressions aright as an ordinary instance of Hebrew parallelism. The fact that the Bible actually contains a twofold conception: a formal one which concerns "structure", and a material one which concerns "content", was never clearly perceived by the theologians of both

²⁸ VanLeeuwen (1990) marks the women's movements in three waves: first, arising "out of the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement"; second, "in the 1920s (when women's suffrage was finally achieved); and "a third wave in the 1960s, whose momentum continues" (pp. 238-239).

²⁹ Mickelsen (1963) explains "synonymous parallelism" as that which "occurs where the second line expresses an identical or similar thought to the first line" (p. 325).

confessions; hence, on both sides their criticisms have been wide of the mark.
(p. 76)

This paragraph caught me quite by surprise and held my rapt attention. The image of God was both and at the same time "public and private." God, I had learned as a youth, is immanent and intimate, distant and close. In my most recent studies I have learned of Tournier's (1981) designation that men are interested in things or tasks and women in persons or relationship. Tournier's observation echoes Brunner's notion of structure and content. Van Leeuwen (1990) introduced me to the notion of two domains, "domestic vs. public" (p.128), which sounds very much like the concepts of "privata" and "publica." Traditionally, women are assigned the domestic or private arenas. As you consider new ways of thinking about women in leadership, trace the developing dialogue implied: first, the self-revelation from God to the biblical writer; then, through centuries of hermeneutic, Luther observed Hebrew parallelism. Four hundred years later, Brunner (1952) discovered an insight; then in rapid succession scholars like Jewett (1975) and Van Leeuwen (1990) have expanded their thinking. Our conversation with the Bible and with one another continues. The Creation account reveals much about God and humankind that we are discovering and rediscovering. In this generation with our emphasis on relationships, perhaps the time is ripe for us to realize the vital role some relationally oriented women and men can contribute to the life of the church through leadership. The theological discussion about the image of God continues. I pray that we will enter that dialogue, and as a result gain a larger understanding of God and a larger sense of self-in-relation. Women, including those in Christian leadership, bear the *imago Dei*.

Pause for Reflection

If the image of God contains all that is masculine and feminine, as well as all that is public and private, then the notion that woman and men together reflect the image of God is strengthened.

When we "split" the image of God, in our understanding and in our practice, how does that affect our concept of persons? Does your practice reflect what you believe? Do personal research, beginning with some books already listed. See where your study leads you. Discuss with others as you clarify your own perspective.

Politically, we have begun to ask the question, "Does one's private life affect his or her ability to do his or her work in the public domain?" After reading this study, how do you respond? What implications does this have for men and women in church leadership?

Transforming Family: Persons-in-Relationship

This is where it all started, in the garden with Adam and Eve, the two-become-one reflecting the Triune image of God. Women participants spoke freely of the positive and occasional negative ways in which family helped shape them as persons and prepared them for or prevented them from leadership. We considered family as the primary location for person-in-relation to develop through dialogue. Relationships with siblings, parents, grandparents, spouses, and children have an effect on the ongoing growth of the person. Women first receive, then employ, then test their notions of person in family settings. The growing individual determines whether patterns established in the family of origin are retained into adulthood.

The prevalent pattern for the traditional family is the notion of male headship. While expressing a biblical concept, the meaning of headship is ambiguous and is currently being studied. Two groups of evangelical Christians have articulated separate understandings of the term, and still other research gives yet further evidence of different meaning. Whether women participate as "under" their husbands or partners "beside" them is central to the

question of headship. While this notion was certainly implied in the dialogues with the participants, additional study may help make sense of this contentious area.

In our reflections on family we point to the biblical metaphors of family, noting that the model of family life has been transferred to church organization and structures. While the model of marriage is apt as the metaphor for the church as the bride of Christ, we now realize that the marriage couple as "male and female" reflect the image of God and the partnership relationship in establishing and leading the family is what is needed in the church. Secular (Gardner, 1990, p.117) as well as Christian (Grenz, 1995, p.230) authors point to the "team approach" in leadership as the preferred model. This is consistent with the pattern of the leadership we find in the letters of Paul to the early church (Eph. 4).

I have been encouraged by responsible scholarship during recent years which allows people to say, in effect, "I don't understand, but I believe there is more here than we yet grasp." One such view comes from Stevens (1986, p. 114) in his discussion on headship as a parable for a watching world. How each Christian couple, indeed each family, works out their relationships, becomes a story for others to read and hear. How do Christian marriages and families reflect the image of Christ to a watching North America?

Lorry Lutz (1997) was once asked how her husband dealt with the fact that she was the more visible of the two. Because her husband was present, Lorry suggested the interviewer ask Mr. Lutz, which he did. Mr. Lutz's response encouraged his wife and contains wisdom for us:

I believe the Christian husband is the spiritual head of his household, God having entrusted him with his wife and children's physical and spiritual care. The Bible says that those to whom something has been entrusted are stewards, responsible for that thing. Thus the husband and father is the steward of the wife and children whom God has entrusted to him. That also makes him the steward of his wife's and children's *gifts* and *talents* from God. So he is

responsible not only to free them to use their talents from God, he also must encourage and assist them to do so. Also, as the steward of these family members, he will give an account to God as to whether he has hindered or helped them in the use of their God-given talents." (p.x)

Whether a family is structured in keeping with traditional or egalitarian views, Lutz's comments provide a timely challenge for Christian men. The wife is to be encouraged, assisted, and freed by her relationship with her husband. As the husband and wife in a relationship continue genuine dialogue through mutual submission, their marriage and their ministry will grow, regardless of which partner is the more visible.

When we consider family as one of several metaphors for the church, we benefit by considering the sibling relationship as well as the marriage relationship. We are all children of God. To restrict our understanding of our valued place in the family of God as limited by gender is to rob all of us of the richness that comes with having a "quiver full" of boys and girls. (See Ps. 127:5 NAS)

Pause for Reflection

Is marriage an "institution" or a covenant relationship? While most Christians would affirm both, how does each metaphor affect our concept of family as persons-in-relationship? How do covenants differ from contracts? What are the essential characteristics of a relationship and of an institution? Taken further, how do these insights help us understand the church as "family"?

For further study, compare marriage and divorce statistics before and after 1970. The current statistics are frightening.³⁰ I have a slightly educated guess that while some Christians blame the feminist movement for the rising rate of divorce among Christian marriages, one culprit may be the traditional evangelical interpretation of *head* that views the man in a dominant position over his wife.

In what ways do children need parenting by both father and mother? In what ways does the church need leadership by "fathers" and by "mothers"?

Another topic for study is abuse in Christian families. As evangelical women begin to speak, some of what they say exposes the darkness of family abuse. (See Kroeger & Beck, 1998, *Healing the Hurting*.)

We have transferred leadership models from the home to the church, but do we understand family in a biblical sense? There is more than one model, and the current "traditional" model is in fact a fairly recent phenomenon. What about sibling relationships? We are all children of God. How does this truth penetrate family relationships and church structures, particularly leadership?

I recommend the following word studies for further understanding: submission, helper, head. These three terms underlie much of the confusion and tension in the current debate. (See Foster, 1978; Kroeger 1998, pp. 281-282; Stevens, 1986.)

Pain and Institutional Policy

While I had experienced some degree of frustration in my Christian ministry, I was very surprised to discover the degree of anger and pain experienced by others, both among the participants and in the literature. When I began to understand the pain of women, relationally and spiritually, in terms of a symptom for the church, I began to look at women and the church differently. I realized that the imbalance in the church, preferring men and subjugating women, has resulted in an unhealthy situation. Men, imbued with an unconscious sense of

³⁰ "The divorce rate is actually higher by a small margin among born-again Christians than for those who profess to have no faith at all" (Dobson, 2001, p. 2).

superiority, and women, inbred with a similarly unconscious and contrasting sense of inferiority, leave relationships estranged in home and the church. Genuine dialogue is almost impossible because the two cannot approach one another on equal footing. At best, one comes with deference, and the other with concern. Genuine dialogue—among men, among women, and among men and women—may lead us to see one another as expressing equally differing aspects of the image of God, and becoming interdependent on one another (I Cor. 11:11) as we mature as persons and as Christians. Dialogue can become the church's best tool for accurate diagnosis within the North American church. Healing can begin.

The church has grown from a relational band of followers of Jesus into formalized structures. While structures, even institutions, are necessary to ensure the continuation of an organizations' work (Gardner, 1990, p.10), the process of institutionalization moves inevitably toward an impersonalized, self-perpetuating, deadening structure. Using Brunner's (1952) insight from Luther, we can now see the importance of "male and female" reflecting the full image of God. Organization reflects the "structure" while relationships exhibit the "content." Tournier's (1981) notion of things and persons is helpful here, in that as an organization gets busy about the work, it can become insensitive to the persons within it. The church is first and foremost an *ekklesia*, an assembly of believers. Jesus knew this when he said we cannot put new wine in old wineskins. While organizational structures are important, those of us who lead and perpetuate them must be careful to allow the "new" work of God to permeate and change our institutionalized structures. The older I get, the more I see both how difficult and also how important this task is.

How do we know when our structures are not working? We can listen to the people in our churches. While I suggest surveys and votes are acceptable tools to gather information, a

50-50 vote (such as the one recounted by Patricia) may not be an acceptable way to make a decision. By listening to women, some evangelicals have determined that our current structures are not working. We have systematically excluded women in ways that would allow and encourage them to fully use their gifts and talents in the church. We need to listen to one another as members of one body to discern what the Spirit is saying. As an institution, the church and its related organizations are in perpetual danger of becoming institutionalized to the degree that the organization itself takes precedence over the people in it. For a gospel venture, that is not good news. Perhaps Moberg's (1962) observations will help as we consider transforming our processes. The church's goal is not to perpetuate itself, but to renew the life of the people.

It consists of all organizations which directly seek to kindle, renew, and guide the religious life of people. It includes the roles and statuses of the person in such groups, their ideological values, goals, and group-related activities, and all the social structures and processes related to religious worship, prayer, association, and other activities in ecclesiastical organization. "The church" is therefore synonymous with "organized religion." (p. 1)

It is possible, proper, and necessary for us as churches and agencies to be organized. But, we must remain alert to the stagnation that frequently accompanies institutionalization.

Pause for Reflection

In what ways does the pain expressed by women in Christian leadership point us toward a debilitating ailment in the church? How has eliminating women from lead positions in evangelical churches hindered our work?

Conduct your own research, asking several women you know questions related to women in Christian leadership. Some starter questions are: "What has helped and hindered you in your growth as a Christian? What has helped and hindered you in your becoming a leader?"

Consider conducting a survey in your church to determine (1) whether people can identify their spiritual gifts; (2) how they are using their gifts and talents; (3) to which areas of ministry people would like to contribute; (4) whether their needs are being met; (5) whether people think the current structures of the church are adequate from their perspective. This may seem ambitious. You could start small by doing a survey in your study group. To do a larger survey, you will want to coordinate your effort with existing church leadership.

What do you know of institutions, institutionalizing, and institutionalization? Leadership gurus have been telling us for over a decade that institutions must be renewed to remain viable, and churches are no exception. Areas for further study are the nature of the church as an organization and the process of renewal for structures. How are the people of God to stay pliable and relevant in the work of God? Ask your church leaders what reading they have done in the area of organizations and renewal. Ask how it has affected their leadership.

Education, Missions, and the Local Church: in a Trajectory of Grace

"The most crucial question facing the Christian today—indeed, the question that confronts every generation of believers—is: What *does* it mean to think, act, and view the world *like a Christian* in today's culture" (Phillips & Okholm, 1996, p. 17)?

While this question has been asked and answered before—*many* times before—each generation in the family must ask whether it is truly being faithful to Jesus now. We are not the heirs of some dead tradition, but, as John Leith has put it, we are people who are "traditioning" the faith. Being faithful to Jesus Christ entails taking the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, RSV) and asking how to live it faithfully *now* In a sense, we are being asked to apply our past—our rich family heritage—to our present. We are attempting to be *faithful* to the Word of God we were reared on *by* bringing it to bear on today's issues in a *relevant* way. (Phillips & Okholm, 1996, pp. 17-18)

I asked Louis a similar question during our interview. "If our traditions are wrong, what do we do?" He answered succinctly, "We start new traditions." He seemed to grasp the concern for women in leadership in our culture, suggesting that we intentionally add women to leadership positions.

The issue with which this study is concerned, women in Christian leadership, requires such examination. I do not suggest discounting nor discarding the heritage of our Christian faith. We certainly do not suggest disregard for the Word of God. Rather, like Phillips and Okholm (1996), we recognize the need to be faithful to the Word of God by bringing it to bear upon the issues related to women in Christian leadership.

We in the church have sent very strong, very mixed messages to our girls and young women. We have said you are made in God's image, and you can do anything God calls you to do. Then, we hold up a big stop sign and say, but you are not fully in God's (male) image and God will not call you to serve in (certain) leadership capacities. The problem is, until very recently the messages were hidden, not overt. Once brought into open dialogue, the messages and their presuppositions have been examined in light of our theology. Our practice and our theology do not seem to line up. We have to change one or the other. At this point, we will either cling to old ways of understanding or allow God to move us toward new ways of seeing, believing, and acting. I believe that God is asking us to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), that we must approach God and one another with deep respect, listening carefully to one another (see Fee, 2000, p. 135).

The participants in this study told many stories of women being resisted or excluded initially in leadership or being taken over after men joined the women's effort. It seems that in missions, education, and the local church, we as evangelicals continue to admonish women to

be involved in kingdom business, but not in leading. The past fifteen years have produced many studies to determine whether having women in leadership is an acceptable biblical notion. Evangelicals are still divided in their conclusions, but the dialogue continues.

I was recently surprised to read Fee's (2000) observation of New Testament church leadership:

The New Testament is full of surprises but perhaps none so much as with its generally relaxed attitude toward church structures and leadership; especially so, when one considers how important this issue became for so much of later church history, beginning as early as Ignatius of Antioch. Indeed, for most people the concept of "church history" refers primarily to its history as a body politic, involving both its evangelism and growth and its intellectual/theological development. (p. 121)

Fee (2000) notes the weaving together of biblical teaching and historical development for our understanding of church leadership. To recognize that many of our "sacred" notions of leadership in the church are more historical than biblical may free us up to consider new ways of "doing church." I fear we have boxed ourselves in to patterns claiming them to be biblical when in fact they may be historical, cultural, psychic prisons.

The issue of women in leadership is the one aspect I have considered. My reading, however, has been to find the relationship of women in the biblical and historical records to the structures of the church and its agencies. Again, Fee (2000) is helpful. He reminds us that the letters in the New Testament are characterized by

twin facts (a) that they are addressed to the church(es) as a whole, not to the church leadership, and (b) that leaders, therefore, are seldom, if ever, singled out either to see to it that the directives of a given letter are carried out or to carry them out themselves . . . the writers address the community as a whole, and the expectation of the letter is that there will be a community response. (pp. 132-133)

The rugged individualism of the United States in particular and Western thinking in general have in large part usurped the community understanding of the biblical text. What

does this mean for women in Christian leadership? Fee (2000) asserts that the role of church leadership is not to be downplayed, rather "leaders are always seen as *part of the whole people of God*, never as a group unto themselves" (p. 134). The "twofold questions of laity and women in ministry" are almost always connected with questions of authority (p. 142). Fee argues that the New Testament interest in church leaders "is not in their authority as such, but in their role as those who care for the others" (p. 142).

As a church, we are moving through time toward eternity future. We have a glimpse in the scripture of what we are to become as an eschatological community. Are we living out of paradigms of the past or allowing ourselves to move into the unseen future with confidence that God who created order out of chaos "in the beginning" is able to lead us through our current chaos into a new type of order? I believe God's Spirit is reconciling men and women, reversing the curse in male/female relations (Stevens, 1986 p. 124), and calling us into shared leadership now and in the future.

Pause for Reflection

Are women in fact equally saved, equally gifted, and equally called to serve in the kingdom of God? Can women serve as leaders alone in pioneering settings, or alongside men in new and established work? What are the differences between biblical and historical notions of church leadership? Do we encourage women to study the biblical texts and enter the ongoing dialogue regarding what the Bible means for our generation in our culture? Do our traditional notions of authority and structure limit us in ways that are not biblical?

Compare the ministries of churches with male only leadership and others with shared leadership teams that include women. Shared leadership is an emerging concept. Some churches have restructured to include a less-hierarchical model but still retain male leadership in the "top positions." Compare and contrast such churches with inclusive leadership teams.

These questions deserve further study. I hope they will serve as a springboard for you, as the dialogues I engaged with the study

Note: This is the last response box of the study. By now your journal is full of ideas and questions. Keep it. Read it occasionally. Use it for prayer and reflection. Use it as a springboard for dialogue with God and others. Mark today's date on next year's calendar. Remind yourself to review your journal. Then, ask yourself, have you changed your mind about anything? You may want to continue your dialogue and your journey of women in leadership.

"She Smiles at the Future"

Strength and dignity are her clothing,
And she smiles at the future,
She opens her mouth in wisdom,
And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. (Pr. 31:25-26)

This study has taken me places I had no way to anticipate. I've jumped into some "mighty deep water," as we used to say, and in some places have been in way over my head. To my surprise, I did not drown: I learned to swim in fresh waters. Initially wondering why I felt the institutional church was amiss with the essence of the good news of Jesus, I began asking questions and eventually came to realize that I was seeing things through the eyes of a woman. Now, I believe that perspective is a gift from God to be given back to God's people in the form of genuine dialogue. I had been content, no, I had capitulated to being excluded from dialogue because the church(es) to which I belonged over the years believed and taught that men were "head" in the authoritative sense of home and church. While something just "didn't set right," I chose to submit (remain attached to) Christ and the church. God's Spirit has been faithful to encourage me and expose me to others who were asking the same questions.

Often during my research, and particularly during the writing phase, I asked myself why I was involved in such a project. As I read and read and read, I discovered many others were leading the way in scholarly research and dialogue. What was I doing? But always I was prompted by the Holy Spirit to continue and frequently encouraged by women and men alike to persevere. I think of two brief comments from male friends. Early on in the process I explained my research to one friend, who looked at me quizzically and said, "Hasn't it been done?" Yes, I supposed, it has. And fairly recently, another friend and member of our church, asked, "Are you going to be able to get past this?" His question reminded me of how much

energy I have expended on this single task for an extended period of time. Both questions gave me pause. As a woman friend of mine said, "You have a unique perspective. Share it." It was not flattery. She was honouring the work of a friend and researcher. At the same time, what she said is true of each of us. Each of our lives reflects common threads of experience; yet each life is uniquely lived and we all discover who we are as we discover one another more fully. I am grateful for the inspiration this study has provided me, and I pray with others, that my sincere desire for dialogue (Van Leeuwen, 1990, p. 239) will prompt others to speak and all of us to listen to one another and to what the Spirit is saying to us today about women in church leadership.

Final Encouragement

"The gospel creates partnerships. One such partnership resulted in the letter of the apostle Paul to the church in Philippi" (*The Disciples' Study Bible*, 1988, p. 1514). I thought of the recurrent appeal for women and men to serve together in leadership as I read one commentator's application: "Partnership and fellowship in the gospel need to be rediscovered in a day when individuals often see themselves as isolated disciples of Jesus Christ and the churches see themselves as competing with each other" (p. 1516).

In the context of a discussion on knowing and becoming like Christ, Paul said,

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. (Phil. 3:13b-16).

The great apostle knew he did not know all there was to know about Christ, and he also realized that even the mature believers in Philippi had more to learn. The "view of

things" Paul encouraged is a "heavenward" view. Today he might say "eternal" or "eschatological." Notice, too, that he recognizes potential differences of thinking. Rather than allow these differences to become causes for dissent, Paul encouraged them to live up to what they knew and had experienced. He trusted God to work in his life and in the lives of the Philippians to lead them to agreement and partnership.

I pray that as you continue to reflect on and study women in Christian leadership, you would trust God to lead you and others with whom you may disagree. Genuine dialogue with God and others will pave the way for the processes of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) and transformation.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions

For the women:

- 1 (a.) Do you consider yourself a Christian leader?
(b.) How do you perform your Christian leadership?
2. What has helped you in the process of becoming a leader?
(family, education, church officials, reading, friends, coworkers)
3. What has hindered you in the process of becoming a leader?
(family, education, church officials, reading, friends, coworkers)
4. (a.) Have you had formal training or post-secondary education?
What? Where? Why?
(b.) If so, how has this affected your leadership?
5. (a.) What do you think are the various contributions you have made to your organizations?
(b.) What other contributions have you made that might be considered indirectly linked to or as spin-offs from your formal leadership capacities?
6. If post-secondary Christian schools (Bible colleges, seminaries, and theological colleges) encourage women to participate in study, why do you think so few women proportionately are visible in leadership in the faculties and on the boards? Among church staffs?

For the men

- 1 How do you assess the current involvement of women in Christian leadership?
2. Do you think women should be more or less involved in leadership positions? If so, which positions of leadership? Why?
3. What contributions do you think women have made in leadership?
- 4 Upon reflection, do you think you have helped or hindered women in their process of becoming leaders? How? Why?
- 5 If post-secondary Christian schools (Bible colleges, seminaries, and theological colleges) encourage women to participate in study, why do you think so few women proportionately are visible in leadership in the faculties and on the boards? Among church staffs?

APPENDIX B

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational Studies
Mailing address
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-5374
Fax: (604) 822-4244

Sample Letter of Initial Contact

Dear _____

This letter is to request your participation in an upcoming research project called "Women in Christian Leadership: Factors That Help and Hinder." You have been chosen as a possible participant because of your recognized leadership.

For almost thirty years, I have been involved in various roles of leadership ranging from the local church to association and national levels. My current studies toward a Doctor of Education in Leadership and Policy (Ed.D.) degree at the University of British Columbia provide the opportunity for me to consider not only my own experience but also that of others.

I hope to interview several women and men to determine enhancers and inhibitors for women as they become leaders in various roles of Christian ministry. As you are aware, women's roles have been the subject of much discussion in recent decades. Evangelical groups have come to no single conclusion but embrace a broad spectrum of acceptable roles for women based on various interpretations of Scripture and church traditions.

In an attempt to gain better understanding of women in Christian leadership, I have chosen this topic for my research for the Ed.D.

I will call you within the next week to discuss your participation in this study. If you are willing to be involved, I will arrange with you a time for us to have a private interview of about an hour. In some cases our discussions may last longer, with a maximum of two hours.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Barbara McKenzie
Res. PH: (604) 275-0775
Email: cate@direct.ca

APPENDIX C

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational Studies
Mailing address
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-5374
Fax: (604) 822-4244

Informed Consent Form

Women in Christian Leadership: Factors That Help and Hinder

Principal Investigator: Dr. Carolyn M. Shields, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Studies, UBC. Office (604) 822-6381

Co-Investigator: Barbara McKenzie, student, UBC Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, Res: (604) 275-0775

This research is being conducted as a part of the work for the degree Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy (Ed.D.)

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and events in the lives of women that have helped or hindered them in the process of becoming leaders in evangelical Christian organizations. Each participant has been chosen because of her or his recognized leadership among Evangelical Christians.

Each woman in the study will be interviewed about her own journey into becoming a leader. As each considers her contributions, she will hopefully identify the key events that have proved pivotal in facilitating her continued work and eventual leadership. These may be decisions made, opportunities presented, education pursued, or conflict or dilemmas in her experience.

Each man in the study will be asked about his assessment of women's roles in leadership in the past two decades and how he believes women in leadership have affected particular ministries.

The hope is to discover themes that run throughout the interviews. The findings will in turn provide a larger understanding of women in leadership and become a springboard both for encouraging women to pursue their full calling and also for men to reflect on their participation in this aspect of Christian ministry.

Study Procedures:

The interviews will be individually conducted and semi-structured. Some general questions will be asked of each participant, and hopefully the discussion will lead to other questions related to each unique situation. The interview will be held at a location chosen by the participant. The duration of the interviews, which will be tape-recorded with your permission, will be from 1-2 hours. Sample questions are attached.

Confidentiality:

Any information resulting from this research study will be kept strictly confidential. All notes and tape recordings will be identified by fictitious name or code number and kept in a locked desk in my home office. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The transcribed interviews will be saved on a disk and locked in my desk. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and to make any necessary revisions.

Contact:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Carolyn Shields at (604) 822-6381.

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Richard Spratley, at (604) 822-8598.

Consent:

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to my current or future positions.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records

I consent to participate in this study.

Subject Signature Date

Signature of a Witness Date