

3 Nelson, Kathy (1981)
*The Equality of Men and Women as
Taught by the Early Church*

The Equality of Men and Women as Taught by the Early Church

Note:
this rough draft
copy. I have placed
the footnotes within
parentheses. This is
for ease of numbering
later, and so the footnotes
would not be displaced
from their foot to which
they are referring.
KX.

Kathy Nelson
History 195H
April 1, 1981

However, this was not so obvious, women were instructed, especially in specific, on social propriety and moral conduct.

The question of sexual equality as we know it today was nonexistent in most societies. Men and women usually acknowledged the superior place of men in society. This was not necessarily a conscious suppression of women, but rather a lack of comprehension that women would ever be able or ever want to have equal status with men in society. If women had requested it, they probably would not have been given equality, but the point is that the women would never have expected such a place.

Christianity, though in our society it seems to be repressive of women, was unique among ancient social orders for the relative "equality," ~~or, better described,~~ the active and respectable role women assumed.

The term "equality" is deceptive, for equality as we know it, in the form of equal occupational opportunity or equal political and economical rights was not taught. Instead, the idea was prevalent in the earliest church that everyone had a particular place in society. Christian women were instructed quite pointedly that they were not to speak in church, (I Cor. 14:34) not to teach men, (I Tim. 2:12) and to submit themselves in all things to their husbands. (Eph. 5:24) The equality prevalent in the doctrine was on an individual basis--that before God all are equal and that both men and women are responsible for their own spiritual and moral adherence to God's law. The blaming, for instance, of sexual infidelity on a wanton woman was no license for a man to commit adultery. A Christian man was responsible for his own conduct, regardless of the circumstance. Therefore, as far as spiritual matters were concerned, each person was an equal in God's eyes. In the practical, physical world,

however, this was not so obvious. Women were instructed, generally and specifically, on social propriety and moral conduct.

The unique aspect of a domestic relationship was that although a wife was to submit to her husband, he was commanded to love her "as Christ loved the Church" and to put her interest above his own. (Eph. 5:25) Paul's conception of self-sacrificing love permeated his writings and influenced the early communities because it gave dignity to all people and was applicable to both men and women. The object of this paper^{is} to see to what extent equality of the sexes was taught in the first three centuries of the Christian Church.

The sources I use include four types of primary material, as well as secondary material. The primary writings are the Gospels, the canonical New Testament, the non-canonical Apocryphal Acts, and the writings of Church Fathers. The Gospels, which are the recollection of Jesus' life and deeds, written after his crucifixion, portray Jesus, his attitudes and his teachings. The New Testament, especially the writings of Paul, which are the earliest Christian documents, are the backbone of Christian doctrine. These are letters to various groups and individuals, instructing them in the practical application of the faith. Although he was not one of the original Apostles, Paul had an experience on his way to Damascus which changed him from a zealous Jewish persecutor of the Christian sect to its greatest spokesman. Other letters in the New Testament, written, for example, by Peter and others, also give instruction to and about women, and will be cited in this text.

Still other documents which were written at various times in the early years of Christianity, and which had great influence or portrayed

certain sides of Christian groups, did not become part of the canon.

Among these are other "gospels" and the "Apocryphal Acts." The latter are also used as sources in this paper. Some of the Apocryphal Acts were denounced by even the earliest of the Church Fathers, for not aligning with the doctrine of Paul. The Apocryphal Acts have several uses historically. The characters in them served as models for the Christian community, illustrating the values of those communities. (S. Davies, p. 52) They "are evidence for a form of Christian life at an early stage of Christian history." (ibid., p.3) M. R. James writes of these non-canonical books:

They record the imaginations, hopes, and fears of the men who wrote them; they show what was acceptable to the unlearned Christians of the first ages, what interested them, what they admired, what ideals of conduct they cherished for this life, what they thought they would find in the next. (p. xiii)

Davies believes that we can use the male-female relationships depicted in the Acts to "determine the composition of the original community behind the Acts." (p. 53)

The last group of sources is the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. The council of Nicea took place in A. D. 325, and the Church Fathers cited here lived and wrote up to that time. These men built upon the foundation of Paul and others, adding their views to the tradition established by Jesus and the Apostles. As early as the first century, new sects of Christianity emerged which influenced some of the writers. Gnosticism and Montanism were two of these early sects. The former believed that the body was a prison, built by Satan, to hold the spirit. Therefore, having a child was aiding the devil; and the complete abstinence

from sexual relations was imperative. Paul stated in I Corinthians that spouses should abstain "only for a while" in order to pray (I Cor. 7:3-5). The Gnostics were not orthodox on this count, although they influenced many Christians. The Church Fathers' writings, though they may have been influenced by contemporary thought, were very instrumental in shaping Christian doctrine. They also recorded the prevailing Christian thought.

The status of woman in Hellenic society was generally one of subjection to man. She was considered merely a possession, "a tool for pleasure while young and for work as she grew old." (Giordani, SMJ, p. 190) And in Sparta a woman was judged for her potential to bear great and strong sons. (Ryrie, p. 2) Although Plato called for an equality and a "partnership of the sexes," the more commonly held view was Aristotle's, which held that inferiority was inherent in the female sex. (Ryrie, p. 2) The relationship of a man and a woman was merely a necessary physical union for the procreation of children. (Ryrie)

Women were of several classes in ancient Greece: wives, hetairai, concubines, and slaves. Demosthenes stated their relationship to men:

Hetairai we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the ordinary requirements of the body, wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households. (Ryrie, p. 4)

Ryrie explains that the hetairai were companions to the men of ancient Greece and "enjoyed much greater freedom than the wives," who were kept secluded at home. Some Greek women gained prominence, but their status was never that of men.

Because of conflicting sources the traditional picture of women in Jewish culture is contradictory. A paradox at best, one must look at the written ideal and how it was responded to.

However, "Roman women . . . enjoyed considerable freedom and independence both at home and in public life." (Ketter, p. 23) This freedom was not an elevation of women though; but rather it reflected the fact that they were allowed to take part in the "promiscuous activities" of Roman society. Though "free," they could not participate in politics, could neither hold property nor be called as a witness. A Roman woman could exercise no legal authority over her children, who were considered to be part of their father's family alone. (170: Mid. 45b) Therefore, although she was given a certain autonomy and freedom, the Roman woman was not given the responsibility or dignity that should accompany them. Legally she had no rights, and was considered officially still the property of her husband.

Roman women did have greater practical, if not legal, freedom because they were not kept secluded as were Greek and Jewish women. This freedom

aided the spread of Christianity because women participated more freely in religious activities. It also resulted in the laxity and licentiousness against which Christianity spoke and from which it protected its women. (Ryrie, p. 7)

Among the Jew, "God's chosen people," women did not fare much better, although they had been led by women such as Esther and Deborah. Polygamy and divorce were permitted, though not encouraged. Lax divorce laws took security away from women of all cultures, for without a husband and a home, a woman's dignity and significance in society diminished.

Because of conflicting sources the traditional picture of women in Jewish culture is contradictory. A paradox at best, one must look at the written ideal and how it was responded to.

even Rabbinic literature placed a high value on wives, often praising the ideal wife and the institution of marriage: "A Jew without a wife lives without joy, blessing, or good." (Cohen, p.171; Yebamot 62b) Marriage, as spoken of in the Talmud, completed a man, "for 'an unmarried man is not a man in the full sense,' . . . A wife meant a home; hence the saying, 'A man's home is his wife.'"

The Talmud further stated:

Honour your wife, for thereby you enrich yourself.
A man should be ever careful about the honour due
his wife, because no blessing is experienced in his
house except on her account." (Cohen, p. 174; B. M. 59a)

The Torah also said that "God endowed woman with more intelligence than man." (Cohen, 170: Nid. 45b) Proverbs 31 outlined the characteristics of a good wife, whose husband praised her for having such qualities. She was to be involved in the business world as well as her household; she was to speak wisely. The ideal wife was capable, and her husband "(sang) her praises." (Pvb. 31:28,29)

On the other hand, women were also described by the Rabbis as "gluttonous, eavesdroppers, lazy and jealous;" they also talk nine times more than men. (Cohen, 171; 115Q-17) Sirach included a long list of reasons to support the fact that a daughter was only a source of constant worry for her father. (Sir. 22:3)

Women were also instructed to wear veils which covered their entire bodies. This was not to protect them in the way that Paul later described, but, as Russell Prohl speculated, "to protect man from woman," for talking with or looking at a woman was surely a curse. "Do not converse with women, as this will ultimately lead to unchastity. He who gazes at a woman

eventually comes to sin." The Talmud continued to warn men, among other things, not to look at a woman's heel, for he who did so would "have crippled children--lame, blind, dumb, deaf." (Prohl, p. 51; Nedarim 19: 56, 57)

Only men participated in Jewish civil law, and it operated to their benefit. Women were not even allowed to learn the Torah, the law of Judaic culture, according to one author. The Rabbi Eliezer, "a contemporary of St. John the Evangelist, even went so far as to declare: 'Rather should the word of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman.'" (Ketter, p. 23)

The traditional paradox emerges: woman is intelligent, yet unworthy, even to read the Torah. She is to be honored, yet is still considered inferior, a legal minor, and should be kept at home and separate. It is into this context that Christianity emerged and grew. Christianity was often seen as a destructive force in society. Celsus and Pliny reported that it was turning children against parents, slaves against masters, and people against their leaders. (Origen, Against Celsus; Pliny, Letters X, Arnold) Jesus offered his message to all, including women, and gave them a place of dignity in the new religion and in its community. In the ancient society Paul's views were quite liberal, as he too welcomed women to an active role in Christianity. Women became equal to men as children of God; but in the family, the community, and in the church itself there was to be order, not confusion or competition. From the instruction given and the traditions formed in the first three centuries, we can ascertain to what extent equality was taught to the early Christians.

It was in the family that women had the most influence, both as wives and as mothers. As in other facets of Christian life, the paradox of equality for women was evident in the family. Women were both equal and unequal. In questions of equality in morality, for example, men and women were both required to remain chaste. Likewise, children were to honor both parents, their mother and their father. But, in the family, as everywhere else in Christian society, there was to be order, something that Paul stressed often. In this order the wife was to be in submission to her husband. Her husband, however, had duties to his wife which balanced their relationship. In the Christian family there many relationships, the most important being one's relationship with God. Next was that of the husband and wife, the parents and children, and the brothers and the sisters. Both partners in a marriage were equally responsible for preserving that marriage.

Jesus did not directly speak to wives as a group in his teachings, although women made up part of his followers. As marriage partners women were not to be divorced or deserted, as was often an occurrence. The marriage relationship was considered by Jesus to be bound by God; and the man and woman became one, both physically and spiritually. Since the wife was as much a partner as the husband, she was equally important to the relationship. Jesus said of the marriage relationship:

At the beginning the Creator made them male and female; for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate. (Mt. 19:4-6)

This, of course, provided the basis of Christian doctrine against divorce. It also illustrated Jesus' view that women were as important to a marriage as men.

In several letters Paul specified a particular "order" or hierarchy for the home. To the Ephesians he incorporated his idea of order with the Old Testament view that Jesus quoted above, and introduced the idea of reciprocal duties and privileges in a marriage.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also should wives submit to their husbands in everything.
(Eph. 5:22-25)

These instructions called for a voluntary submission of the wife "to (her) husband as to the Lord." Therefore, as she followed the Lord voluntarily and with commitment, so also should she honor and obey her husband. Paul continued with instructions to the husbands:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, and to present her . . . holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church Each one of you must also love his wife as he loves himself and the wife must respect her husband. (Eph.5:25-29,33)

The husband ^{was} therefore responsible for the spiritual, as well as physical, welfare of his wife. He was also told to be self-sacrificing toward his wife, and her value was equated to that of his own. Though later celibacy was favored by some over marriage, several of the Church

Fathers had good marriages. J. G. Davies portrayed Clement of Alexandria as having the ideal marriage, with a submissive wife whom he trusted so completely that he did not need to restrict her in any way. She was his partner, his complement in the Christian life.

In a Christian marriage home life revolved around the Christian faith. In the Apostolic Tradition, 41-42, Hippolytus described the prayer life of two Christian spouses:

All the faithful, men and women, on rising from sleep in the morning should wash their hands and pray to God before they undertake any sort of work: then they may proceed to their work Pray before your body takes rest on your bed. At midnight get up, wash your hands with water and pray. And if your wife is there too, the two of you should pray together. (Wiles and Santer, pp 207-208)

Tertullian, at the end of the letter to his wife, wrote of the ideal marriage of two Christians. In the passage he wrote of the spousal relationship:

Oh how sweet is the yoke of two of the faithful who are one in hope, one in faith, and one in the service to God! Both brothers, both servants to God without any estrangement in body or soul. They are truly 'two in one flesh'; and when the flesh is one so is the spirit. Together they fast, instructing, exhorting and supporting each other. Both are in the Church and equal, at God's table, in their trials, in persecutions, and when relief comes. (Tertullian, To His Wife, II, 9)

Within the Christian family the husband was to be the undisputed head, who gave his wife honor and was to be self-sacrificing toward her. She was to respect and honor him in all things. The issue of superiority in marriage was not a problem, because both partners were to help each

other and give of themselves for the other, and because the honor and respect given to women was unique and a noticeable improvement already for women compared to surrounding cultures.

Outside Christian marriages was where the doctrine of order was tested, for outside Christianity the husband was not obligated in any way to his wife. If she were a Christian though, she was still obligated to honor and to be submissive to him. Jesus did not consider different beliefs to be grounds for divorce, the only possible grounds being adultery. (Matt. 5; Mark 10) Paul required the Christian partner, man or woman, to remain with the non-Christian in hope of converting him or her to the Christian faith. (I Cor. 7:14-16) This was also the opinion of Peter. (I Peter 3:1-2) The Church Fathers, notable Tertullian, described the problems of a "mixed" marriage, (Tertullian, To His Wife, II, 4-8), but with the idea of prevention in mind, rather than divorce. In such a union the Christian wife would not only be unable to have a partner with whom to share her religion, but she would often be prevented from attending feasts, fasting, and praying because of her pagan husband's antagonism toward Christianity. (in footnote quote To His Wife, II, 4) The fathers never approved entering into this type of relationship. But if the marriage were contracted before the wife was converted, then there was hope that the husband would see the change in her and be converted. Tertullian wrote that "the daily life of a Christian woman was a revelation to her husband." (Kidd, p. 119) "He knows her changed for the better. Thus even he himself is, by his awe of her, as one who aspires to God." (Foster, p. 44)

Pagans considered Christianity to be a destructive force in the community and in the family. (above) Often, although the wives became

more loyal and the children became more obedient as Christians, the man of the house divorced or disowned his family members because of their conversion. (Foster, p. 39) Celsus also complained of this, and he was quoted by Origen in Against Celsus as using that as an accusation against Christianity.

As mothers and sisters, women held equal honor and importance to men. Both children and adults were told by Jesus to "honor (their) fathers and mothers." (Mt. 19:18; Mk. 7:10) This commandment was repeated by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. (Eph. 6:1,2) Jesus himself obeyed his mother when he left the Temple in Jerusalem with his parents. (Lk. 2:41-52) Examples from Jesus' life were often used by later Christian authors to formulate and justify points of Christian doctrine. Therefore, even if he did not address a subject directly, Jesus' actions were thought to show his opinion on it. In the case of children's obedience, Jesus and Paul both quoted the Mosaic commandment to children. (Deut. 5:16)

"The farewell to mother and sister was reckoned quite as great a sacrifice as the parting from father and brother." (Faulhaber, p. 152) Followers of Jesus had to be willing to leave everything, including their families, to become his disciples. Although this may seem an insignificant point of equality, it does imply that the female members of the family were just as important as the male members, unlike the pagan attitudes.

Exposure of infants, especially females, was a prevalent custom in the ancient world. "A certain (Roman) Hilarion writes to his wife Alis: 'If you give birth to a male child, keep him; if it is a girl-child, expose her.'" (Giord., SMF, p. 249) These children were left someplace in the open, either outside or within the city walls, to die from exposure to

the elements. But anyone who wanted the children could take them and exploit them to their own benefit. (ibid., p. 247) Such children had to beg, steal or become prostitutes if that person so wished. The children differed from slaves only in that their parents could redeem them if they wished, though this was rare. (Giord., SMF, p. 247)

To Christians children were a blessing, the reason for the marriage relationship; although Tertullian called them the "bitter, bitter pleasure." Jesus welcomed all the children and blessed them. (Mt. 19:14) The Church Fathers were appalled at any practice of exposure or abortion. (quote: Justin, Giord. p247; Minucius, Tertullian, p. 246) Members of the early Christian communities often gathered up the little children exposed by their parents and rescued them from this death. (Giord., p.249) They protected both male and female children, for they each had souls. Jesus healed both sons and daughters, of those who asked him. (Mk. 5:21-43; 7:24-30) Parents were instructed in the Didache, "Do not neglect your son or daughter; but teach them from childhood the fear of God." (Gior., 250)

As parents and children, females in the Christian home were to be treated with honor. To Timothy Paul wrote that mothers and sisters were to be treated "with absolute purity." (I Tim. 5:2) That "pure" relationship was to be extended to the other women in the community: younger women were to ^{be} treated like sisters, the older women like mothers.

Jesus did speak about the preservation of marriage. Both polygamy and divorce were tolerated in the Jewish tradition, although neither was ideal. Jesus condemned these, declaring that marriage was to be strictly monogamous. (Mt. 19:7-9) He also taught that the marital union was "joined together by God," (Mt. 19:6), and that the wife became an inseparable part of her

husband. From this time further monogamous marriages were the only type allowed by Christians.

Second marriages were disputed doctrinally. If a person was separated or divorced, then a second marriage was not allowed while that spouse lived. Even if the spouse had died, the doctrinal preference was for the widow(er) to remain single. (I Cor. 7:8-11) Both Clement of Alexandria and Origen disapproved of the marriage of widows. (Giord., SMF, p. 230) Ahtenagoras considered even this type of marriage "an honorable adultery," and that "whoever frees himself of his first wife, even if she is dead, is an adulterer in disguise, forcing God's hand," for if marriage was for the purpose of begetting children and God dissolved that union, then marrying again would be going against God's plan. (ibid., p. 228-229) Why should someone want to "rebuild what God has destroyed" when one spouse died, asked Tertullian. (To His Wife, I, 7) Remaining single was not, however, mandatory for those widowed. Paul wrote to the Romans saying:

By law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress, But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. (Romans 7:2, 3; see also I Cor. 7:8,9)

Another option for a widow or widower was to marry again with the mutual understanding that the spouses would be celibate. (Tertullian, On Exhortation to Chastity, XII) Tertullian told those widowers who needed someone to take of their households to "take a spiritual wife" for this reason. Their relationship was to be as brother and sister, not as

husband and wife, having a physical relationship, according to Clement. (Ryrie, 108) Another reason to take such a wife is described by Igino Giordani:

The very infirmity of the human body leads to marriage, a kind of intimate society which completes the physical life also: the care, for example, which a wife gives a sick or aged husband has no substitute, nor can it be equalled by the care administered, nor can it be equalled by the care administered by his closest relatives and friends. (Giord., SMF, p. 220-221)

This was to be the relationship of such a couple, their focus remaining on Christ and on the Christian work in the community.

The responsibility of preserving the marriage fell equally on both partners. As mentioned above, the Christian married to a non-Christian was to remain with that spouse, hoping to convert him or her to Christianity. Though Jesus allowed adultery to be the only possible reason for divorce, Paul mentioned another possible reason, in regard to "mixed" marriages.

If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. . . . But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances. (I Cor. 7:12, 13, 15)

The Christian spouse was not to remarry, but, if possible, was to be reconciled to that spouse later. (I Cor. 7:11)

In the cases of moral conduct, men and women were again on equal ground. Both committed adultery if, once divorced, they married again. (Mk. 10:11, 12) Each individual was responsible for his or her own conduct, because Christians were not to judge each other, (Mt. 7:1) and the

transgression of God's law was between that person and God. Adultery was blamed on both participants equally. This was different from the prevailing Jewish practice. Although the Torah condemned both parties, the man was usually allowed to "escape," while the woman took the punishment, by law that of stoning. (Sergio, p.52) Christians did not continue this practice.

Whether to marry at all was another option mentioned by Paul. Marriage in the Jewish custom was prevalent, for the emphasis on family was great. But Paul stated that he wished people, both men and women, would not need to marry, so that they would be able to devote themselves "to the Lord." (I Cor. 7:3, 28, 32-35) Yet even as he was explaining this, Paul told both men and women that it was good to marry, and that marriage, even second marriages, are preferred to "burn(ing) with passion."

In this passage Paul wrote to married and unmarried, men and women alike. It is clear that marriage was a mutual decision and that even without marrying, women had a place in the Church, equally respectable to that of unmarried men.

Fidelity was required of both Christian spouses. Tertullian condemned the Romans for sharing their wives and said, "We share everything except our wives." (SMF, p. 223) Christians were very proud of the chastity of their wives. Almost all instructions on marriage were given to both men and women.

Although most Church Fathers approved of sexual relations in order to beget children, the Apocryphal Acts did not even consider that a good reason to have physical relations. The Acts of Paul emphasized continence for Christians as a sort of standard of piety or spirituality. The Acts

portrayed both Paul and Andrew as dissuading maidens from marrying their betrothed and encouraging wives to become celibate.

Women, such as Thecla (Acts of Paul) and Maximilla (Acts of Andrew) were not portrayed as equal to the men, but as superior, even to the Apostles in those books. Stevan Davies believes that a real problem existed in the early Church because certain men would not take seriously women in any important position in the ministry of the Church, and that these writings reflected the frustration of such women. The Acts were widely read and had great influence in the early Church. Perhaps already there were women who because of their celibacy considered themselves exceptions from Paul's other directives on the place of women. Another possibility was that because of the loose structure of the Church, certain women may have taken, or been given, major roles in certain communities and were not being universally accepted.

In the second century it was already easy to find Christian 'men and women who had grown old without marrying because of the hope of uniting themselves more closely to God. And if remaining virgins and celibates brings us closer to him, even the very thought of impure desires separates us from him,' (writes Athenagoras) Men and women consecrated themselves to (virginity and celibacy), but of their own free will (SMF, 217)

Paul never expected all Christians to be celibate. He preferred it for himself and those who thought they could remain so, because a married person had to be concerned with the needs of a spouse, while an unmarried person could fully concentrate on the Lord's work. (I Cor. 7:32-35, quote in footnote) In Paul's teaching on marital relations, mutual consideration was the main focus. The wife was not an object to fulfill "the ordinary

requirements of the body," as Deomsthenes had said earlier of Greek men and women.

Each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to him alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (ICor.7:2-5)

Equality was given to both men and women in this passage, in their obligations and in the rights to their spouse's body. Such a statement by Paul may sound strange as doctrine, but if a spouse decided to become celibate and it was not a mutual decision, it could be quite a strain to the marriage. Paul stated that sexual relations were permitted in a marriage, but they were not to be used to divide a marriage with the excuse of piety. Spouses were not to be deprived of these rights to each other for spirituality's sake. Abstaining for a time to pray was fine, even encouraged, but making that permanent was not. The deprived spouse could too easily fall into the temptation of committing adultery. Paul was describing a relationship above, based on mutual consent and consideration. The husband, though still the "head" of his wife, did not take advantage of this position spiritually or physically.

Summing up Christian family life in the first few centuries, the woman as wife was subordinate to her husband. They were not equal, except as Christian individuals; he is her "head." A Christian wife was to submit to her husband in all things, and a Christian husband was told to

treat his wife with honor and dignity. Male and female were equal in the family as parents and as siblings. Both husband and wife were responsible for preserving their marriage and were allowed to marry again only if the first spouse dies. However, it was preferred that they remain celibate to devote themselves completely to the work of the Lord. While married, their own fidelity was their individual responsibility. They were equal before God as far as morals were concerned, God being their judge. Finally, in their sexual relations, they were to consider each other's needs and be careful not to use prayer as an excuse to become celibate or even to refuse relations for any length of time, but only to abstain for a while, by mutual consent, and to pray.

In the first three centuries, women of all cultures were given an inferior place in the community at large. Some women held positions outside of the family, but most lived and worked at home.

Since the Jewish tradition had been protective of women, it is not surprising to see Christianity with a similar trait. Although the Torah protected women, by Jesus' time many Jews, even the Jewish religious leaders, felt no such compassion toward them, as illustrated in the Gospel accounts. The woman taken in adultery, (Jn.8:1-11) the woman in Bethan- who annointed Jesus with perfume, (Mk 14:1-9) and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-27) were particular cases where Jewish men showed little interest in the woman, but where Jesus showed them compassion. He considered a person's need more important than that person's gender and applied himself to that need. At different occasions he healed both a man and a woman on the Sabbath and rebuked those who criticized him. Women, as well as

men, also received instruction and were rebuked by Jesus if they were wrong. Martha, a friend of Jesus, was one such lady. (Lk. 10:39-42) Jesus never hinted that women were to be shunned; but, on the contrary, treated them respectfully, sharing with them his message.

Paul also promoted such treatment of women when he instructed husbands about their wives (I Cor. 7) and Timothy on the attitudes towards women in the community. The Church Fathers also taught that women, widows in particular, were to be protected and cared for. The fact that women were to be protected and provided for was in itself evidence that they were not considered to be equal to men, who presumably could take care of themselves. Even Paul did not consider the temperment of women to be like that of men. The special instructions to and about women bears this out, though both sexes were "equal in Christ."

The agape love stressed as part of the Christian community was another application of equality between men and women. This love was self-sacrificing, and was to be given to all members of the community. We would call it "brotherly love," but it was really much deeper than that. Concern for others, loyalty and forgiveness were all parts of it. Paul explained agape love in I Corinthians 13:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Preceding this Paul told the Corinthians that without this concern for others, all that they did would be in vain:

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I have to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (I Cor. 13:2-3)

Agape was a cornerstone of the Christian's life. It was a necessary part of the Christian personality; and it was applicable to all Christians, rich or poor, man or woman, Jew or Gentile. Because of the application of agape, women were treated much more equally, not as inferior beings, but as those worthy of consideration in the community. If someone refused to give this love and concern to anyone, his own good deeds would be counted as nothing.

The community of Christians in the first three centuries, was the Church and vice versa. There was no separation of religion from daily life. The place of women was not outlined in this area as precisely as was their position in the home or within the ecclesiastic hierarchy of authority. Women had a legitimate place in Christianity, unlike in Mithraism, which admitted only men, or the mystery cults, in which the place of women were often as temple prostitutes. All Christians, including women, were "equal in Christ," according to Paul, (Gal. 3:28) and took part in learning about and in spreading the faith. Women were instructed as to their "proper" place, yet there was flexibility. This was not as true in the home or in the authority of the Church. Several notable women had quite prominent places in Christian communities.

Christian leaders taught that women deserved equal justice and had equal moral responsibilities to men. The latter especially derived from the idea that all people were individually responsible before God for their

actions. (Romans 2:6-11) Aside from individual equality before God, there were two other facets of the Christian community wherein women were both equal and influential: first as they spread the Gospel message, and second, as they were martyred.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, women had a part in Christianity. They compiled part of the large crowds that followed him. (Mt. 14:21) and he taught (Mt. 5:1-2) and healed them. (Mt 9:35) Children were brought to Jesus, (Mk 10:13) presumably by women, since mothers raised their children, at least until age twelve.

Roger Gryson stated that Jesus spoke "indiscriminately to men and women," and was "particularly well received by the latter." (Gryson, p. 2) At the Crucifixion, after the disciples had fled, several women stood by at a distance. (Mk. 15:40-41) These women had ministered to him as he taught in Galilee; other women were also there from Jerusalem. The Gospel accounts of the Resurrection also legitimize the inclusion of women, for Jesus appeared first to "Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others." (Lk. 24:10) From the mention of so many women in Jesus' actions and parables it is evident that many women followed Jesus, believed what he taught, and were participating in the religion of which he spoke. Several of these women were specifically named as part of the group with Jesus. (#30-115Q) Others mentioned were those that he healed or used as examples in parables. There were also close female friends, Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, spent much time with Jesus; and he dined at their home in Bethany. (Lk. 10: 38-43)

It is notable, though, that none of the original Apostles were women. Jesus, although he welcomed women as children of God, worthy of

the same salvation that men were offered, (Romans 3:22) did not place them in places of authority in Christianity. Whether they would have been accepted had he done so is an interesting question; but I think not. ~~The~~ The social structure of that time would not have recognized women as leaders of men. Throughout those first three centuries, and even up to the present, for most of Christianity it is still true that whatever positions women hold in the Church, pastoral authority is the most controversial and the least accepted. Femal leadership in the Church will be discussed more fully later; but from the beginning of Christianity women were discouraged, even forbidden, from participating in this facet of the Church.

The early Christian concept of a community, the ecclesia, was likened to a body; and the Church itself often called the "body of Christ." Paul's instruction to the Corinthians (I Cor. 12:12-28) was that since the Church, as any physical body, was made up of many indispensable parts. No member could rightfully claim its own importance over any other, for all were needed for the body to function correctly. (quote: I Cor. 12; "if the ear. . . are indispensable.") Paul continued:

God combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it; so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it. (I Cor. 12:24, 25, 27)

The Apocryphal Acts taught that women were not only a legitimate part of Christianity, but also that they were superior in many ways to men, even to the Apostles. (S. Davies, p. 63) In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, Thecla gave up everything to follow Paul and become a Christian;

but he did not take her seriously as the assistant she wanted to be. The same situation occurred with Maximilla and Andrew in the Acts of Andrew. Within these books the piety of the women was emphasized, while the men appeared selfish, shortsighted and weak in their faith. It is probable that whoever wrote these accounts was troubled that women who were good Christians were not accepted in roles of authority by the Christian community. (S. Davies) The women in the Acts were suitable as models for Christian women, but the men were generally not worthy of emulation. (ibid., p. 63)

The Church Fathers also gladly accepted women into Christianity. The promises to the Jews, and thereby to ^{all} Christians, (Gal. 3:8, 14) included women. Jesus said, "Whoever believes shall not perish . . . (John 3:16); Paul wrote, ". . . everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Rom. 10:12, 13) Salvation therefore was ~~equalled~~ offered to men and women. As new Christians were baptized, both men and women were accepted into the Church by the same standards and had the same responsibility to the faith. (Ayerst and Fisher, p. 60-63)

~~Women were accepted, therefore, in the earliest Church.~~ After Jesus' Resurrection women took part in all of the major events in Church history. They were in the upper room at Pentecost, with the Apostles. (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4) As the Church grew, "more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number," (Acts 5:14) Later, in persecution, first by the Jewish leaders (Acts 9:2) and later by the Roman authorities, women died for their faith alongside men. Women also participated in the first general baptism which was held in Samaria. (Acts 8:12)

Another area in which men and women were treated equally was that both were educated in Christianity, though they may have been taught separately. Jesus told his disciples to "preach the Gospel to every creature," (Mk 16:15) which obviously included women. This was never questioned by the writers of the New Testament, nor by the Church Fathers. The Jewish tradition, however included this statement by Rabbi Eliezer, a contemporary of John the Baptist, "Rather the word of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman." (Ketter, p. 23) To this Christians did not agree.

That women should be taught was exemplified by Jesus when he told many parables twice, once in a way men would understand, then again with an application familiar to women. (Faulhaber, p. 154) Luke 15:4-10 is an example of this. Jesus was telling the people, especially the Jewish leaders, that heaven rejoices more "over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." He illustrated this point first by the example of a shepherd who searched for a lost sheep and celebrated at finding it. Men could understand this, for as shepherds most had felt such concern over a missing sheep. For the ladies Jesus told the same story about rejoicing over something valuable which had been lost, then found. He told a parable of a woman who had ten silver coins and had lost one. She searched the house for it, lit a lamp, swept the floors and, when she had found it, rejoiced with neighbors. Using both examples Jesus could be sure that everyone could understand the concept he was teaching.

Women listened to the Apostles preach too. The canonical Acts of the Apostles mentioned that women were present in several groups being taught. (Acts 2; Acts 5:14) Paul taught the women at Philippi as well. (Acts 16:13)

Along with the opportunity to learn the faith, women were given specific instructions on their conduct: "women should learn in quietness and subjection." (I Tim. 2:11, 12) If they had questions, women were to ask their husbands at home, rather than raise the question in public. (Quote I Cor. 14:34,35) ~~They were~~ allowed to learn, but in learning they had to recognize the authority and superiority of the men.

In his work Against Celsus Origen quoted Celsus criticizing Christians for allowing the participation of "the silly, the mean, the stupid, with women and children." (Foster, p.42; C. Celsus, III, 44) Pagans criticized Christians for including women, but the Christians were proud of their women. (Foster, p. 37-38, 42-43) As for women in Christianity, Origen said:

There was such a charm about the words of Jesus that not only men were willing to follow him to the wilderness, but many women also, not being put off by the weakness of their sex, nor by proprieties. (A. Celsus, III, 10)

The Fathers realized the resource they had in women, their influence in the family and beyond, and that Christian women could strengthen the Christian community.

The Church Fathers quoted often the passages of Paul which restricted women. In doing so they denounced the teaching of the Apocryphal Acts as invalid, because the women were allowed to take men's roles. The Church Fathers believed, and by their writings, they taught Paul's doctrine about women, rather than that of the Apocryphal Acts which glorified women over men.

In the practical sense of everyday life, women were not really equal. The social context of the ancient times prohibited this. Outside of the

spiritual relationship, even among Christians, women were not considered to be equal. This may have been the problem addressed in books like the Acts of Paul and the Acts of Andrew. The attitude toward women had improved a lot though with Christianity, for Christians were instructed to "walk in the Spirit," (Gal. 5:25) applying the Christian guidelines to everyday situations.

One area in which an attitude changed the condition of women was that of adultery. In his Sermon on the Mount, (Mt. 5) Jesus not only reiterated the Mosaic commandment "Thou shall not commit adultery," but also told men that "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Mt. 5:27-28) Women were thereby "lifted even above the insult or violation that is secret, within the mind, in the glances of men." (Giord., SMJ, p. 191) Men were to look at women as sisters, coworkers, fellow-Christians, not as satisfiers "of normal bodily desires," as Demosthenes had said. Paul wrote to Timothy that Christians were to treat "older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity." (I Tim. 5:2) Athenagoras, in the second century wrote that to look at a woman with "dishonest pleasure" was an adulterous act. (Gior., SMF, p. 223) The agape love and the "kiss of peace" were extended to both male and female Christians as a sign of 'benevolence and charity.'^(Euseb., p. 14) The concept of brotherly love transformed women from objects of sexual pleasure for men to "sisters," and loyal friends.

Writing to the Corinthians on propriety in worship, Paul reminded them that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (I Cor. 11:3) He continued saying

that the woman ought to have a sign a authority (the veil) on her head. This passage was used as evidence that women were inferior to men. But later in the same passage Paul wrote that men were not superior to women before God:

In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. (I Cor. 11:11, 12)

Also in his letter to the Galatians, Paul stated that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It is apparent that in spiritual matters men and women were equal in Paul's view, but that did not give women an equal position in society overall.

One position in the community was readily allowed to women. Women helped spread the faith in families and in the community. B. J. Kidd wrote on the spread of Christianity:

The uneducated classes who owed most to the Gospel and its methods of oral instruction, were themselves its unofficial yet most ardent and effective missionaries.

Women were among this group. According to Celsus much instruction was given in humble workshops and women's quarters. Children were persuaded to "go with the women . . . into women's apartments or ~~the~~ the leather shops . . . that they may attain perfect knowledge." (i.e. oral instruction) (Against Celsus, III, 55)

Women also spread the Gospel within their families. Peter felt that women could affect their families as missionaries, (I Peter 1:3) as did Paul. (I Cor. 7:14) Tertullian wrote that the daily life of a

Christian wife was a revelation to her husband. (To His Wife, II, iii-vi)
 In his Plea Regarding Christians, Athenagoras wrote that even "dear old mothers," along with others, ~~to~~ promoted Christianity by their deeds. (Arnold, p. 96-97)

The effects of women evangelizing were not limited to humble situations. Several Church Fathers mentioned ladies "of distinction" who were Christians. (Justin, Apol II,2) Women brought Christianity into the household of the Ceasars. Domitian's niece was a Christian, so were Diocletian's wife and daughter. (Foster, p. 43)

Many women were mentioned by name in the Gospels (see #33-115). Some of them were family or friends of Jesus, or women that he had helped; but several became a permanent part of the Christian community. They ministered to the disciples or stayed at a location after Jesus and his group left. The fact that these women were named "indicates the consideration those people enjoyed in the early community, and, at the same time, confirms the historicity of these references." (Gryson, p. 2)

In his letters Paul mentioned many women by name and greeted them, often as coworkers. Priscilla, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis are listed in Romans 16:3, 12. Other women, Lydia for example, held services in their homes. (Acts 16:15)

Women functioned in the community in still another way by performing acts of charity. Dorcas "practiced a silent diaconate of charity as mother of the poor, 'full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.'" (Faulhaber, p. 191) So important was the giving of charity that Tertulian used the fact that a pagan husband would not allow a wife to participate as a reason to prohibit "mixed marriages," (To His Wife) for

this was an important ministry of women to the sick and the poor.

Worship was a major facet of the Christian community. As already stated, Jesus treated women as equals to men in faith. Paul wrote that "in Christ" everyone was equal. Since the Jewish traditional "inheritance" was also available to women, Christianity was open to them as well. It is in worship that men and women were on absolutely equal ground, for their souls were of the same worth.

In the worship service this equality had its limits. Women were told "to learn in submission," to "keep quiet in church," and not to raise any questions in public. They were prohibited from teaching or holding authority over men, (I Tim. 2:11, 12) although older women were to teach the younger women to be the ideal Christian wives and mothers. Women were to be taught how to "love their family, be self-controlled, kind, submissive and busy at home." (Titus 2:3-6) Although women did prophecy at Corinth, they were required to be veiled to show that they were under the authority of their husbands. (I Cor. 11:5-10)

The teachings of the Apocryphal Acts did not coincide with this view of the place of women. Thecla broke her betrothal and assumed some male roles such as teaching in public and baptizing herself. Maximilla also left her home and her husband to serve Christianity. This could not be considered as legitimate Christianity because Paul expressly told Christians to remain with their spouses if they were married.

Two points on which the Apocryphal Acts and the teachings of Christianity differed, were the place of women and the requirement of celibacy in the Apocryphal Acts. The Church Fathers, though they also favored celibacy, did not consider it a requirement for ministry, especially for

those who were already married. The fathers specifically denied any place of authority or leadership in the Church. Tertullian condemned the Acts of Paul because women in it "were assumed to have the right to preach and to baptize." (S. Davies, p. 66) Tertullian:

It is not permitted to a woman to speak in Church, nor yet to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer (the sacraments), nor to assume any office which belongs to a man, least of all the priesthood. (Morgan, p. 240; Tertullian, On Veiling of Virgins, 9)

In the Corinthian church there existed the controversies over the veiling of women and whether women could speak in church. On one hand women were told not to prophesy unless they were veiled. (I Cor. 11:5, 6) Then, as Paul instructed the church on the propriety in the worship service, he declared that women should "remain silent in the churches. . . for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." (I Cor. 14:34-36) I think this controversy hinged on Paul's desire that Christian women not be confused with the many pagan women of Corinth and his desire to keep the worship services orderly. The fine points of the controversy are not important to this paper. Rather, the fact that women were not thought of as equal, but as subordinate to men in public worship, is important. Paul's hierarchy, though not applicable in an individual's relationship to God, was observed and taught in the workings of the Christian community and in its worship services.

In the first century the traditional Jewish idea, which believed in the weakness, and therefore the inferiority, of women was prevalent. In fact, it was the weakness inherent in women which was the reason they were to be protected and kept in someone's authority, as far as both the

Old and the New testament believers were concerned, the Jews and the Christians.

The "new Christian woman," according to Giordani as follows:

The new woman is fashioned; she is no longer the agent of lust, but the agent--the most solicitous, tactful and desired--of social service. She no longer carries her charms to brothels, rendezvous of doubtful reputation, or frivolous gatherings; but with thoughtful and smiling face, she carries the gentle light of maternal solicitude into the darkness of a prison or a hovel to shine upon the suffering and abandoned. She renounces herself for others. She does not poison, kill or ruin; she revives, cheers and helps. A new and limitless field of action opens up before her. (Giord., p. 234)

The teaching of the Christian Church on women's position in the ecclesiastic hierarchy was similar to that of wives, in that they were regulated to a specific position, subordinate to men. Unlike a woman's position in the home, in which she was subordinate to her husband but held significant influence in her family, the position given to women in the hierarchy of the Church included little authority. She remained a member of the congregation, faithful in prayer and loyal to the group of Christians in the community.

Although in worship women were on equal ground with men individually, there was a certain propriety to be followed in services. Except for the non-canonical Apocryphal Acts and a very few women in the New Testament, women were prohibited from holding pastoral offices and performing priestly duties. This was not a repressive action against women, because women did not expect to be in leadership positions ~~above~~ men. The Apocryphal Acts did, however, imply that there was a conflict emerging in some Christian communities over the position of women.

Although most of the positions held by women were either unofficial ones and those ministering to the community, women were given some specific positions in the Church. There were instructions given to widows, to wives, and to women who prophesied. The positions of women were still subordinate to men and brought with them little authority. This subordination was absolutely necessary, even if a woman were one of the exceptional women of the New Testament who functioned in a position of authority.

According to the New Testament, several women were given authority in the Church under certain circumstances; but these were practical exceptions. The Church did not teach that such positions were open to women. The one section of early Christian literature that advocated an authoritative role for women, the Apocryphal Acts, were declared not to be orthodox and thereby were deleted from the Christian teachings from that time on.

The positions that concern this paper are those in which men and women can be compared as leaders in the Church. The positions in question are those listed in Ephesians 4:11 :

Apostles--those men divinely sent and commissioned
to represent Christ.
Prophets--inspired messengers
Evangelists--one who proclaims good news
Pastors--shepherds (of the flock of Christians)
Teachers

In the New Testament text women can be found who filled each of these positions, except as an Apostle. Jack Hayford wrote that this was consistent with the spiritual hierarchy commanded by Paul. Women were, because of the curse given at the Fall of mankind, put in a subordinate position. (Gen. 3:16) Therefore, in any form of ministry

a woman had to have a male overseer. Apostles had no such overseers, but the other offices did. It was the Curse to which Paul attributed his views on women. (I Tim. 2:13, 14)

Jesus provided the example of no female Apostles in that he did not designate one in his lifetime on earth. But an example of a prophetess in the New Testament was Anna, who lived at the Temple in Jerusalem and who saw Jesus when he had been brought there as an infant by Mary and Joseph. (Lk. 2:36-38) Later in the development of the Church Acts speaks of Phillip's four daughters who were known to prophecy. (Acts 21: 8, 9) Peter's declaration at Pentecost was that the Christian Church was the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy:

Your sons and daughters shall prophecy . . .
Even on my servants, both men and women, I will
pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will
prophecy. (Joel 2:28, 29)

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church instructing women who prophesied to be veiled; (I Cor. 11:5, 6) therefore there must have been women prophesying there, in ^{the} Corinthian church. Other prophetesses were mentioned in the Acts of Paul, so prophetesses must have functioned in the early churches. (Gryson, p. 15)

Since evangelists were those who "spread the good news," then women of all kinds were evangelists. The Samaritan woman beside the well told her townspeople about the Messiah who she had seen. (Jn. 4:39-41) Women also talked to their families and friends and thereby many were converted to Christianity. The many martyrs usually preached before they died. All of these were evangelists.

That women were sometimes pastors was evident from I Corinthians 1:11. (JWH) Chloe was the "shepherd" of the church that met in her home.

Local assemblies were often referred to as "houses," and the possessive expression "of" someone, indicated not so much who owned the building as who was overseer of that segment of the Church universal. (JWH)

There are other examples of this type of referral of "'the house of Stephanus' (I Cor. 16:15) and the 'church in his (Nympha's) house' (Col. 4:15)." (ibid.,) Chloe was an exception, not by any means the rule of Christian teaching, and Hayford felt she showed that she was under Paul's authority by letting him know about the problems in her congregation.

There were also many female teachers. Priscilla was the most obvious. (Acts 18:26) She and her husband Aquila taught Apollos, a very influential teacher himself of the Gospel message. Because Priscilla was often mentioned before Aquila, many scholars think that she was the more dynamic of the two and had the greatest ministry; yet it is clear that she is married and under the submission of her husband during this time.

The interesting thing in all these cases was that the woman involved was always under the leadership of a man, whether he was an apostle or her husband. This bears out Hayford's interpretation.

Women, therefore, were not expected, nor encouraged, to become leaders. The fact that Jesus appointed no women among the twelve Apostles is to some, reason enough to keep women from leadership positions. However, when a woman did become a leader, she was always subordinate to a man. This was not true of cases in the Apocryphal Acts and was

another reason they could not be included in the orthodox Christian teachings. Most Church Fathers, especially Tertullian, denounced as heretical both the pagan and the heterodox sects which allowed women to be leaders. Even after he became a Montanist, of the sect which took its teaching from a prophetess, (Giord., SMF, p. 235) Tertullian still felt that women were not to have any priestly duties. He condemned the Acts of Paul and Thecla, and based his proof on the apparent contradiction of Paul's doctrine:

For how credible would it seem, that he who has not permitted a woman even to learn with over-boldness, should give a female the power of teaching and of baptizing! 'Let them be silent,' he says, 'and at home consult their own husbands.' (Ryrie, p. 120; On Baptism)

After he became a Montanist he further outlined restrictions of women:

It is not permitted to a woman to speak in church, nor yet to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to assume any office which belongs to a man, least of all the priesthood. (Morgan, p. 240; On the Veiling of Virgins, 9)

In the Apocryphal Acts, Thecla was called an Apostle. (Arnold, p. 332) Because the Acts of Paul and Thecla was declared non-canonical, it was not used as an example for orthodox teaching in the Church, though some people have tried to use it to make a case for the ordination of women.

Thekla became the type of the female Christian teacher, preacher, and baptiser; and her story was quoted as early as the second century as a justification of the right of women to teach and to baptise. (Ramsay, p. 375)

The Acts of Xanthippe portrayed women as being very intelligent, but they also observed the prohibition of female teachers. (S. Davies, pp 64-65) Therefore we see both strains of the early Christian thought: one advocating an equal place for women beside men in Church matters, the other observing the restrictions placed on women in this area, while at the same time portraying women as equally intelligent and pious to men.

It is possible that the Acts of Xanthippe is a re-working of the Acts of Paul to retain models of female excellence without wholly flying in the face of church authority. (S. Davies)

Restrictions were also placed on women in the congregation. Most of these have already been discussed, but here they are collected.

Scriptural

These formed the basis of orthodox teaching on women.

But I would have you to know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered dishonoreth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head; for that is even all one as if she were shaven. . . . For indeed a man ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. . . . Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither is the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. (I Cor. 11:3-12)

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (I Cor. 14:34, 35)

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over a man, but ~~to~~ to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (I Timothy 2:9-14)

Even so must their (bishops and deacons') wives be grave, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things. (I Tim. 3:11)

(Treat) the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. Honour widows that are widows indeed. . . . Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. . . . Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. (I Tim. 5:1-9)

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. (Titus, 2:3-5)

(The Zondervan Topical Bible, p. 1073)

These then, along with Jesus' examples, made up the bulk of teachings in the Church toward women. Summarized, women were to be orderly, modest, chaste, and respectable. In the church they were subordinate to men, and with very few exceptions, prevented from gaining positions of equal authority to men.

It cannot be said that women had no place in the ministry of the Church, because they were given specific roles in which men could not

participate. Some, by definition, would not include men, virgins and widows were examples. Other positions were more applicable to women than men: teachers of women to be good wives and mothers, (Titus 2:3-5) those who visited women's quarters where men would not be welcome or allowed. Still other women assisted the Apostles or allowed churches to meet in their homes. (Foster, 40-42) Lastly, a good wife was listed as a requirement for the offices of bishop and deacon. (I Tim. 3:2-12)

One office of the Church which developed was that of the widow. The qualifications for a widow were more than just having lost one's husband. Younger widows were not brought into this group for fear that they would remarry eventually.

Let not a widow be taken into the number under (60) years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. (I Tim. 5:9, 10)

The Jewish tradition and Jesus both taught that widows were to be cared for by the community. In the Christian Church widows eventually became an office with specific outlines, but this had not yet happened during the first three centuries. They ministered to the poor and the sick during this time, and supervised the younger women; but widows had no authority to speak in church or baptize, although they could prophecy if veiled. (Morgan, p. 126) The same status was true of virgins. Although they unofficially were the female order in the Church at that time, there were no official duties.

Continence became a problem in the first three centuries. Married women thought themselves to be more pious by abstaining from sexual

relations, whether their husbands agreed or not. Paul did not endorse this practice. (I Cor. 7:5) Continence is also the prominent trait in women of the Apocryphal Acts, again as a sign of piety. The general belief at that time was that abstinence was both means and proof of one's union with God. (Giord., p. 217)

St. Cyprian wrote De Habitu Virginum for young girls who had devoted themselves to Christ. Unlike Tertullian he did not think continence was required by God. It was instead a matter of choice, though a meritorious one. (Labriolle, p. 159) Eberhard Arnold wrote of the virginity common to many apostles and prophets of the early Church:

We must not confuse this soldier-like self-discipline of the Christians, the sole purpose of which was the eschatological task and fight, with the asceticism of later times, which was valued for its own sake. There was no striving for redemption through ascetic, religious exercises. It was purely and exclusively the concentration of all their powers on the prophetic proclamation of the coming Kingdom; it was the tempering of all their energies on the one object, the task at hand. (Arnold, p. 36)

Women's greatest official "offices" were as a teacher of women in the community and as a visitor to the sick. Another interesting aspect to the woman's "place" was the requirement of a bishop to "be the husband of one wife." (I Tim. 3:2) She was to be a woman "worthy of respect, not (a) malicious talker but temperate and trustworthy in everything." (I Tim. 3:11) The same was true for the requirements of a deacon. (I Tim. 3:12)

Women therefore did have a place in the hierarchy of the early Church, but it was one in which she was subordinate to her husband or some other male authority. They were not equal to men, but were very

important to the ministries of many men.

Women from the outset of Christianity have had a place in the faith. Initially they were in the crowds that followed Jesus, and they became one of the biggest influences of Christianity's spread throughout the Mediterranean area.

Christianity was a mixture of the three cultures from which it came: Greek, Roman and Jewish. It brought together ideas from all three, but most of its traditions came from the Jewish background. The attitude of protecting women in the Talmud was perpetuated in Christianity. But Christianity went beyond the Jewish tradition and welcomed women as active participants in the faith. Women knew that in Christianity they were seen as individuals by the Christian God. They did not necessarily see this as a position of equality to men, but it was more than the lack of regard for women most cultures had. The Apocryphal Acts bore out the fact that some women in the Church sought equality as ministers of the religion, as well as the spiritual equality. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28) According to Charles Ryrie "the meaning is: the spiritual privileges in the body of Christ equally to men and women." (Ryrie, p. 70) The Church Fathers were proud of Christian women and met the pagans' accusation with strong words to that effect. Celsus derided Christians for speaking to the humblest people of society: slaves, children and women. Origen wrote Against Celsus in reply to Celsus' writings against Christianity. Tatian addressed the lack of discrimination in the Christian community, as it seemed to be in the social context of his time,

Because we do not make any distinction in rank and outward appearance, or wealth and education, or age and sex, they (pagans) devise an accusation against us that we practice cannibalism and sexual perversion. (Address to the Greeks, Tatian; Arnold, p. 88)

Christian women were not considered to be men; but they were to have spiritual equality, when they prayed, when they received "spiritual gifts," (I Cor. 12:7-11) and when they died. Jesus told the people that there was no marriage in heaven, (Matt. 22:24-30) in which case women would not be subordinate to men, but equal.

Jack Hayford believes that since Eve was not named until after the (Gen. 3:20) Fall that perhaps God had originally intended men and women to be equal on earth. (JWH) It is known that as a result of the Fall, women were forever blamed in religions for breaking the union with God and therefore were put in a subordinate position to men. The dichotomy of equality and subordination was explained by Igino Giordani:

Woman enters Christian society endowed with equal rights with men because she enters it with a soul, and among souls there is so distinction of sex or class. But she enters it also with the distinctive nature of woman and so duties are imposed on her which are most suited to her nature. (SMJ, p. 191)

On earth the woman was given specific roles in Christian society. She was subordinate to her husband and men in the Church authority. She was equally able to participate in the community, as long as she remained chaste, submitted, and devoted to the Christian faith. As a wife and mother she was given respect; but as a rule, this was to be her ministry along with visiting the sick and the poor and other charitable acts. She was to have no place in the leadership of the body, and in the community

her place was to serve others and spread the Gospel by word and deed.

Christianity did not equate men and women, for the latter was subordinate to the former. However, Charles Thwing wrote about this relationship: "The subordinate position of woman does not mean she was inferior to (man), but only that each has a peculiar position in the universal economy." (Thwing, p. 285) The supposition that each person had a particular place in society was a part of ancient thinking. In Paul's illustration of the Church as a body, each member was no less important than any other.

Lastly, David Smith commented that woman

is subordinate to man, even as Christ is subordinate to God; and even as the Son has equal honor with the Father, so woman has equal honor with the man. (Smith, p. 285)

This described the teaching of the early Church on women: they were honored in their place beside men. Several Church Fathers boasted about Christian women; the Apocryphal Acts portrayed women as intelligent and pious, able to handle the jobs of men in Christian communities. Smith continued with the fact that a woman's honor lay in observing her role beside, not below, the man. (Smith, p. 285) This too was upheld by Scripture in the qualifications listed for bishops and deacons, and in the case of Priscilla and Aquila, for women often ministered beside their husbands.

The extent to which equality was taught in the first centuries of the Christian Church was that although a woman was to be subordinate to a man, her soul was equal to his and that in her submitted, not equal, position she was to be honored as a child of God and an equal heir to the covenant of Abraham, the promise for Christians as well as for Jews. (Ro. 11:11)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arnold, Eberhard. The Early Christians. Rifton, New York: Plough Publishing House, 1972.
- Ayerst, David, and Fisher, A. S. T. Records of Christianity. Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1971.
- Brittain, Alfred. Woman: In all ages and in all countries. Philadelphia: Rittenhouse Press, 1908. (vol. 2)
- Cohen, Abraham. Everyman's Talmud. London: The Temple Press, 1932.
- Daniel-Rops, Henri. Daily Life in the Time of Jesus. New York: Hawthorne Books Inc., 1962.
- Danielou, Jean. The Ministry of Women in the Early Church. London: The Faith Press, 1961.
- Davies, J. G. Daily Life of Early Christians. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1953.
- Davies, Stevan. The Revolt of the Widows. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980.
- Faulhaber, Michael Cardinal. Women of the Bible. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1955.
- Foster, John. After the Apostles. London SCM Press, Ltd., 1951.
- Fried, Jacob, ed. Jews and Divorce. New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1968.
- Giordani, Igino. The Social Message of Jesus. Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1943.
- Giordani, Igino. The Social Message of the Early Church Fathers. Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1944.
- Goodsell, Willystine. A History of Marriage and the Family. New York: Macmillan Co., 1934.
- Goodspeed, Edgar. Paul. Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1947.
- Goodspeed, Edgar, and Grant, Robert. A History of Early Christian Literature. Chicago: University Press, 1966.

- Grant, Robert M. Second-Century Christianity. London: Trustees of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1946.
- Gryson, Roger. The Ministry of Women in the Early Church. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1976.
- Harkness, Georgia Elma. Women in Church and Society. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972.
- Harnack, Adolf. The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972. (vol. 2)
- Hayford, Jack W. "On the Question of a Woman's Place in Church Leadership." Van Nuys, California: 1978.
- Holy Bible, New International Version. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978.
- James, M. R. The Apocryphal New Testament. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926.
- Justin, "The Second Apology of Justin for the Christians." Ante-Nicene Fathers, Robertson and Donaldson, eds.
- Katz, Mordecai. Protection of the Weak in the Talmud. New York: AMC Press Inc., 1966.
- Ketter, Peter. Christ and Womanhood. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952.
- Kidd, B. J. A History of the Church to A. D. 461. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1976. (vol. 1).
- Labroille, Pierre. The History and Literature of Christianity. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1925.
- Lebreton, Jules. The History of the Primitive Churches. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949.
- Lefkowitz, Mary, and Fant, Maureen. Women in Greece and Rome. Toronto: Samuel-Stevens, 1977.
- Leigh-Bennet, Ernest. Handbook of Early Christian Fathers. London: Williams and Norgate, 1972.
- Lightfoot, J. B. The Apostolic Fathers. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956.
- Mathews, Shailer. Jesus on Social Institutions. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.

- Morgan, James. The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1928.
- Origen. "Origen Against Celsus." Ante-Nicene Fathers. Roberts and Donaldson, eds.
- Orr, William, and Walther, James. Anchor Bible: I Corinthians. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1976.
- Prohl, Russell C. Woman in the Church. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957.
- Ramsay, William Mitchell. The Church in the Roman Empire Before A. D. 170. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893.
- Ryrie, Charles C. The Role of Women in the Church. Chicago: Moody Press, 1970.
- Sergio, Lisa. Jesus and Women. McClean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1975.
- Smith, David. The Life and Letters of St. Paul. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913.
- Tavard, George. Women in Christian Tradition. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1973.
- Tertullian, "To His Wife." Ante-Nicene Fathers. Roberts and Donaldson, eds., vol. IV.
- Thwing, Charles F. The Family: an historical and social study. Lothrop, Lee, Shepard Co., 1931.
- Viening, Edward, ed. The Zondervan Topical Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969.
- Wiles, Maurice, and Santer, Mark. Documents in Early Christian Thought. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Zeiller, Jacques. Christian Beginnings. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1960.