

**WOMEN BE SILENT – THE MINISTRY
OF WOMEN IN THE EVANGELICAL
CHURCH OF SOUTH AFRICA (ECSA)**

BY

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Thank You
May God richly bless you!
Devan Naidoo.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Iris Naidoo and to my sons Ryland Naidoo and Keegan Naidoo.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, is my own original work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Devan Naidoo
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ABSTRACT

There has been much discussion on the roles of men and women in the church today. One of the crucial questions being asked is whether women should be ordained as ministers. Many debates have been centered on the question, “Should women teach?” “Should women exercise authority with men?” “Are men and women equal?” These questions have been approached from different angles. In recent years many denominations have increased opportunities for women in ministry.

This thesis sets out to look at opportunities for women in ministry in the Evangelical Church of South Africa (ECSA). It is important to discover what Scripture says about the role of women in the church. The desire to be totally involved in ministry in the church has prompted women’s struggle for emancipation.

By looking at the culture and background of Indian women in South Africa we are able to ascertain some of the problems facing Indian women in ministry. In order to do this, Old Testament teachings, teachings of Jesus in the gospels and doctrinal teachings in the New Testament have been considered. Various views of those who have written on women in ministry have also been considered. This thesis is not an attempt to undermine the leadership of the ECSA, but rather it wishes to bring clarity on the issue of the ministry of women in the ECSA.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE NO.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	(i)
DEDICATION	(ii)
DECLARATION	(iii)
ABSTRACT	(iv)
CONTENTS	(v)

Chapter one (1)

The Problem and it's Background	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Hypothesis	3
1.3 Methodology	4

Chapter Two (2)

History of the ECSA	6
2.1 Historical Setting of the ECSA	6
2.2 Women's Ministry in the ECSA	11 ✓

Chapter Three (3)

The Influence of Culture on women in Ministry	14
3.1 Introduction	14
3.2 Culture and Background of Indian Women	18 } ✓

✓ Chapter Four (4)

The Changing Role of Women in Post-Modern Society and the Church	24
4.1 Women's Rights	24
4.2 The Response of the Church Towards Social Change Among Women	27

Chapter Five (5)	
The Biblical basis for Women's Ministry	32
5.1 Introduction	32
5.2 Power and Leadership	33
5.3 Principle of Biblical Interpretation	35
5.4 Biblical Evidence	36
5.4.1 Mary, mother of Jesus	41
5.4.2 Anna, the Prophetess	41
5.4.3 The Syro-Phoenician Woman	42
5.4.4 The Samaritan Woman	42
5.4.5 Jesus and the Sinful Woman	42
5.4.6 Other Women in the Ministry of Jesus	43
5.4.7 Mary and Martha	44
5.4.8 Jesus' Teaching and Treatment of Women	45
5.5 Extra Biblical Evidence (Mary Magdalene)	46
5.6 Women in the Early Church	54
5.7 Women who Worked with Paul	56
Chapter Six (6)	
Let Your Women Keep Silence	61
6.1 Introduction	61
6.2 Order in the Church	62
6.3 Teaching in the Church	65
6.4 Submission in the Church	68
Chapter Seven (7)	
Four Views	71
7.1 Egalitarian View	71
7.2 Traditional View	73
7.3 Plural Ministry View	76
7.4 Modified View	78

Chapter Eight (8)	
The Way Forward for the ECSA	81
8.1 Introduction	81
8.2 Changing Leadership Positions	81
8.3 Other Structures Which Need to be Broken	83
8.4 Changing Traditional Orientation in Women	84
8.5 Ordination of Women	85
8.6 Liberation of the ECSA from Sexism	86
Chapter Nine (9)	
9. Conclusion	88
Appendix A	89
10. Bibliography	90

Chapter 1

1. THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Changes in South Africa have brought a new awareness regarding the gender issue. As a result of this the church is looking at Scripture with clearer lenses with regard to the role of women in ministry. Not all Christians agree that women should be allowed to hold positions of leadership, teach or become ordained ministers (Lees 1984:11). In many denominations women have been sidelined and told to keep silent. If women are to keep silent in the church how then can they make the gospel relevant to those who have not accepted Christ? This would become a difficult task. As Christians take this task seriously they are faced with the problem associated with giving women a more prominent place in society. Among Evangelicals the debate over the role of women usually focuses on whether they should be ordained as ministers in the ministry. This is only one of the issues that my denomination, the Evangelical Church in South Africa (ECSA), is struggling with. Over the last year it has become my desire to investigate the ministerial role of women in the ECSA. I believe that change is inevitable and I hope that this research will help bring about some clarity on the gender issue and the role of women in the ECSA.

The division over the proper relationship between men and women, and over the role of women in Christian ministry, is one of the deepest in the church today.

In the church today men and women are called to be working side by side with each other. One of the ways that they can do this is to become involved in pastoral work in collaborative ministry. It is a matter of urgent practical importance that we work side

by side with each other so that we can know who we are as men and women before God. Life in the early church demonstrated that there was no difference between men and women in their status as believers. The apostle Paul acknowledged that at times women showed more prominence as teachers than some of their male counterparts (Acts 18:2, 26; Romans 16:3-4; 2 Timothy 4:19). Many women worked with him and used their spiritual gifts in a variety of ministries. There is nothing in the New Testament ideals and practice of ministry, which should exclude women from becoming involved in ministry, but rather many features that endorse and encourage the participation of women in ministry, e.g. teaching (Acts 18:2, 26; Romans 16:3-4; 2 Timothy 4:19), using their spiritual gifts (Acts 16:13-15), serving as deacons (1 Timothy 3:8, 11). The churches today are facing profound challenges that cannot be ignored. What Wamue (1997: 55) says brings clarity to the matter. She points out the following:

Such questions are forcing the church to rethink and re-evaluate its attitudes towards women's participation in the church activities. The most significant is women's participation in church ministry. Much as the church is addressing itself to the question, only a minimal development has so far been achieved.

One of the challenges facing the church is that the church becomes more *community* orientated. How can the church teach the acceptability of men and women before God, and continue to discriminate against women in their own ministry and organization? Clouse (1989: 10-11) argues that,

On the one hand, women were put on a pedestal and adored as similar to the Virgin Mary, but on the other, they were viewed as scheming descendants of Eve, who would lead men astray with the sins of the flesh.

Wamue contends further that the church has excluded women from leadership roles because it has used 'twisted, religious doctrines' against women and it is these doctrines that have kept women silent in the church. Denying women the opportunity

to be in *leadership* is an infringement of their rights as human beings and as Christians. Infringing on their rights is oppression. Moltman-Wendel and Moltman (1991: 4) have the following to say about oppression:

Of course oppression has two sides: the master on one, the slave on the other; here the man rules and there the woman who serves. Oppression destroys humanity on both sides: the oppressed are robbed of their humanity and the oppressors become inhuman.

Women make up a larger percentage than men in the denomination, yet they are being oppressed and restricted from making full use of their potential by the male dominated leadership. The value of this is that women can complement the ministry. Ministry is all about service rather than domination (Wamue 1997:61).

For this reason the male dominated leadership should be mandated to re-examine their leadership over women by educating and training the church community that women are human beings that have been created in God's image.

1.2 Hypothesis

Many women believe that they can become effective leaders in society and in the church. A general survey (see Appendix A) taken at a ladies meeting, among a group of twenty women in my church has shown that fourteen voted in favour of women being in a position of leadership, thirteen voted in favour of women being ordained and sixteen voted in favour of women teaching and preaching in the church. Obviously not all women will be in favour of women being in a position of leadership, teaching or being ordained but the majority of women want to see women lead, teach and preach and become ordained ministers.

What this tells us then, is that women want to see change but feel they do not have a voice in the church. Many women have the potential to bring different qualities and

abilities to leadership roles. They definitely have different skills to offer and they have clear vision of what they are called to offer. In the ECSA women are restricted from using their full potential as leaders and are often sidelined into minor roles by the male dominated leadership.

The following problems/issues are to be investigated:

What does Scripture teach about women's calling in ministry?

Should women be allowed to teach, preach and become leaders in the ECSA?

Should women be ordained as ministers in the ECSA?

1.3 Methodology

There are wide areas of ministry, which Scripture recognizes as equally open to women. An overview of the problem/issues will be provided and then show that women should be given the opportunity to become leaders and be ordained as ministers in the ECSA. In this research the following sources were used to collect data.

1.3.1 Interviews

Many women who have been placed into a position of leadership or ordained into the ministry have encountered rejection from their male counterparts. In other instances women have had pleasant experiences. The two interviews conducted in this research tells us of that experience. Two women in the Anglican church were interviewed and both have had different experiences.

1.3.2 Surveys

Two surveys were conducted in this research. One amongst 20 women in the church that I serve and one amongst 4 women who have completed their

theological education. These surveys show that women are keen on being involved in leadership and being ordained as ministers in the denomination.

1.3.3 Literature

Research by way of books, journals and periodicals formed the major part of this dissertation. Scripture was also used to argue problems and issues discussed in this project. The cause of many problems and issues facing women in the church stem from poor Biblical interpretations. This research will try to address this issue.

Chapter 2

2. HISTORY OF THE ECSA

2.1 Historical Setting of the ECSA

Mahatma Gandhi had the following to say about the man who founded the South African General Mission (SAGM). In his autobiography, he says, “When I was in Durban, Mr. Walton, head of the South African General Mission (SAGM) found me out. I almost became a member of his family. Mr. Walton had a manner all of his own. I do not recollect his ever having invited me to embrace Christianity, but he placed his life as an open book before me and let me watch all of his movements. I liked Mr. and Mrs. Walton’s humility, perseverance, and devotion to work and we met very frequently. This friendship kept alive my interest in religion” (Francis 1979: 2).

The humble beginnings of the **Evangelical Church in South Africa (ECSA)** began in 1882 when Rev. Dr. Andrew Murray met Mr. William Spencer Walton at the Keswick Convention in England and invited him to come to South Africa. William Spencer Walton felt led by God and seized the opportunity to come to South Africa to bring the gospel message. During his time as a missionary some 500 people professed their faith in the Lord Jesus in a short space of four months. Prior to him returning to England it was felt that he should remain in South Africa and after much deliberation it was decided that a mission organization be formed. It would be called the Cape General Mission. William Walton was elected its first director whilst Rev. Dr. Andrew Murray was elected president. After the establishment of the Cape General Mission, William Spencer Walton returned to England to recruit

missionaries. In 1889 he returned to South Africa with a pioneer party of five young missionaries (Francis 1979:2).

In the meantime another mission was organized in the Natal Province which was called the **Southeast Africa Evangelistic Mission** with its headquarters in Durban. The mission began to grow throughout Natal and Zululand, and the need was felt for a proper organization, but there was reluctance to continue independently. The Cape General Mission was approached with a view to amalgamation. After lengthy discussions both mission organizations were amalgamated and the name was changed to **South African General Mission (SAGM)**. The following announcement appeared in the magazine of the Cape General Mission:

After much prayerful conference, the English Council has at length arranged to amalgamate our Cape General Mission with the Southeast Africa Evangelistic Mission, under Mr. and Mrs. Osborn-Howe of Natal. The two missions will henceforth bear the one name of the South African General Mission, but it's plans and methods will be the same, having the same president, the Rev. Andrew Murray; the same director, Mr. Spencer Walton; and the same official organ, the South African Pioneer (Francis 1979:4).

William Spencer Walton took up residence in Durban, Natal shortly afterwards and in 1896 decided to commence mission work amongst the Indians who arrived from India in 1860. Two woman missionaries offered to work with the Indians, Miss M. Day and Miss E. Hargreaves. As many of the Indians were living in the barracks in Durban, Miss Day and Miss Hargreaves went to the barracks each Sunday morning to hold meetings with the Indians. Much of their teaching and preaching was done through interpretation, as they were not fluent in Tamil although they were in the process of learning the language. In 1898 these two women were able to bring the gospel to other Indians living in Phoenix about 18 kilometers from Durban. They were allocated the use of a house, and a chapel that could be used as a school. They

took the opportunity to open a school and named the school **Hope Mission Station**. Between fifty and sixty boys attended the school. This continued for about eighteen months, when Miss Hargreaves was called back home due to the death of a family member. She returned to England in 1900. Miss Day felt that she could not manage on her own and resigned from the mission (Francis 1979:4).

Two other women, Miss P. Brown and Miss C. Harris, who arrived from Swaziland, took over the work at Hope Mission Station until help could be found. Although they found some difficulty with the language they continued to teach at the school. When the time had arrived for them to return to Swaziland Mr. J.L. Roberts, an Indian believer, and his mother took over the work. In addition to the day-school they established a Sunday school. Mrs. Robert assisted with the visitation. In the same year a church for Indians was started in Point Road, Durban among the Telegu Baptists from India. Meetings were held in the barracks of the African Boating Company and both day and night schools were established. A few women taught at the school.

Early in 1901 a young man walked into the office of Mr. William Walton with a letter addressed to Rev. Dr. Andrew Murray. Walton soon found out that the man was Nelson Tomlinson who had come from Australia, but had been born in India and that he knew the Telegu language well. Tomlinson was the perfect answer to prayer for a missionary among the Indians in Natal. Tomlinson turned down the offer stating that he had not come to work among the Indians but among the Black people of South Africa. A few days later Tomlinson was invited to interpret for another missionary at the Point barracks. He accepted the offer and at that meeting many people were so moved to hear a white person speaking their language that they wanted him to come

back and minister to them. In 1902 Tomlinson returned to Australia to bring his fiancée to South Africa. They returned to South Africa a few months later and were married in Durban (Francis 1979:10).

In 1903 John Rangiah was sent out to South Africa as a missionary of the Indian Church of the American Baptist Telegu Mission. Incidentally both Rangiah and Tomlinson were from the same town in India and they were glad to get together and serve as missionaries in South Africa. In 1904 Tomlinson joined the SAGM as a full time missionary to the Indian people in South Africa. He served the ministry for forty-five years until his retirement in 1949. Soon after joining the mission Tomlinson and his wife were sent to Phoenix but after a short time of service returned to Durban as Miss Hargreaves had returned from England to take up her position at the school in Phoenix (Hope Mission Station). In 1904 Hargreaves married Hamilton Burns who was also a missionary and they became associate workers of the Mission (Francis 1979:10).

In 1907 Tomlinson attended a convention in Port Shepstone and while there he ascertained that many of the Indians working on the sugar estates had never heard the gospel of Christ. He prayed that God would open a way for witness along the South Coast. As a result of a visit to the sugar estate near Port Shepstone permission was obtained to place an evangelist and in April of 1909 the first evangelist John Thirapillay commenced ministering the gospel in Port Shepstone. On the 1 July 1910 Tomlinson moved to Umzinto as he had the desire to plant churches along the South Coast. Not long after his arrival in Umzinto, Tomlinson acquired a piece of land in Esperanza. The first Indian church of the SAGM was built at Esperanza. After

-serving a year at Port Shepstone John Thirapillay moved to Esperanza to help Tomlinson with the work there. In the years that followed many churches were established in Port Shepstone, Beneva, Illovo and Sezela (Francis 1979:11).

In 1927 Miss B.L. Holford arrived from England to work among the Indians in Sezela. She taught Scripture lessons at the Missions school and visited the women in different centres. She was very instrumental in organizing open airs in which she played her small organ. Two other women missionaries, Miss H Wilkenson and Miss H. North arrived in South Africa and worked with members at Park Rynie. Both missionaries established a Bible School for Indian workers where they conducted Bible studies. Another woman worth mentioning is Faith Josiah, wife of M. Josiah who was the elder of the church at Renishaw. Faith became a Bible teacher in Merebank, Durban during the early 60's. Edith Stephen, wife of Elder John Stephen (former president of the ECSA), was an interpreter at the Sunday morning services and outreach works in Port Shepstone (Francis 1979:17).

In 1937 Nora Tomlinson, daughter of Nelson Tomlinson, established a school in Park Rynie. It was named after the theological college attended by Tomlinson and was called Angus Protestant School.

In September of 1949 several missionaries arrived from England and U.S.A. Most of them were women missionaries, just to name a few, Miss B. Loveday, Miss I. Quick, Miss E. Iles. Many of them were instrumental in establishing churches in other towns such as Pietermaritzburg, Ladysmith, Newcastle, Lenasia and Johannesburg (Francis 1979: 18).

The annual conference established in 1921 at Esperenza by Tomlinson continued to function and took more and more decisions in regard to the Indian church. In 1951 the missionaries ceased to serve as officers of the conference, with a view to allowing the church to be controlled by Indian believers. During May 1966 complete autonomy, including the right to own all property, was accorded to the "Indian church" by the South African General Mission (SAGM). As there were about ten churches established, a denomination was formed which called itself "The Evangelical Church in South Africa" (ECSA) (Francis 1979:18).

Schools as well as churches were very much in the mind of the early missionaries. In addition to the first school established at Hope Mission Station, other schools were established at Illovo, Renishaw, Park Rynie, Esperenza, Beneva, Batstone, and Marburg (Francis 1979:17).

2.2 Women's Ministry in the ECSA

Women's involvement in the ECSA has been transformed from an active participation to a passive participation. Women form an integral part of ministry in the ECSA. As mentioned earlier there is a larger percentage of women than men in the denomination. The history of the ECSA shows that women were very instrumental in establishing Bible schools and Mission schools yet women are no longer involved in ministry except that they teach Sunday school and lead the Ladies group. Many of the early women missionaries taught men and women from the Scriptures. They organized open-air meetings and also led in worship. The role of women has altered to such an extent that they are not allowed to participate in the decision making of the churches. What is the reason for this? The ECSA says that women should remain

silent in the church (Article 4.5 of the Constitution of the ECSA). This article says that women cannot participate in roles of leadership but they should be considered as lady workers. This is contradictory to the manner in which the church started off. The very fact that white women missionaries were allowed to teach Indian men and women goes against the grain of what the ECSA stands for at this present time. It would appear then that only "white" women are allowed to teach men and women. The same Scripture that was taught to Indian men and women has left an indelible impression of oppression and prejudice in the minds and hearts of men and women in the ECSA. As much as South African culture has been responsible for the oppression of women I also believe that Indian people were taught that women must remain silent in the church. It stands to reason that those who did not know the Scripture learned from those who taught them.

I have the utmost respect for missionaries because had it not been for them I myself would probably not have been a Christian. It was the missionaries that taught the Scriptures to most of the Indian people. The point that needs to be made here is that women missionaries were allowed to teach, preach and lead but they themselves taught that women should remain silent in church. One of the reasons put forward for this is that there was a shortage of men and until the men were trained they had no alternative but to teach men and women. What happened after men were trained? White women missionaries did not stop teaching.

The fact of the matter is that Indian women were taught by the church that they should remain silent and that their place was in the home and they had to be in submission to their husbands. It has always been a known fact that women should remain silent in

the church. Women have had no voice in the church. I have been in this denomination for thirteen years and I substantiate this argument by the knowledge I have. The teaching remains the same. Women are to remain silent in the church. Until recently women were not even allowed to pray in church. Women have never been allowed to take an active part in the leadership. White women missionaries on the other hand could teach, preach and lead. This is blatant discrimination against Indian women. If women were teaching, preaching and leading, why aren't they allowed to do so now? Perhaps it is time the denomination looked at Scripture again and base their decision on not what was taught then but what is being taught in the different denominations now. This research will look at constitutional and Biblical issues affecting women's ministry, in order that some clarity can be brought to this matter in the ECSA.

Chapter 3

3. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY

3.1 Introduction:

The feelings of feminists all over the world is that they see the Scriptures as keeping women in submission and preventing them from being emancipated. This is confirmed by Elizabeth Moltman-Wendel (1987: 9) who says, “through its patriarchal nature the Bible has been used to keep women under control.” The grievance among feminists is that the world is androcentric in nature.

Women are being denied the opportunity to realize their full potential because of discrimination of their sex (Fiorenza 1985:10). Women feel that they are no more than sex objects and from their early years they are made aware of their subservient roles and inferiority. Feminism, however, demands that women should be treated with respect, and that attitudes towards their inferiority should change (Nchabeleng 2000:72).

South African Indian women are in the process of rediscovering and redefining themselves within a society that has been constructed in the past through oppressive influences such as androcentrism or male domination, racism, capitalism, religious bigotry and ethnocentrism (Nchabeleng 2000: 95). Authority within the church can be a very contentious issue as it generally rests with the male. In the ECSA the male has always occupied positions of authority. This is done by theologically justifying the differences between men and women. Certain qualities like meekness, humility and

submissiveness are attributed to women but Furlong says that these qualities can also be found in men (Furlong 1991:7).

This process of rediscovering and redefining themselves as women is an important move towards reconciliation and respecting human dignity. But how do women themselves find common ground with oppression still deeply grounded in their experience? How can women themselves fight the common enemy of sexism if they themselves are still divided as a result of androcentrism and racism? What relevant tools can be used which are free from the historic ideology of 'divide and rule' and free of suspicion of women of colour?

Since the first democratic elections in South Africa, and the exciting new beginnings of our fledging democracy, women have seen many changes in their lives. One of the significant happenings has been the incredible new space that has opened up for structures and projects that focus on the welfare of women. In a host of areas, women's concerns are being raised, and the government as well as the non-governmental organizations are devoting their energies to the welfare of women. Women's voices are being raised during parliamentary hearings on a number of issues. What this says is that, women are making their mark in many areas of influence in society (Mdhlela 2000: 7).

However, in spite of the many initiatives by and for women in South Africa, women have not reached the 'promised land'. According to Kretzschmar (1990:124) personal liberation and empowerment must be developed in order to attain social transformation. Patriarchal structures and attitudes must be dismantled and discarded if social transformation and change is to take place. The government, along with economic sectors, churches and women's leagues must join forces to fight oppression,

suffering, abuse and marginalization of women in South Africa. In many aspects of our day to day living, the experiences of women demand transformation and change. This is also true in the light of the Church.

Women students of the Moravian Seminary in Heideveld met in 1997 to discuss the issues and challenges facing them as women studying theology in South Africa today, and expressed some of their thoughts. Coming from different backgrounds and denominational churches, they felt affirmed by the Spirit of Christ to serve as ordained Ministers. They openly expressed their pain at not being fully supported by those around them. They believed that women lacked confidence and assertiveness and needed to see themselves reflecting the full image of God. Chaves (1997: 94) writes write the following:

A women affirmative theological movement is certainly needed in our country. The movement needs to focus on a theology that does not only hover in the lecture rooms of Universities, but also *reaches our grassroots women.*

Women's theology in South Africa today needs to focus its critique on the background and culture that continues to keep women in a subordinate position. In order to do this it is essential that women understand how social systems operate and the role they play in oppressing women. Any critique thus needs to include economic, social, political, religious and cultural analysis.

However, this is not enough – women also need to look within themselves. They need to ask questions such as: “are we willing to support the cause of other women who are involved in the struggle to emancipate ourselves, even if we do not necessarily agree with the approach?” Too often women fail to question the extent to which they promote their own and one another's oppression (Wamue 1997:61).

Are Indian women afraid to ask why things are the way they are? Are Indian women always satisfied with the way things are around them? In terms of ministry and leadership roles, women are quite satisfied at being where they are. This satisfaction has come as a result of being dominated by their male counter parts. I am in agreement with Wamue (1997: 61) who says, “the first step toward achieving these goals must be taken by women. Women must strive to liberate the church from male domination.” Indian women in the ECSA need to speak out and question the way things are at the present moment. It is time for Indian women in the ECSA to ensure that their voices are heard.

In this thesis, I wish to look at the aspect of The Ministry of Women. Scholars, students and theologians have done much work in this area and I realize that this is quite an exhausted area. However, I wish to focus on a different aspect of this issue. My aim is to look specifically at the role of Indian women in the Church, with a special focus on my Church denomination (ECSA). I would also like to look at the way Indian culture has influenced or played a role in leadership positions. Over the years Indian women have been to some extent influenced by western culture. I think that this is amazing as well as challenging. Indian women of South Africa have a specific role to play not only in our country, but also in each of our Churches. I have chosen to look into this area, since not much work has been done in terms of “Indian Women” in Ministry.

I would like to look through the lenses of culture and background of Indian women, since they are the main aspects that affect and contribute to, as well as influence the role of Indian women in ministry. To fully understand this view and way of thinking,

it is necessary for us to understand the experiences and the cultural background of the Indian community in South Africa. We need to follow their journey through the events of time, and understand where they come from.

3.2 Culture and Background of the Indian Woman

The anthropologist Peter Schineller (1990: 45) describes theology as being a “critical reflection on one’s faith, or in a traditional formulation, as faith seeking understanding.” He goes on to point out that one’s faith is influenced by one’s culture; the same is true of theology. Theological understandings therefore have an impact on culture and are affected by culture.

In order to determine whether this has in any way influenced theological understandings it is important to look at Indian culture and its background.

South African Indians have their roots in India. They were brought to South Africa to work on the sugar cane farms as indentured labourers. Although they had to adapt to an African context, which was widely influenced by Western thinking, much of their culture was passed on from generation to generation. If one has to take into consideration the role and status of Indian women we find that Indian society has all along been a male dominated society. The woman’s place has been primarily confined to the home, her role limited to procreation, upbringing of children, and catering for the needs of her husband. She was seen as man’s possession, as part of his property (Robinson 1999: 115-116)). The traditional Indian Society has looked upon women as perpetually dependent on males. Women had to be under the protection of men and consequently guided by them. They were often seen as

inferior, objects of use, abuse and exploitation (Kumari 1999:3). They were often handled as personal property. I doubt whether there has ever been a period when the Indian woman enjoyed equal status with men. Indian women have suffered great hardship. The typical Indian woman is told, whether overtly or covertly, that she is only a true Indian woman (bharatyā nari) when she toils and suffers in silence, putting her husband first, children second, and herself last (Franklin 1985: 49). If a husband died his wife also had to give up her life (Kumari 1999:3). She was cremated with him. Although women of all societies have endured great hardship, no other woman could surpass the inequity of the treatment of Indian women. The birth of a female is considered to be a family misfortune. If a male was born his birth was hailed as a joy. Phoebe Swart-Russell (1988: 311) argues that this provides the groundwork for consequent oppression of women,

The polarization and definition of men and women as superior and inferior has resulted in men being regarded as normative humanity, and in being far more highly valued in society than women. Thus, baby boys have generally been preferred to girl babies, and a woman bearing a son has received a higher social status than a woman bearing a daughter.

Boys are seen as an asset to the family as he would be the one to care for his family in their old age and who would also carry the family name for generations to come.

Katti Padma Rao (1999: 19) points to this fact when he says,

There were many references to the desire for male children in the Vedas. But none at all about female children in the Rig-Veda. Bearing sons was equated with the fulfillment of womanhood in those days. A prayer to the god of fire was to save the householder from the plight of 'sonlessness'.

The female on the other hand was seen as someone who would not contribute to the status of the family and was regarded as a liability. For this reason she was induced into house keeping and child-care roles early in life. As she grew older she was expected to be a model for younger siblings under her care. She frequently assumed

the role of small mother (choti-ma) (Larbeer 1999:88). She must help with the cooking and serve male members first. As Navamani Peter (1999: 168) says, “She becomes a second mother to her family.” She has to marry at the tender age 14 or 15 and begins to bear children and take care of them. She lives to serve her husband, children and in-laws until her death.

During her life span the Indian woman constantly assumed the role of disciplined daughter, submissive wife and daughter-in-law and a sacrificing mother. One might suggest that her role of submissive daughter-in-law is perhaps the most difficult, calling for adjustment to unfamiliar expectations of a new ‘extended’ family. Although many modern Indian couples don’t live with their in-laws South African Indian woman have become entangled in the web of the extended family. When a woman marries her husband she also marries his family. Indians are very family orientated, family being the most important thing. This also applies to Indian Christians. In India the husband is to be treated like a god. The wife must be devoted to him no matter who he is whether he is a person of low or high caste (Robinson 1999:116). According to Jain (1976: 51), the Rig Vedas VIII, 31, 5-9 (Holy Scripture of Hindus) say, “a woman must do whatever her husbands asks her to do whether in accordance to Dharma or opposed to it.” Dharma is a way of life for Indians and submission to her husband is a way of life for the Indian woman. Submission therefore plays a major role in the eyes of the Indian community.

This background would perhaps help us understand the influence Indian culture has had on Indian women in ministry and leadership and how our culture has influenced and impacted the role of women in the church. In view of what Schineller (1990:45) says, “culture influences our theological understanding,” I have come to the following

conclusion. Indian culture has greatly influenced our theological understanding in terms of the role of women in ministry. The Indian women's duty is submission to her husband - she is to be led by her husband. For her to be the leader has raised many questions. Those Indian women who are in a leadership position in other denominations have definitely encountered rejection from the male dominated leadership, and so has been the experience of many other women in ministry.

During an interview conducted recently with May Laban, an Indian Anglican Priest, I was informed that prior to 1992 no women were allowed to be ordained as priests. The first vote to ordain women was taken in 1990 but the Diocese of Natal voted against the ordination. It was a blow for those who wanted to see women being ordained. Despite the failure it experienced, *The Movement for the Ordination of Women* (MOW) continued to push for the ordination of women and in August 1992 a second vote was held. After serious debate it was decided that women should be ordained as priests. In 1992 May Laban was ordained as a deacon and three years later she was ordained a priest. Although she has been in ministry for approximately ten years she has found that male domination still seems prevalent in the Anglican Churches. She asserts that her male counterparts still treat her as a woman and not as an equal. One thing that is evident in her vocation is that she has to work ten times harder than her male counterparts. She feels that the reason for this that she is a woman. She has no problem with that because she is happy in what God has called her to do.

In my interview with Beryl Arrikum who was recently appointed a deacon of the Anglican Church in Imbali, Pietermaritzburg, I ascertained that being ordained as

deacon was one of the most exciting moments of her life. The priest, in the parish where she serves, treats her with the utmost respect and they work very closely together. She has been given equal opportunities to perform all the priestly functions and she has not encountered any problems with other members of the clergy or members of the congregation. She is extremely happy in her new vocation. These two examples convey that there are men who are willing to embrace women in positions of leadership whilst others see women as a threat to their leadership positions.

In the secular world we find that the scenario is completely different. There are many women who are powerful leaders and ministers. The countries of India, Britain, Israel and the Philippines have had women ministers. The speaker in parliament in our own country is an Indian woman. Pakistan, Bangladesh and Ceylon presently have Prime ministers who are women (Senavoe 1997a: 79). We are supposed to be setting an example in terms of equality in the church. We cannot preach equality when men and women are divided about an issue like women's ministry.

There are a number of women who attend a Theological Institute or some Bible Seminary, who would not apply or pursue being ordained. The number of ordained Indian women in South Africa is very limited. Women are not content with serving as missionaries, ladies leader, or Sunday schoolteacher or similar post the church may offer them. The reason for this is that they have been "forced" into these positions because they have the desire to serve God as best they can. A recent survey carried out at my local church (see chapter one) has proved that women are not content with serving in the positions that they are presently assigned to. They have indicated the

desire to serve in leadership positions. Many of the Indian women who go to a Theological Institution end up serving as missionaries, ladies group leader or Sunday schoolteacher in the ECSA. There seems to be a constant reminder of this role of submission, acceptance, and duty that they need to fulfill.

There are lots of Indian cultural practices that need to be reconstructed and to be made meaningful if we as Indians are to maintain our important cultural heritage that is relevant to our present society. I feel that androcentrism and discrimination against women must be removed, since we believe that God is the creator of all people. If we are to discriminate against and deprive women of their God-given status then we have not set the example that God has set for us in his Word. I agree with Mpumlwana (1991:166) who says that it is very un-African to regard women as not being nation builders. We must keep in mind that women are builders and mentors of this nation. They are not only co-workers and partners with God in the creation process but also co-workers and partners building in the kingdom of God. For this reason I believe that the Indian woman has much to offer in terms of her leadership skills in the ECSA.

It is quite clear that Indian women, especially women in the ECSA, need to be released from this past, so that they can find themselves and realize their place that God has called them to be in. Once Indian women in the ECSA become more liberated in their thinking, living and worldview, it could help Indian men see and accept them for who they really are and for the strength they possess.

Chapter 4

4. THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN POST-MODERN SOCIETY AND THE CHURCH

4.1 Women's Rights

Before looking at the response of the church toward the social change of women in South Africa, we must understand that there have been a number of issues that have influenced social change among women. One of the most important changes is the stance government has taken toward the injustices carried out against women. What is the present day government saying or doing in order to improve the status of women in our country? The struggle has indeed been a long and a hard one for women all over Africa. However, I believe that in our South African context, this is in the process of change. Women's rights are protected with a Bill of Rights (Albertyn 1992: 20) which, in summary says the following :

- *Women have the right to be treated equally to men.
- *Women have the right to freedom, safety and dignity.
- *Women have the right to be healthy, and free from all forms of violence at home and in public.
- *No one has the right to treat women in a cruel way.
- *No one has the right to discriminate against women at home or at work.

In view of what the Bill of Rights says, we realize that women have rights, they have dignity, there should be no discrimination against them, they have an equal status to men, and they have a measure of freedom.

It is clear that the country is doing all it can to protect the rights of women. Our Government signed a world agreement to protect women's rights. This agreement is called **CEDAW**, (The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination

Against Women). Every few years the Government must show the United Nations what they are doing to improve things for women in South Africa.

During a recent conference in Beijing, China, an agreement was made to promote and protect the rights of all women. The government has also signed the SADC, (Southern African Development Community) Declaration with other countries in Southern Africa to end violence against women.

President Thabo Mbeki (1999: 2 -3) delivered his first speech in Parliament on 25 June 1999. South Africa's new president recommitted Government to build a caring society that will *guarantee the dignity of every citizen* (italics mine).

He says the following:

We are at the dawn of a new life. We are building a caring society, which must guarantee the dignity of every citizen on the basis of a good quality of life for every woman, man and child, without regard to race, or colour or disability.

Going a little further, this is what the president had to say about improving the Status of Women in this country.

The office on the Status of Women will present a gender audit to the Government by September, to enable us to evaluate progress in implementing our plan of action on gender. This will enable us to make whatever decisions are necessary to ensure we continue to focus on the vital question of development and emancipation of women and continue to integrate this issue into all government programmes. The advances in gender equity that we have made in Parliament and in the National Executive point to the need to adopt a similar approach with regard to all other centres of authority and power in our society.

These are indeed strong words, but I am convinced that these are not just vain words or flowery political statements. There have been signs clearly showing that the Government has worked out its Plan of Action and will do everything in its power to

ensure that the Status of Women in this Country is improved. It may not happen overnight as some of us would like, but the good news is that the wheel is in motion.

Government has called on *all other centres of authority and power in society* to adopt a similar approach that they have regarding advances in gender equity and improving the status of women in this country. This center of authority and power would certainly include the Church at large. The Church is said to be the largest ‘social institution’ in South Africa. According to recent census data provided by the Central Statistical Services, over 80% of the people in South Africa reported being Christian. (This information was available from Diakonia Council of Churches AIDS Programme). Many of us don’t hold firmly to what statistics say, but this is something for us to go by. It shows us that if ever there is a center of authority and power in society that could make a difference, it is the Church at large.

But a sad fact is that women in the churches have even greater problems in this regard. For years the debate regarding ordaining women, having women priests, the role of women in the church, and so on, has been continuing, and goes on until this day in many denominations. Government is now paving the way for women, while the church has become entangled in ongoing debates and discussions with regard to women’s ministry.

Feminist theology seeks to redress the inequalities that exist in a male dominated world. It is therefore necessary for women to be liberated from within the church so that they can do what they have been called to do.

In terms of our Indian context, most Christian women are willing to “*go with the flow*”. They are not bold enough to join in the struggle of emancipation and liberation

of women in church circles. Coming from an oppressive background and culture, they are afraid to speak out since it *“is not in keeping with our Indian Culture”* (italics mine) (Peter 1999:167). It is quite clear that women need to develop in many areas in order to become more relevant and effective in the South African Context. Despite all that the government is doing, South African women are still suffering subjection. According to Kretzschmar (1995:152) subjection simply means that women have been repressed and forced to suffer humiliation and hardship. Fathers, husbands, traditional and cultural laws, employers and government officials impose many of these hardships. In light of what has been discussed, how has the church responded to social change among women?

4.2 The Response of the Church Towards Social Change among Women

Over the last forty years many changes have taken place in the status and roles of women. In the secular world women are generally recognized as equal to men. Many Indian women are engaged in the same kind of work that men are involved in (Melanchthon 1999: 47-48). In our own country we are seeing more and more women being employed in the medical field, in law, commerce, government etc. There are many women in democratic societies who are able to vote, stand for elections to political office and this is true of our own government where a number of women are politicians (Senavoe 1997a: 79). Since our country became a democratic country many changes were made with regard to the status of women. Jerome Skolnick (1969: 19) stresses the fact that protest and policy change is essential in any democratic society. Today, in most, if not all, democratic societies it is accepted that nobody should be prevented from active participation in society simply because of race, colour, social class or sex.

From the late 1700's to the early 1900's women's rights were not taken seriously but this has since changed. Edwards (1989: 119) points out that,

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the spread of Marxism drastically affected women's status in Communist countries, where women are now officially recognized as equal with men, even if in practice they often have to fulfil traditional domestic responsibilities in addition to outside work.

This change came only as a result of racial and sexual equality being enshrined in international and national legislation. The same has happened to women in this country (Mdhlela 2000: 3).

Another contributing factor has been in the area of education where women are given the same opportunities as men to study further. Enormous efforts are being made in countries like Japan and Britain (Edwards 1989: 119) and South Africa to give men and women equal opportunities in industry, commerce, and education (Mdhela 2000: 3).

Prior to this many women were prohibited from educating themselves so that they could work. Many of them became financially dependent on their husbands for support. In fact those women who married had to stop working because it was said that they were neglecting their families and other responsibilities (Freeman 1975:20). As a result of this many women had to aspire to the role of devoted wife and mother. During the 1920's and the 1930's this role changed as many woman had to find work to supplement or provide total income for their families (Chafe 1977:32).

One of the reasons for this change was the modern feminist movement. Since the inception of the feminist movement there has been an upsurge of feminist thought, whereby feminists seek to raise public awareness about women's lives, emotions, and

ways of thought. Many feminists see men as wanting to usurp authority from them. They recognize that more female leadership is needed in this world in order for the world to be a better place (McHaffie 1986: 134-137).

It was soon after the Second World War that the church stepped in and encouraged women to return to their subordinate roles. The church said that it was the responsibility of women to bear and raise children and the responsibility of men to provide for their families (Chafe 1977: 22). In spite of the call by the church, women continued to work. Many women, however, began to broaden their view on the secular world in spite of strong opposition from the clergy. According to Chafe (1977: 24) there were strong drives for reform in church doctrine concerning the role and status of women in church. In other countries around the world there was a rising sensitivity to the plight of woman in which great strides were made (Massey 1990: 281). All over the world changes with regard to the social status of women are being felt. I believe that there needs to be a re-examination of values, beliefs and customs in order for us to prepare for and determine the course of women for the future. In India there is visible change in the status of women in all faiths (Massey 1990: 288). As we consider these developments we find that they have forced many churches to re-examine their positions concerning the status of women. The United Methodist church, Episcopal church, United Presbyterian church and many other churches have gone so far as to reexamine the status and approve the ordination of women (Massey 1990: 288-298).

Over the last decade women have been given unparalleled freedom (Senavoe 1997a: 79). Many women are involved in the area of science, economics, politics and

education and they have shown that they can be equal to men. Senavoe (1997a: 79) had the following to say about the opportunities of women in the world today:

It is becoming increasingly clear that as women are given opportunities in society their gifts are being manifested in various leadership positions in the fields of medicine, finance, industry, politics, education, law, engineering and elsewhere.

If women are given the opportunity they will make history. In 1860 Catherine Booth, founder of Salvation Army, made history when she fearlessly spoke of how the Holy Spirit had called her to share the gospel. This was the start to her preaching career. That same evening she was allowed to preach a sermon before members of the church she attended. Her husband recognized that women should be treated equally and hold positions of authority in the church and elsewhere (Edwards1989: 125)

In the ECSA however, women's status has been tremendously hindered. Every year women are graduating from Durban Bible College (ECSA) with degrees and diplomas in Theology but they have no place to make use of the education they have been given. A survey carried out in my denomination in the last year proved that four (4) women graduated with their degrees from the Durban Bible College. All four women were allowed to serve at various churches but as 'lady workers.' None of them were given a leadership position because women are not allowed to be in positions of leadership in the ECSA. In terms of Article 4.5 of the Constitution of the ECSA women cannot participate in any leadership role but they should be considered as lady workers. This, I believe is discrimination. As a member of the executive committee I had the opportunity to speak to these women. After having aspired to do their best, they have conveyed to me their desire to be in positions of leadership. It is demeaning to know that the very people that trained with you have been placed in positions of leadership yet you yourself have been robbed of that privilege.

What is the reason that the ECSA does not allow women to become involved in leadership? Is it because of what it believes in, that women are to keep silent? There are two sides to a story. The ECSA understands one issue and that is, that woman are to remain silent, they are not to be in a position of leadership and that they are not to be ordained. I would like to put forward, in the following chapters, the reasons for allowing women to be in positions of leadership. I would like to perhaps start by looking at the Biblical basis for women's ministry.

Chapter 5

5. THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR WOMEN'S MINISTRY

5.1 Introduction

In her article *An Ecclesial Community: Women's Visions and Voices*, Elsa Tamez (2001: 58-59) writes that the "church community is joyful and happy when all its members feel satisfied in their work and fulfilled and accepted persons." She quotes the poetic prophecy of Isaiah 65: 17-19 as the basis for her argument for the quality of good life. In it she argues that women are concerned with a good quality of life for everyone in the church community.

However, being concerned with a good quality of life for everyone else except oneself is not enough – women also need to look within themselves. They need to ask questions such as: "are they willing to support the cause of other women who are involved in the struggle to emancipate themselves, even if they do not necessarily agree with their approach?" Too often women fail to question the extent to which they promote their own oppression. One example is the issue of whether or not Indian women prepare their daughters to be obedient, submissive and docile wives. If they do, will they not actually promote women's oppression by passing it on to their daughters?

Women need to be in dialogue with one another about every situation and every hindrance that does not encourage all to have life to its fullest. If their aim is to build a society of equals, they must be willing to challenge each other about their practice as women in order to move the margins of society where the majority is. This is

particularly true for educated women who have positions of power and comfort. Liberating them as individuals while important in the process of gaining self-esteem, confidence and dignity, should not be an end in itself. It is important that they empower themselves in order to empower others. This too requires an understanding of how oppressive social structures are operating so that they are able to identify those who are oppressed, why they are oppressed, and conscientize them about their oppression.

5.2 Power and Leadership

Then we move on to the question of power and leadership. Indian women need to be exposed to role models other than male role models. There have not been many role models, (this is so with my own denomination and perhaps many others), particularly in the academic setting, and thus women have tended to adopt the behavior of male mentors. However, leadership models should not be hierarchical, but rather have an attitude of service to those who lead (Swart-Russell 1988: 386). The task of women's theology is to empower all the powerless and to promote a humane society in which each person is respected. We need to practice a culture of acceptance. Each should feel free to say what is on her/his mind and be respected even if there is disagreement.

Furthermore, for our theology to be relevant and have an impact on the lives of the majority of women, it needs to address their context and experience, and not simply be an intellectual exercise (Smith 200: 91). Not many would have known or understood the culture that Indian Women come from – not many would understand the oppression and hardship that they suffered. Hence it is necessary for women, especially in this “Rainbow Nation” (Mbeki 1999:2) to take time to understand one another in order to share the gospel with each other.

The task that lies ahead for women, who have already been conscientized, are to go out and conscientize others. In attempting to conscientize woman Navamani Peter (1999: 168) points woman in the right direction by saying,

We Christian women must rise up and reclaim the image in which we have been made. Let us not be satisfied that few leaders and the Christian women have the privileges and the rights. Let us mobilise women at the local church the women at grassroots level and sensitize them. Let us not leave this challenge until every sister of ours achieves this image of equality.

In addition to this women also need to recognize that they are key players in demanding that both church and society put women's empowerment on the agenda – not as an addendum, but as a priority! The Bible has much to say about the manner in which women should be treated. It is for this reason that I would like to turn my attention to investigating the biblical evidence for the ministry of women in the church. I do understand that much work has already been done in this area but I sincerely believe that in order for members and the leadership of the ECSA to understand the importance of the role of women in the church my argument needs to be based on biblical evidence. There are some similarities in the manner in which Indian women and Jewish women were treated and for this reason I see that it is imperative that Biblical evidence be looked at. Robinson (1999: 117) draws our attention to the following statement when he says, “The status of “wives” in the ancient Israelite tradition, out of which the Christian heritage has arisen is no better than the status of women in the Indian heritage.”

In the Jewish culture women were treated as minors and they were considered to be part of the possession or property of man (Evans 1983:25). Wives referred to their husbands as ‘master.’ The wife was regarded as means of obtaining children. Mary

Evans 1983: 25) explains that “it was very important to every Israelite to have children, especially male children who could carry on his line.” The man being the leader in the home played a major role in terms of providing for his family and leading worship. Women’s roles were passive. The home was the domain of the woman, although she still came under the authority of her husband or father. Patriarchy was firmly entrenched and subservience followed (Evans 1983: 33-37).

5.3 Principles of Bible Interpretation

Our principles of interpreting the Bible greatly influence the conclusions to which we come. When interpreting it is important to ask ourselves, what is the Bible saying to those who wrote the Bible as well as the first hearers of the Bible. As interpreters of the Bible we must have a good understanding of history and culture and the specific situation of the original readers if we are to understand the Word of God (Mickelsen 1989: 177-178). This includes translation from one world to another. As Palmer (1991: 27) comments, “The Bible comes to us from a world distant in time, space and language.” It also demands that we carefully examine the subject being taught if we want to rightly understand a particular verse.

Another question that we need to ask ourselves is how should we understand and apply the passage in the way we live and see things? This involves explaining. For it is necessary to place the event within a specific context for it to have meaning (Palmer 1991:24). In order to do this the interpreter must identify the highest norms and standards taught in the Bible. Most regulations taught in the Bible are not part of our conduct and faith in the church of today

A good example can be found in the Book of Acts 15: 28-29, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (NIV). Most of us will not feel guilty if we eat a rare steak, or eat food sacrificed at a Hindu prayer, because we are under the impression that they don’t apply to us today (Except for the instruction regarding sexual immorality) (Mickelsen 1989: 178). There are many other examples quoted in the Bible.

Jesus set the standard and the highest ideals for us and we need to recognize these standards and ideals, but this is no easy task. The reason for this is that the message in the Bible runs contrary to our customs and culture. We like to be selective about passages in the Bible, selecting passages we like and ignoring those that seem to disturb us. We like to read into text meanings that are incoherent and we find a text and try to prove almost anything in the Bible that is important to us. We need to set the highest norms and standards if we are to interpret the Bible in a meaningful way so that we can achieve an overall understanding of the Bible (Mickelsen 1989: 181).

5.4 Biblical Evidence

Many great scholars and theologians have explored this area, extensively. There are numerous great works that have been produced and published on the Biblical perspective regarding women in Ministry, and I have the utmost respect for people who have developed this aspect. There are many opinions about women in ministry but it is vitally important to examine what the Bible says, because my argument is based on Biblical principles. Any study of the biblical aspects of relationships

between man and woman must, I believe, start with the creation account. For this reason I would like to start with the Old Testament and thereafter discuss the gospels and the letters written by Paul.

Our thinking has been influenced by what other writers have said. In commenting about the Genesis temptation and fall Tertullian has said that woman bear the brunt of God's curse for sin. He defended this by saying that it was women who opened the door to the devil and that it was she who plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree. It was because of women that the image of God in man was destroyed and it was she who caused the death of Jesus Christ. He blamed her for the sufferings of mankind and Christ (Hayter 1987:103).

When God created Adam he created him from the dust (Genesis 2), God's observation that it was not good for Adam to be alone, suggests that Eve be created to be a partner to Adam. Susan Foh (1979; 61) writes, "The woman was created to help the man...The woman was created to be a help to the man." This is confirmed by Famonure (1997: 107) who comments as follows:

The creation story tells us that women and men are partners (Gen. 1:26) one complementing the other, which was God's intention from the beginning. Both fell short of the intended relationship with him.

What Foh and Famonure suggest here is that there is no sense of inferiority between the sexes, even though the woman has been treated as inferior by her male counterpart. It is my understanding that God did not make woman for man to rule, control or make decisions but to be an equal partner who would rule with him. In the creation of man and woman we see that it is void of any aspect of man's authority over woman.

The second account of creation might give support for female subordination. The following argument is forwarded: (1) that the woman was made after the man; (2) that she is taken from the man's rib; (3) that she is named by the man. From these views it has been said that women are subordinate to man. These views can however be challenged. Haubert (1997: 24) argues that "although woman was created after man it does not indicate anything about her essential nature." She further argues,

In calling her woman and himself man for the first time, he is declaring his recognition of one who is like him. In the woman, he finds the one who is like himself, his equal. And he cries out with great joy, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." In other words, "This is one like me." The emphasis is upon the likeness of male and female.

The fact that woman was created from man's rib does not prove that she is subordinate. In fact it serves to highlight her likeness to him. It serves to show that they belong together and are of the same substance (Haubert 1997: 24).

One of the problems in our society is that women have been burdened with Eve's sin for too long and they should be freed of this burden. God did not create man to have preeminence over woman rather he created both of them to complement each other in their relationship. One of the ways that they complement each other is through reproduction. Paul used this thought in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God." (NIV), to correct the over balance of man's authority over women. Paul knew too well the injustice Judaism used to repress its women and he sought to correct the error (Trombley 1985:74-75). It was the Jewish tradition that had the greatest influence on the status of women in the early church. Between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, significant events happened within the Jewish nation. It would appear that Roman rule and foreign cultural influences changed the

Jewish

view of women. Women were being seen as less intelligent than men, and the attitude of the Jewish men up to the first century was clearly discriminatory and biased against women. Women were considered to be inferior to men, physically, intellectually, and spiritually. They were considered to be secondary in creation and the only reason they were created by God was for pleasure and procreation (Massey 1990:71). It is for this reason they were considered unsuitable for ministry and it was clear that they were subject to male domination in all spheres of life. Massey (1990: 72) aptly points out,

But by reason of their ceremonially impure bodies, they are ontologically unsuitable for direct spiritual ministry in worship. Therefore, from a Jewish perspective the status of women in the first century was clearly that of subjection to males, in family, society and religion.

In ancient Israel and especially during the Mosaic period all Israelites were called upon to enter into a personal relationship with God. Men and women were required to come to the tabernacle and later to the temple to worship, fulfil vows and to offer sacrifices. Hurley (1984:123) says, “In these areas of service all were equal.” Men presented the sacrifices and offerings on behalf of the family (Leviticus 1:2 “When *any* (italics mine) of you bring an offering to the Lord, bring as an offering an animal from either the herd or the flock” NIV), but the wife could also be present. Women attended all the feasts as well as most areas of worship. But by the time of Christ the view of women had changed. Jewish women were no longer active in temple or synagogue worship. They were often put into inferior and subservient roles. Women were restricted to the court of the women where they could listen but not speak (Parrish 1999:8).

In Deuteronomy 29:9-18 we find that it makes it clear that a woman is a full member of the covenant community, yet she was treated as inferior.

In the Graeco-Roman world the general status of women improved over a long period. There were several women of outstanding accomplishments in the art and literature such as Agrippa, Sulpicia, Balbilla, and the wife of Pliny (Evans 1983:39). Women became more influential and those who could grasp their freedom enjoyed the status of their male counterparts. Most women however were still considered to be inferior and they remained under the dominant authority of the men.

When Jesus arrived on the scene he cast a new light on God's intended purpose for women in His Kingdom. In Jesus' time we find that he treated women differently. He gave them status equal to that of men and understood that like men they were also sinners in need of forgiveness. We find that Jesus welcomed women into his ministry, Mary, Joanna and Susanna. These women supported him in his ministry (Luke 8:1-3). There are many examples cited in the gospels that tell us that Jesus showed that the opinions of women mattered. Martha opened her home to Jesus and it was at their home that Jesus encouraged Mary and Martha to learn from him giving an indication that he was preparing them as his disciples (Luke 10:38-42). He paid attention to what they said and he took these things seriously. The very fact that he allowed women to follow him reveals how very different he was from the other teachers and rabbis. Through his redemptive work he broke down the walls of discrimination and all have become one (Ephesians 2:14 "For he himself is our peace who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" NIV). All divisions have been smashed between the different race groups, between men and women and between priests and laymen (Revelation 1:6; Galatians

3:27,28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”). This attitude encouraged many women to follow and minister to him. The gospels point out that for a great part of Jesus’ ministry he was not only accompanied by the twelve disciples, but also by several women (Witherington 1984:123-124). It would be worthy at this juncture to point out a few examples of women who were leaders in their own right in the New Testament.

5.4.1 Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38)

Mary, the mother of Jesus was truly a godly woman. It was one of the reasons why God chose her to be the mother of Jesus. She was a person of great faith in God and she fulfilled a ministry calling of the highest order. She was the mother of the Son of God. That is an incredible privilege. It would appear that she took the place of Eve. Many people have blamed Eve for the fall of mankind but God held both Adam and Eve accountable. All the way back in Genesis 3:15 God spoke about a plan to repair the damage done by Adam and Eve. It was through Mary, a woman, that God allowed the Saviour to come and redeem us (Parrish 1999: 8).

5.4.2 Anna, the Prophetess (Luke 2:36-40)

Anna was a prophetess in the temple and she was used by God to confirm that Jesus was in fact the long awaited Messiah. She was 84 years old and served in the temple for about 60 years. This godly woman had an important part in Jesus’ birth and dedication. She is an example of an obedient leader that God used to shape the future of Jesus’ ministry. The Bible tells us that she went out and told all who were present that the Messiah had come. Many people in

the church believe that they need godly fathers. That is true, but I believe that we also need godly mothers like Anna who will rise up, teach and lead their sons and daughters (Parrish 1999:9).

5.4.3 The Syro-Phoenician Woman (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-39)

In this story we find that the Syro-Phoenician woman was seeking healing for her daughter. It would appear that the conversation was too long and the disciples became irritated with her and they asked Jesus to get rid of her. Instead of getting rid of her we see Jesus dealing with her in a way that surprised the disciples. He did not send her away but rather talked with her. It was here that she recognized that Jesus had the power to give her what she needed. Jesus also recognized that she was an intelligent woman and that she had much faith and it was this that made him grant her wish. He paid attention to what she said and he treated her with respect (Evans 1983:51-52).

5.4.4 The Samaritan Woman (John 4:7-12)

We know that in Jesus' day Jews were not allowed to talk to Samaritans but what must have surprised the disciples was the fact that he talked to a Samaritan woman. This story is indicative of Jesus' complete disregard for Jewish customs regarding women and foreigners. She was probably surprised that he had talked to her. Jesus shared the truth of who he was and he brought her to a place where she understood that she had been forgiven. That very day she was converted she went out and preached and brought many people to Christ. She became one of the first women evangelists (John 4:28,39,39). F.

F. Bruce points out that ‘But for the woman’s witness, her fellow townsfolk would not have come to know Jesus’ (1973:116).

5.4.5 Jesus anointed by a Sinful Woman (Luke 7:36-50)

Whilst Jesus was having a meal at the home of a Pharisee, a woman came and anointed his feet with perfume and wiped it with her hair. It is not clear whether Jesus knew this woman but there is no doubt that she knew Jesus as one who could forgive her and redeem her from sin. In this story we find that the Pharisee treated her as a sinful woman but Jesus did not see her as such. As a woman he treated her with dignity and respect so much so that she was liberated to a new life.

Matthew 26:1-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8 describe the event of a woman anointing the feet of Jesus. Whether all these stories refer to one or several events is unclear. What emerges from these stories is that Jesus recognized the importance of what she had done. Jesus finally remarked that wherever the gospel was preached the woman’s deed would not be forgotten (Witherington III 1990: 107-108).

5.4.6 Other Women in the ministry of Jesus

In his ministry we find that Jesus healed many women both physically and psychologically. The woman who had been crippled for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17) was referred to by Jesus as ‘the daughter of Abraham.’ According to Swart-Russell (1988: 244) this gives confirmation of the woman’s worth. She says, “This is a fundamental affirmation of the woman’s worth, and indicates that Jesus apportioned equal worth to women and men in the sight of God.”

In the healing of the woman with the issue of blood Jesus was very much concerned for her wellbeing (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25,34; Luke 8:43-48). By healing her Jesus put her above the religious law and purification rites of the day. After the healing, the worth and importance of the woman was proclaimed (Swart-Russell 1988:245).

5.4.7 Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)

This story tells of the tension between Mary and Martha over their tasks at home. Jesus had visited with the sisters and Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him whilst Martha went to prepare a meal for Jesus. In the Jewish tradition this was not acceptable as it were the males who sat at the feet of the rabbi. Women were not generally instructed in religious matters, yet Jesus allowed Mary to sit and listen to him. Martha on the other hand was concerned about the preparation of the meal and protested to Jesus; who affirmed Mary's right to learn from him. Mary thus becomes a symbol of an emancipated and liberated woman (Langley 1983:85).

In all of these instances, God manifests a deep respect for the woman by treating them as individuals in their own right. We find that God dealt directly with them instead of going through their husbands. A case in point is the annunciation when God respectfully asks a maiden, Mary from Nazareth to become the mother of his son (Luke 1:26-38). The next person to know of this is Elizabeth her cousin. This proves the deep respect God has for women. Jesus' deep respect for women is also well known. We have already talked

about some of the examples. We can recall his compassion for the widows, his respect for the sinful Jewish woman. These examples should be able to convey and illustrate how God and Jesus Christ worked with women as co-partners in giving, fostering, preserving and saving life (Nchabaleng 2000:130). There are many other examples cited in the Bible that we could make reference to that will help us understand how God treats women. We have observed his interaction with women and the manner in which he treated them. Jesus' behaviour towards women stands in total contrast to his fellow men. For this reason it is important for us to consider Jesus' teachings in the way woman should be treated.

5.4.8 Jesus' Teachings and Treatment of Women

Adultery and Divorce

The Christian society was founded on Jewish society with its customs and tradition. As a result the new Christian society had to contend with ambivalence (how should one interpret Scripture, whether in the Jewish tradition or modern tradition) concerning the role of women that it had inherited from Jewish social structures. Christianity was thus faced with Jewish patriarchy as opposed to Jesus' understanding and respect accorded women (Ryrie 1978:31). Jesus' treatment of women was always exemplary. He always showed concern, respect and understanding.

In Matthew 5:28 Jesus said, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (NIV). What

Jesus teaches here is that sin arises in the heart of the person and it is clear that a man who has lust in his heart is sinning. The abuses of sexuality were so overwhelming on the side of men during the time of Jesus that he directed his warning directly upon the sin and exploitation he saw. What Jesus was wanting to teach here is that men who reduced women to sex objects were sinning against God and that men should change their attitudes and show respect for women as human beings. Women are human and they need to be treated justly (Swart-Russell 1988: 259).

In his teaching on divorce (Matthew 5:31-32) Jesus accorded the same rights to both husband and wife. What this actually did was that it placed the status of the wife to the same level of her husband. Here again he wanted men to understand that women were not objects who could be used and abused. One thing common to Jesus' teaching on lust and divorce is the absence of the double standard discriminating against women. In his dealing with women he never saw them as inferior or even stated that they were subordinate to men. He spoke out against those who tried to dominate others or even treat others unfairly for that matter. Jesus completely rejected dominant attitudes and he sought to replace it with service and humility (Swart-Russell 1988:259-262).

5.5 Extra-Biblical evidence – Mary Magdalene

It is evident from the gospels that those disciples who accompanied Jesus also included women. Luke refers to Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, Chuza, and to Susanna (Luke 8:1-3). Matthew and Mark also mention several other women: Salome, Mary the mother of James, Joses and the mother of Zebedee's sons (Matthew 27:55-56 and Mark 15:40-41). During the trial and crucifixion of Jesus it was the

woman disciples that remained true to the Lord when the men fled in fear (Matthew 26:56 and Mark 14:49). There is no doubt that all of the women were with Jesus throughout his suffering. In the gospel of Luke (23:26-32) the women met Jesus on the Via Dolorosa and mourned openly for him. Even at his crucifixion the women remained loyal to him. At the resurrection it was the women who were first on the scene and made the report to the other disciples. The women first discovered the empty tomb and the angel appeared to them and told them to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. Three of the four gospels report that Jesus' first appearance was to the women disciples but yet 1 Corinthians states that Jesus first appeared to Peter and then to the other disciples. Was it because Paul's message would have carried little weight if the witness was a woman?

This could probably be one reason. It is for this reason that I would like to look at the well-known Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene was a first witness of the risen Christ and the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and John attest to the fact that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene.

Mary of Magdala or Mary Magdalene is best known in popular Western imagery and tradition as a repentant prostitute, as the adulteress rescued by Jesus from men trying to stone her (John 8:1-11), and as the sinner woman whose tears of repentance washed the feet of Jesus in preparation for his burial (Luke 7:36-50). Yet scholars like Billerbeck, Barrett and Stauffer believe that none of this is historically true (Witherington 1984: 117-118). Nothing in the New Testament or early Christian literature provides a shred of evidence to support this portrait.

Historically Mary was a Jewish woman who followed Jesus of Nazareth. She came to the town of Magdala, located on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, just North of the city of Tiberias. Apparently of independent means, she accompanied him during his ministry and supported him out of her own resources ((Luke 8:1-3) (Evans 1983: 54-55).

The New Testament Gospels and other early Christian literature consistently portray Mary as a prominent disciple of Jesus (Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3; John 19:25) (De Boer 1996:78). In the gospel stories, she is said to be present at the crucifixion (Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25), and to have witnessed the resurrection (Mark 16:1-8; Matt. 28:1-7). Indeed, she is portrayed as the first or among the first to see and speak with the risen Lord (Matt. 28:9-10, John 20:14-18). In the Gospel of John, the risen Jesus gives her special teaching and commissions her as an apostle to the apostles to bring them the good news (John 20:17).

Karen L King, an apocryphal investigator and author, writes of the Gospel of Mary, an early second-century text discovered at the end of the nineteenth century in Egypt, which also affirms that Mary received special teaching from Jesus and functioned as a leader among the disciples after the resurrection. The combined evidence strongly suggests that Mary was a visionary and a leader in the Christian Movement after Jesus' death. But in all of this, King (1998: 29) points out the following problem. She says:

How are we to understand and account for these different portraits? for the simultaneous canonization of Mary as a prominent disciple and her marginalization as a repentant prostitute? The simplest answer is that the problem arose due to misguided exegesis.

King (1998: 35) goes on to suggest how in the 4th century, Christian Theologians in the West began confusing Mary of Magdala with Mary of Bethany. They supposedly conflated the account of John 12:1-8, in which Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus in preparation for his burial, with the account of the unnamed sinner woman in Luke 7: 36-50 who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and anointed them. From there it was an easy step to identify Mary of Magdala with the unnamed adulteress in John 8:1-11. Thus Mary the disciple became Mary the whore. We can perhaps see this confusion as simply an error – there are after all a lot of Marys to be kept straight: Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary the wife of Clopas (Jesus' aunt), Mary the mother of James the younger.

Mary lost all resemblance of a devoted disciple and visionary. She became a model for women to immolate themselves for their crimes of sexuality, vanity and bold speech (King 1998:35).

Looking at the Gospel of Mary itself, the theme of Jesus' special regard for Mary appears with special emphasis. Here after the Saviour's departure, Mary steps into his place, comforting the grieving disciples and encouraging them and turning their hearts towards a discussion of the Saviour's words. The work also tells of a special revelation, which the Saviour had given to Mary in a vision containing advanced teaching about the nature of visionary experience and the journey of the soul after death. The Gospel of Mary exemplifies Mary's role as apostle to the apostles by portraying her as prophet, teacher and support for the other disciples (De Boer 1996: 88).

It illustrates Mary's leadership by contrasting her strength of character and spiritual maturity with the fear, ignorance, and jealousy of the other disciples. She alone had maintained her composure at the Saviour's departure while the other disciples were weeping and fearing for their lives should they follow the Saviour's command and go out and preach the Gospel. In her vision, the Saviour praises her for 'not wavering' at the sight of him. While the other disciples exhibit jealousy and contention over the fact that the Saviour loved her more than them, Mary only demonstrates care toward them, taking up her role of teacher and leader only in response to their need (Massey 1990: 83-84).

The Gospel of Mary illustrates the characteristics of spiritual virtue in Mary's calm, in her unwavering faith, her care for the disciples, her fearlessness in the face of possible persecution, and her advanced spiritual comprehension of Jesus' teachings. In this way, the Gospel of Mary holds Mary up as a model for Christian leadership based on spiritual maturity and prophetic insight. It is because she has achieved spiritual maturity that she was able to teach and care for others.

Moreover, the Gospel of Mary addresses the topic of women's leadership directly by narrating a story about a controversy among the disciples over Mary's exercise of leadership. In the story, when she finishes teaching the other disciples about her revelation, Andrew and Peter challenge her. Andrew suggests that her teachings are 'strange', but Peter goes further and questions whether the Saviour could really have preferred a woman to them. Peter's position is shown up for what it is - an ignorant jealousy, which makes it impossible for Peter to see past the distinctions of the flesh to the spiritual insights of Mary's teachings. He is so focussed on his loss of prestige at being instructed by a woman that he fails to learn from her teaching (King

1998:40). From what I have said thus far, I am convinced that the Gospel of Mary thus presents the clearest argument for the legitimacy of women's authority and leadership in early Christianity. By insisting that authority should be based on spiritual maturity rather than on sex/gender distinctions, the Gospel of Mary opens up the possibility of an engendered space in which both women and men could exercise legitimate leadership aimed at teaching, preaching and exercising care for others.

The fact that a Gospel was written in her name and that she appears so prominently in these early writings shows that, like Peter and Paul, she was a figure to whom apostolic appeal was attributed. Mary of Magdala was therefore a much more important figure in the early church than the canonical portrait in the New Testament allows.

The Gospel of Mary constructed a Christian identity apart from social gender roles, sex and childbearing. It argued that direct access to God was possible for all through the Spirit (Ricci 1994:125). Leadership was exercised by those who are more spiritually advanced by giving freely to all without claim to a fixed hierarchical ordering of power. Jesus was understood as a teacher and mediator of wisdom, not as a judge or ruler. Excluding the Gospel of Mary and marginalizing the figure of Mary of Magdala managed to erase an important source for reconstructing early Christian women's theologizing and for advocating the legitimacy of women's leadership.

Elizabeth Johnson (1998: 146), an author of note and an authority on women's leadership, says the following in her article on "Rectifying the Distorted Story: Mary Magdalene." She says:

There is an ethical issue here, for the distortion that shifts the story of a leading woman into someone remembered mainly as

a sexual transgressor ... a powerful religious leader is turned into beautiful, pliant sinner, symbol of female sexuality redeemed.

While the canonization of Mary gave her a positive role as a disciple of Jesus and witness to the resurrection, it was a role in line with the needs and requirements of patriarchal theology and one which stopped far short of portraying her as an important leader in formative Christianity. However, even the limited portrait of Mary in the New Testament has been a resource for women in their attempts to legitimate their practices of leadership. The portrait of Mary in the New Testament as a prominent disciple and an important witness to the resurrection, is a positive reflection for all woman in the church of Christ (Ricci 1994:129).

King (1998: 35) is in support of Ricci. She says:

Mary of Magdala and women in general were not marginal actors in the formation of Christianity; their marginality was produced in part by the process of canonization as part and parcel of the theological development of 'orthodoxy' which condemned every Christian theology that was in support of women's leadership as heresy. Canon and 'orthodoxy' were devised in part to exclude women from positions of leadership and authority.

However, the invention of Mary as prostitute has not kept women from appealing to her to legitimate their public preaching and teaching throughout the centuries. If this Gospel were canonized, could this have changed the attitudes and mindsets that people have developed regarding the role of Indian women in ministry? Perhaps we have not had a strong enough role model of a woman in leadership from the Bible itself. This could be one of the many reasons why people approach the aspect of women in leadership/ministry with much suspicion. But I believe that The Gospel of Mary is a very well balanced document which gives us reason enough to believe and accept that just as great men were called and set apart for ministry, so too, are there

many great women who are just as able and capable of fulfilling a calling of this nature.

In understanding the gospel of Mary, I realize that over the years, men have not encouraged and supported women fully on this issue of women in ministry. Perhaps they needed something strong enough to convince them that women have a definite place in Ministry. A document like “The Gospel of Mary” could have been a very strong source, and could have played a vital role in breaking mindsets. Indian culture says that a woman’s place is at home, moreover, she must be in total submission to her husband. A husband should lead, and a wife should submissively follow. Robinson (1999: 116) confirms this by saying,

A woman has no separate sacrifice, ritual or fasting other than the worship of her husband. A woman who displeases her husband can never go to his world after death. So a wife should never be over her husband.

To say or do otherwise is to reject a culture that has been handed over for the past centuries. In my casual conversation with women in my church I hear more and more of how they have been “indoctrinated” into thinking and believing that there is no other way. Even though Indian women are in a South African context, some women still hold firmly to their cultural roots and background.

For Christian women, could a document like the Gospel of Mary have helped male dominated leadership see roles of women in leadership in a different light? Could it have helped to view women’s leadership and call to the ministry as a God given responsibility? Surely, this could have helped women look through a different set of lenses – one that focuses differently on the role of women in ministry – one that

shows that this is ordered by God. This document on Mary could be used as Theology – just as John or any other Gospel is. It deals with issues of social change. This document could certainly have given women a boosted confidence in what they are doing, rather than women spending much needed energy debating what they are supposed to be. But the reality is that the Gospel of Mary has not been canonized. The struggle of women will perhaps be an ongoing one but should they not try to focus on the *good* that this situation has to offer? This in itself may sound controversial but the *good* in this situation is that debate about women’s ministry must remain in the forefront.

This is not just an Indian, or a Black, or a White, or a Denominational, or a South African problem! This is a universal problem. Christian women all over the world fight a similar type of battle. They have experienced rejection and oppression regarding their roles in ministry, particularly in their roles of leadership, thus being allowed to teach and preach and ultimately to become ordained ministers in the kingdom of God.

5.6 Women in the Early Church

Most of our information regarding the ministry of women is obtained from what transpired in the early church. On the day of Pentecost many women also received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Both men and women spoke in tongues and prophesied. In the book of the Acts chapter 2: 4 we are told, “*All* of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (NIV) (italics mine). We can draw an inference that “all” includes men and women. In the book of Acts we find that women played an important role among the first

Christians. The most prominent woman in Jerusalem was Mary, the mother of John Mark and identified as the sister of Barnabas. The fact that Peter went to her house directly upon his escape from prison suggests that she used her home as a church and it was well known by the Jerusalem Christians (Massey 1990:95). One of the important roles played by woman was hospitality. The church's existence and growth was due largely to the hospitality of the women. They not only provided temporary lodgings for Christian evangelists but their homes were also places where the Gospel was preached. The house churches played a vital role in the growth of the early church. In the Apocryphal Acts women played a central role. One such woman was Thecla. She became a friend of Tryphena, a mission worker and later went on to become a disciple. In Philippi Lydia was the first convert who provided hospitality for the disciples (Acts 16:14-15, 40). Lydia appears as a leading member of the Philippian church (Acts 17:4, Philippians 4:2-3). Euodia and Syntyche were also two other women who prominently feature in the church at Philippi whom Paul states as "labouring with him" (Massey 1990:96). In his letter to the Philippians Paul urged Euodia and Syntyche to settle their differences while at the same time he commended them for the work that they were doing (France 1995:83). Another prominent woman who was devoted to "good works and acts of charity" to the widows in the church, was Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42) (Perriman 1998:61-62). As there were no pensions or grants Tabitha (or Dorcas) was able to help those who were in need. She also conducted a home dressmaking service, a service that could not be provided for by men (Marshall 1984:181). She was so deeply valued by the community that when she died they sent for Peter who raised her from the dead. We should take note here that Tabitha is specifically termed a disciple that would indicate that this title applied to women as well as men (Swart-Russell 1988:282).

5.7 Women Who Worked With Paul

Before Paul met the Lord Jesus Christ he was determined to get rid of all Christians. On the road to Damascus he had a life changing experience with the result that he was now determined to bring as many people as possible to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. These people also included women as well. He was determined to preach the gospel of Christ to women as well as men. In his ministry he was able to convert many women and we find that he mentions several women by name in his letters (Trombley 1985:188). From the manner in which Paul writes we are able to draw an inference that many of the women who were converted became leaders.

There was Phoebe, a *deacon* in the church (Romans 16:1), and Priscilla, whom Paul referred to as “my fellow worker.” It would appear that Priscilla and Aquila (who was the husband of Priscilla) were associates of Paul who enjoyed equal standing with him (Trombley 1985:188). There is no question about their involvement with Paul in the ministry. It would appear that Priscilla was the more capable and the more zealous in the faith. The home of the couple served as central headquarters and the principal meeting place for new Christian believers (Massey 1989:49).

Paul also mentions four other women: Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis, all active, hard-working gospel labourers. The contribution of these four women is that they laboured hard in “the Lord” which suggests a recognized role of ministry within the church. In Philippians 4:2 Paul states that these women have “contended at his side” meaning that they have worked with him as equals. It would appear that he had deep gratitude and respect for the woman and there seems to be no male dominance by him or even a hint of him wanting the women to submit to him. In the book of

Romans Paul applied the titles of deacon and apostle to two of his woman colleagues, Phoebe and Junia (Romans 16:1-16). France (1995: 88) points out the following:

In Romans 16:1-16, therefore, we have a remarkable insight into the varied and influential role played by women in the Pauline churches, including not only the titles 'deacon' and 'apostle', but also a wider recognition that they, along with the men, had been in the forefront of the missionary work and leadership of the churches, as Paul's co-workers.

Paul mentions Junia as an outstanding apostle and fellow prisoner. In quoting John Chrysostom, Trombley (1985: 190) said,

John Chrysostom (337-407), bishop of Constantinople, wasn't partial to women. He said some negative things about women but spoke positively about Junia. "Oh, how great is the devotion of this woman that she should be counted worthy of the appellation of apostle." Nor was he the only church father to believe Junia was a woman.

The remaining woman in Romans 16:1-16 is Phoebe described as deacon. Trombley (1985:194) says that, "the word deacon was usually translated to mean 'minister' and for the first 250 years, the ministers, men and women were called deacons." Phoebe is the only woman to whom this title is specifically given. She was a person of authority and it would appear that Paul entrusted her to take the letter of Romans to the church in Rome. Paul commended her as a faithful leader to the church in Rome. Paul referred to her as 'ruler' (prostatis) which meant that she was a woman set over others (Hurley 1984:139).

Church history also confirms that women were ordained as deacons and were teaching right up until the third century. Langley (1983:63) says, "Female deacons were to be 'serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things' (1Tim 3:11). Their calling was to serve." It would appear that deaconesses played a special role in

anointing female candidates for baptism by immersion and instructing them afterward in the faith and visiting and caring for Christian women who lived in pagan households (Langley 1983:63). This evidence is further elaborated in the Apostolic Constitutions, a fourth century document, probably of Syrian origin, that lists various church laws. According to Canon 15 of the Canons of Chalcedon passed in 451AD, a woman could “not be ordained a deaconess under forty years of age and that after strict examination” (Stevenson 1989:358). It was only during the fifth century that women were abrogated from serving as deacons. Trombley (1985: 197) points out,

During the Apostolic Age, women were deacons, just as men were (Romans 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:12), but by the late fourth century women deacons were being called deaconesses, a new term not found in Scriptures, and were subordinate to male deacons, even though they were still ordained as clerics. By the twelfth century, in both the Eastern and Western Church, the order of the deaconesses had disappeared.

This could have been the result of the revival of Old Testament practices about purity and the existence of taboos in European cultures. These taboos remain up to today and seriously affect the ministry of women in the church.

It would appear that women also served as elders in the early church. 1 Timothy 5:17 might include both men and women who served the church as shepherds. The primary office clearly functional in the first century church is that of elder (or presbyter). Massey (1990: 108-109) notes that reference was made to “older women” in the Pastoral Epistles that could very well have been women elders. He concludes the following,

The Pastoral Epistles include certain noteworthy references to “older women.” The identity of these women is obscure, but the qualities expected of them and the responsibility to teach could easily be associated with those who are specifically identified as “enrolled widows.” But some suggest that the responsibility of teaching implies a role more appropriately described as “female elders.”

He further goes on to suggest that he has “reason to consider that both men and women served in an official capacity as shepherds and overseers.”

Apart from apostles and deacons, women were also called as prophets and anointed of God in the early church. No distinction seems to be made between the office as exercised by men and women: they each speak the inspired word of God, as occasion demands (Langley 1983:61). Anna ministered as a prophetess of the Old and New Testament. The book of Acts refers to the four unmarried daughters of Philip who were active as prophetesses at Caesarea (Acts 21:9). If Luke mentioned them as prophetesses it is certain that they had some part in proclaiming the gospel.

There is strong evidence to suggest that women participated in the church as speakers and teachers and these women were known to be prophetesses. Unlike the Old Testament prophets who were seers of visions or prophets of future events, New Testament prophets were merely proclaimers of the Word of God. Massey (1990: 113) confirms this by saying,

Therefore it can be said with reasonable certainty that prophets in the apostolic church were essentially inspired preachers of the Word of God, whose primary service was the edification of the Christian community. They were not merely recognized as prophets because of repeated utterances in assembly, but rather were known in their community as those having been endowed with the gift of prophecy by the Apostles.

I am in agreement with Massey who says that prophetesses did exist in the early church and that they were used to proclaim the Word of God. Massey (1990: 117) goes on to further say that “

One need not look for special references to prophetesses once it is established that they existed, for the masculine plural would doubtless include all females with the same prophetic gift.

If prophesy is predicting, proclaiming, teaching, preaching, then women should be allowed to proclaim, predict, preach and teach. I don't believe that the male leadership has a right to prevent women from prophesying. If God said women can and should prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:3-5), who are men to prevent them from doing what God has said in his Word. It is not gender that makes one prophesy but the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Trombley 1985:192).

It would appear that women were teaching during Paul's ministry. Foremost among the woman teachers was Priscilla. She taught with her husband Aquila. It would appear that she was teaching foundational truths. She expounded the Scriptures to Apollos. Witherington (1990: 219) forwards the following argument:

Luke's concern is not so much what Apollos was taught by Priscilla or Aquila, or the results of that teaching, but that he was taught "more accurately" by this couple. This suggests that his concern is not doctrinal but personal, i.e. he may wish to indicate the role of the couple, particularly Priscilla.

Although there is no other direct evidence most scholars agree that there were women teachers. One thing is evident here, and that is, if there were prophetesses who were preaching and teaching then there is ample evidence to show that women were teaching in the early church. It is also extremely important to examine Scripture in the light of what I have already said thus far. There are many problem passages that can seem confusing and for this reason it has to be examined in the context in which these passages were written. The following chapter will look at portions of Scripture that have become a problem in the church today.

Chapter 6

6. LET YOUR WOMEN KEEP SILENCE

6.1 Introduction

The picture of the church we receive from Acts and the Epistles indicates that women began to take full advantage of their new status. There is no doubt that Jesus' attitude toward women comes across clearly in every source and in every form; parables, miracle stories, discourses, etc. and all lead us to the same conclusion. He healed them, dialogued with them and related to them primarily as human beings rather than sexual beings as he was interested in them as persons (Evans 1983: 64).

The same can be said of the apostle Paul, who also enjoyed good relations with the women of his day. He also treated them as persons and commended the good work that they had done as they ministered with him. Many people have questioned the portions of Scripture that Paul wrote and they refer to him as being a male chauvinist. How could Paul write such things about women? What did he actually mean when he wrote about order in the church, women being silent, or that they should be in submission to their husbands and that they could not preach or teach? (Parrish 1999:16).

Witherington (1990: 123) says that it is important to remember that "we are dealing with letters, not gospels or documents such as Acts of the Apostles." He goes on to say the following:

The letters of Paul are usually written to meet certain needs or to answer certain questions. Since almost of all Paul's letters were written in response to a communication, they represent only a portion of a larger dialogue, is not complete in

themselves, and often require us to reconstruct the questions being raised or the pleas being urged that prompted his letters of reply.

It is important therefore to understand why Paul was writing and the purpose for which he was writing the letter. Some of the verses that are of concern regarding the role of women in the church are found in the book of 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. Let us examine these verses. We find that these verses are mainly concerned with (1) women being silent in the church, (2) submission and (3) teaching and preaching. It would be appropriate for us at this juncture, to start with 1 Corinthians 14:40 which speaks about order in the church.

6.2 Order in the Church (1 Corinthians 14:26-40)

Paul had received some disturbing news about moral and spiritual problems among believers in the church at Corinth. They were struggling with issues such as divisions, spiritual maturity, marriage, immorality, food being offered to idols, use of spiritual gifts, orderly worship, resurrection of Christ and the dead etc. The church was in a state of division and disorder (Trombley 1985: 9). There seemed to be much confusion among believers and Paul wrote to encourage them in their relationships with one another and Christian conduct in the church. It appears that Paul's main concern is to correct the behaviour of some of the Corinthian women and men (Witherington 1990: 168). In 1 Corinthians 14:40 Paul wrote, "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (NIV). He wrote to teach them about their behaviour, which would ultimately bring about order in the church. Paul's rulings then, are meant to achieve order in the church. How then does one relate order to what he says in 1 Corinthians 14:34, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission, as the law says" (NIV).

In 1 Corinthians 11:5 he says something that is contrary to what he says in 1 Corinthians 14:34. If Paul meant women were never to speak in church, why would he say “And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head - it is just as though her head were shaved” (1 Corinthians 11:5) (NIV). In one verse he seems to be saying that women are to be silent in the churches and in another verse he gives instructions on the manner in which they are to pray or prophesy. What, was Paul wanting to achieve here? It would appear that Paul’s main concern was for order in the church. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and 14 he addresses the problem of order on two levels.

Firstly, in the Jewish culture a woman who appeared in public without a head covering was considered to be immoral. If a woman’s head was properly covered it meant she was married and she was in submission to her husband. If she was unmarried her submission was to her family (Trombley 1985: 139). A man without a head covering showed that his covering was the Lord and that he was in submission to the Lord. Parrish confirms this by saying, “both represented a proper spirit of submission in places of public worship” (1999: 16). What this teaches is that Paul had no problem with women praying or prophesying, but he wanted believers to do it appropriately. Apparently the wearing of a head covering by an adult woman in a public and especially in a ritual context was a traditional practice known to Jews, Greeks, and Romans (Witherington 1990: 166). The issue here is that it is done in order with a heartfelt submission for authority.

Secondly, how does covering of one’s head relate to women being silent in church? In 1 Corinthians 14:34 (Women should remain silent in church) we find that the issue

here again is order. Many scholars have put forward different interpretations dealing with 1 Corinthians 14:34 (Trombley 1985: 4). Before Christ's time women in the Jewish culture were not allowed to take part in any religious ceremony. After Christ came, these traditions were broken and women were given freedom to worship and involve themselves in ministry (Edwards 1989: 51). They were forbidden to enter the court of worship in the Jewish temple, neither were they allowed to speak in the synagogues (Parrish 1999: 16). With this new found freedom of being involved in the worship, they may have wanted to find out certain things and they could have even argued about these matters and in so doing were challenging their husbands' authority and shaming them. Parrish (1999: 18) states that if the original text in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 "was expanded to include the true meanings of the original Greek language" in which the Scriptures were written it would read as follows,

Let the wives not interrupt the meetings of the church with extended or random harangues that disrupt others and have nothing to do with keeping order in the service: for it is not permitted for them to interrupt and talk endlessly about unimportant matters or to call out to others with questions; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also it is taught in doctrine. And if they desire to learn about anything, let them wait and ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for them to call out or talk endlessly in the church .

Paul was not preventing women from talking in the church. Why would he go against what he had already said about women and men praying and prophesying in church? It is clear here that Paul wanted to teach all believers, men and women, that there needed to be order in the church. This is brought out clearly in 1 Corinthians 14: 27 "If *anyone* speaks in tongues..." (italics mine). Paul makes no distinction here because he says, "anyone" meaning men and women. It would appear that in writing to the church he was given to understand that there seemed to be a lack of manners, common courtesy and inappropriate behaviour among believers. He was not trying to keep women from taking an active part in the worship services. His concern was for

order in the church (Swart-Russell 1988: 196). He reminded believers that God was not a God of confusion but a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33).

6.3 Teaching in the Church (1 Timothy 2:8-15)

The strongest statement made by Paul is referred to in 1 Timothy 2:12 which has kept women from ministry in the church for many years. “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” (1 Timothy 2:12) (NIV). Like the church in Corinth, Ephesus faced problems of doctrinal error, qualifications for leadership, and improper behaviour by those in the church. Timothy, a young pastor was sent to church of Ephesus by Paul so that he could restore order and bring stability to the church. Paul however, was concerned for Timothy and he wrote to him to encourage him in the hope that the letter would help him properly attend to the problems that had surfaced during that time (Fleming 1990: 439).

Some women were not educated or trained in those days and knew nothing about God (Parrish 1999: 18). Evans (1983: 101) confirms this when she says,

There was a particular tendency towards heresy in some of the Ephesian women. This is perhaps not surprising in view of the lack of education of women and their lack of training in discerning truth.

Many of the converts came from pagan backgrounds and held on to their former beliefs (Trombley 1985: 163). Gnosticism was prevalent and many people were teaching false doctrines. Haubert’s (1997: 28) response to this is as follows:

Since women at this time were uneducated, they were prime targets for heresy and ill equipped to teach. Thus in these verses, Paul’s emphasis falls upon women learning (1 Timothy 2:11).

Jewish culture forbade a woman to teach, but Paul's encouragement was revolutionary. He wanted women to teach, but for this to happen women had to learn (Haubert 1997: 28).

Paul writes to Timothy to help him correctly lead and provide order for new Christians, both men and women. We find that he gives instructions about simple matters, such as how a godly woman should dress, act and wear her hair. He reminds women that her true attractiveness is her character (Key 1984: 146). In verse 11 of 1 Timothy chapter 2 he says, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission."

The very first area of concern with which Paul instructs Timothy in this letter is the prayer life of the church in which he gives instructions to both men and women. It would appear that in giving instructions to the women Paul saw the danger of women behaving in a way that was conducive to pagan worship. For this reason he insisted that Christian women should express themselves in modesty of appearance and behaviour (Parrish 1999: 8-9).

The first instruction that follows is a positive instruction that *allows* her to learn. What this could mean is that in a culture where women are not allowed to receive education it would be good for them to learn about certain matters because it seems that many of them did not know much about the Scriptures and doctrine. But as they learn they must do so in quietness (Trombley 1985: 170). Women must submit to those who are teaching them and they need to sit quietly and listen. The reasoning behind this is that Paul wanted them to learn, so that they could teach later. It stands

to reason that one cannot teach others without learning. Trombley (1985: 166) asserts that the situation at Ephesus was that many were teaching strange doctrines and the reasons are that Paul did not want anyone teaching until they were properly taught and became fully qualified. The Gnostics had many beliefs that went against the teachings of God's word. The Gnostics did not believe that Eve had sinned when she ate from the tree of knowledge. They believed that instead she received special knowledge. It was for this reason that Paul addressed this false doctrine (1 Timothy 2:14 "And Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (NIV). They believed that women were the mediators between God and people. We know that this is false because only Jesus is the mediator between God and people.

The Gnostics also taught that Eve lived before Adam and that she, not God brought Adam to life. That is the reason why Paul reminded the church at Ephesus, "Adam was formed first, then Eve (1 Tim 2:13) (Parrish 1999:21). There was much false teaching going around. Paul wanted to correct this and for this reason he said, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission" (1 Timothy 2:13) (NIV). They had to be instructed properly before they could teach others. It is extremely important for those who are going to teach to have a good solid understanding of the Scriptures and doctrine. It would appear that Christians met in house churches and it is likely that false teaching spread easily (France 1995: 64).

Paul was not undermining the ministry of women in the church but he was trying to align them with Scriptural principles while seeking to maintain a godly and holy order in the church (Parrish 1999: 21)

6.4 Submission in the Church (Ephesians 5:21-24)

The male leadership often uses this portion of Scripture to keep women from taking an active part in ministry. Trombley (1985: 147) asserts that “this is the most used Scripture teaching wife’s submission.” What does submission mean? Submission means to let someone have authority over you. The proper functioning of any society calls for the exercise of authority on others. This is true in politics, education, economic institutions, as well as religion (Senavoe 1997b: 14). Ephesians 5:21-22 says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord” (NIV).

The question that we need to ask in this section is, whether all men have been delegated authority over all women? Our answer to this question should be *no*, but in the society in which we live, and especially in the church the answer is *yes*.

We have already said that our answer should be *no* which would be the ideal for society and the church. We start by answering Ephesians 5:21. Firstly we find that Paul exhorts all believers to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Here he wants believers to be in mutual submission to one another (Perriman 1998: 52). Mutual submission is not guided or motivated by the structures of society. It is motivated by love for one another. This desire to get along with one another is what is important. It does not mean to obey someone, but it is a willing submission (Trombley 1985:150).

This mutual submission can only be understood by the coming of the Holy Spirit since it flows out of a person who is spirit-filled. This submission is not domineering, oppressive, harsh and manipulative. Any person, who requires another to submit

through oppressive, dominant, harsh or manipulative tactics does not have the love of Christ (Senavoe 1997b: 17). No human being has absolute authority over any other person.

In verse 22 the apostle now speaks about wives submitting to their husbands. What are the limits of the husband's authority toward his wife? We must realize that a wife's submission to her husband is to be in accordance with that which is acceptable to the Lord (Trombley 1985:151).

Trombley (1985: 152) says that verses 21 and 22 were not divided. In fact they were one verse and should have read "Be in mutual submission to one another in the fear of Christ; wives to your own husbands, as to the Lord." He goes on to say that mutual submission is the context of the apostles teaching in these verses. What he emphasizes here is submission not only to husband to wife and wife to husband but also to other believers. When Paul said, "wives submit to your husbands, he also said husbands love your wives." He equated the wife's role in Christ with her husband's. What this means is that the husband also yields to his wife. Jesus also left instructions that husbands must love their wives as themselves. Paul makes the same application here.

We must realize that wives are not slaves and should never be treated like slaves. Submission is mutual function where both husband and wife yield to one another out of reverence for Christ. Husbands must accept and treat their wives just as Christ loves the church. Trombley (1985: 157) points out that "the same love the Lord has for his people is the same love husbands must show their wives."

In the patriarchal structure of the church today there must also be mutual submission between men and women. Paul's approach to marriage is a deliberate attempt to reform the patriarchal structure of the church. He uses the example of marriage to

help the church understand that both men and women need to work together. It is his contention to exhort all members of the church to work together in harmony. Paul is calling for mutual submission of all Christians to each other including married partners (Witherington 1990: 156).

Interpretation of Scripture regarding the role of women is important but the different views concerning women in ministry is equally important. The next chapter looks at different views regarding the role of women in ministry.

Chapter 7

7. FOUR VIEWS

All of us face the task of making the gospel relevant to those who have not accepted Christ. Those of us who seek to follow the will of Christ in making the gospel relevant to the lost must formulate our own views regarding the role of women in ministry. This chapter will attempt to investigate the different views on the role of women in ministry.

7.1 Egalitarian View

An egalitarian view defends the full equality of men and women in the church. Equality and freedom are popular concepts in today's world. Although there are many Christians who agree wholeheartedly that men and women are created equal in God's sight many don't believe in the emancipation of women in the church. According to Mickelsen (1989: 173), the reason for this is "sin and/ or cultural influences."

God has called women to positions of leadership and blessed their work. He has imparted gifts to women so that they may use their full potential and influence the lives of others in the kingdom of God. There are many women such as Priscilla, Thecla, Catherine of Alexandria, Marcella and others through whom God worked (Mickelsen 1989:175-176). God is working through women whom he has gifted and called to leadership positions around the world. What we need to understand is men and women are made in the image of God. Jesus set the standard for us.

If we are made in the image of God we must remember the Golden Rule, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12) (NIV) is the same meaning as loving our neighbours just as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37) (Mickelsen 1989:179). Peter is a good example. It took a special vision of God to convince Peter to go the house of Cornelius (a Gentile) to preach. In God’s sight we are all created equal but many of us have the same problem that Peter had, finding it difficult to treat others as equals. The same applies to women in the church, society and family. Do our ideas come from interpreting the Scriptures properly or do we allow our cultures or our sinful nature get the better of us? What this implies is that we use Scripture to suit ourselves so that we can dominate women.

We must be reminded that we are all equal in the sight of God (Galatians 3:28-29). Despite the fact that we find difficulty in interpreting Scripture, the general attitude in God’s Word and especially the New Testament is that there is acceptance of women’s ministry. God created male and female and made them equal and gave them authority to rule and have dominion over the earth. They are equally able to perform the leadership and priestly task of bringing people into the kingdom of God and of enabling the church to fulfill its reconciling and redemptive role (Reuther 1974:134).

Christ came to liberate all believers from sin. One of these sins is the sin of domination. We should never usurp power and authority over others. There is a perception that women are inferior and men superior. This was largely due to the hierarchial structure of the church. As the hierarchial structure of the church became more and more entrenched between clergy and women alienation became more prevalent. So convinced were some of the early church fathers (Jerome, Ambrosiaster

and Aquinas) that they truly believed that women were created solely for procreation (Swart-Russell 1988: 317-319). The reason why this inferiority has resulted is because men have used power as domination. The headship of the male in Christian tradition has been misused. Feminists argue that men have occupied dominant positions in society for many centuries and they have used women to suit their own needs (Reuther 1983: 83).

Christian men and women are supposed to be free. The reason Jesus died on the cross for all men and women was so that they could be free to serve, love, to care for, strengthen and support those around them. All men and women are called to preach, teach and make disciples.

7.2 Traditional View

The traditional view is that women may not exercise authority over men nor teach men. Most traditionalists are happy to allow women the privilege of singing or teaching children or other women when adult men are not present. They say that God distinguishes between the sexes and that Christ has already conferred the gift on the gifted men-apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (Ephesians 4:8-11). Because of this the church has acknowledged their Christ-imparted authority by appointing them to their various offices or functions and therefore it is not necessary for women to hold these offices.

Piper and Grudem (1992: 15) are convinced that only “men should bear primary responsibility for Christ like leadership and teaching in the church.” They go on to argue that it is detrimental for women to assume this role. One needs to ask whether

men only can have Christ like leadership in the church. God has gifted men and women in leadership and teaching roles. The Bible affirms that in Christ both men and women are equally accepted, redeemed, and gifted by the Holy Spirit to represent him (Edwards 1989: 165).

Bruce Waltke (1986: 13) in the magazine *Christianity Today* says, “men and women are equal in bearing the image of God, the husband is the head of the wife and all church leadership must be male.” To him the issue is quite simple, “the Bible says it, and that is it.”

Culver (1989: 42-43) argues that a woman named Jezebel filled only one New Testament teaching office and it was disastrous. There are no other women exalted to be teachers of the church. Trombley (1985: 54-55) disagrees with this and strongly argues this point with the following:

Jesus commissioned the church to evangelize the world. Our Lord specifically told us to teach the nations, to herald the good news concerning the Son of God. Included in this directive are ministries of evangelism, preaching, teaching, exhorting, witnessing and even electronic evangelism. Did Jesus forbid women from telling the good news? Were they restricted to prophesy?

Tradition has limited the ministry of women in the church. Many women have been called into ministry by the Holy Spirit just as men have been. To say that women should not teach or have authority over men is to deny their right of calling in God's kingdom. Placing traditional restrictions on women shows great inconsistency in what the Scriptures are saying. Culver (1989:37) maintains that there is enough support for the tradition in Scripture. He goes on to say that men are people's representatives and God's agents in the church. Old Testament history supports the

eminence of men over women in every kind of leadership. Priests, kings and judges in the Old Testament were always men except for a few women. All of the Old Testament prophets were men. Genealogical lines (Genesis 46, Numbers 26, 1 Chronicles 1, Nehemiah 7, Matthew 1, and Luke 3) were only traced through the male line. Women are introduced as helpers and compliments of their men.

Many scholars such as Mickelsen, Foh and Liefeld believe that there is no support for what Culver says (Clouse and Clouse 1989: 53-65). According to them, men and women are agents and representatives of God in the church and the world. In the Old Testament many women had eminence over men, to quote but a few, Deborah, Esther, Huldah etc. To suggest that genealogical lines be only traced through the male line is a slur on women. One has to only look at the book of Matthew that supports the genealogical line of women as well. Five women are mentioned in the genealogical line of Jesus: Mary, Ruth, Bathsheba, Tamar and Rahab. Witherington III (1990: 229) writes, "There are a number of theories as to why they are included but perhaps the best is because they were involved in "irregular" sexual unions and yet were vehicles of God's Messianic plan."

He goes on to further say that "the genealogy also points out Jesus' indebtedness to both men and women for his Davidic ancestry, and to Mary especially for his humanity." Matthew also wanted to show the importance of women in God's kingdom.

Mickelsen (1989: 61) argues that it is biblical principle that has limited the ministry of women. The reason for this is that traditionalists have not interpreted Scripture

properly. One example that she quotes is the “deception of Eve in the Garden of Eden.”

Traditionalists say that because of this deception women have a lesser ability to comprehend and therefore they should not be allowed to teach. Mickelsen (1989: 63) makes her point by saying that many women are winning awards in all fields. She goes on to say, “bad tradition, is the real problem facing them today - not the lack of ability or lack of the call of God.” In the ECSA Indian women are doing exceptionally well at Durban Bible College and many of them are among the top students.

God is calling Indian women in the ECSA to serve in every area of service. From the Old Testament right to the present time God is calling women from all walks of life. Individuals and denominations are setting up barriers to prevent women from taking their rightful place in the church. God has gifted many women and it is for this reason they need to realize their God given gifts and make use of them. When God’s gifts are not used for the good of the church the church suffers. This is true of the church. The church is suffering today because the gifts of women are not being appropriately used.

7.3 Plural Ministry View

Plural ministry view says that women should be involved in ministry. Women however, should not hold positions of authority but rather be involved in ministry of service. Plural ministry questions ordination as a means of conferring authority. Feminists consider pluralists as seeing women as subordinate and inferior. Their

argument is that they hold to subordination of women but this is as a result of women's function in the kingdom of God and this in no way implies that they are inferior. They base their conclusions on a particular understanding of headship and that woman should remain silent in the church (Liefeld 1989: 128). Authority is found in the Bible and not in the messenger. Authority does not rest with individuals but with the Lord Jesus Christ. No persons should hold personal authority. The authority is in the Word itself and not in the individual who teaches or preaches.

What this says is that the minister is to be like the Lord Jesus Christ who did not come to be served but to serve. In serving in the kingdom women should not consider *authority* but *ministry*. If people are eager to serve in the kingdom they must be eager to serve and "not lord it over others but be examples to those whom they serve." Difficulties over women teaching can be overcome by a better understanding of what teaching and authority meant in the time of the new Testament church and what they mean today (Liefeld 1989:151). Collins (1985: 11) asks, "how shall the Scriptures be interpreted and who shall interpret them."

It is not easy to interpret Scripture because the situation we now live in is different from Biblical times. We have a completed canon, which we recognize as the inherent Word of God. It is important then that we base our authority on this inherent Word of God (Mickelsen 1989: 165-166).

Edwards (1989: 165) however argues that "verses that have been used to support male authority over women are in fact geared to specific situations and cannot be used in all situations."

Liefeld (1989: 151) forwards the following reasons why women should not exercise authority over men: (1) Ordination does not biblically confer authority (2) Ultimate authority rests with God and not with mankind (3) Ministry is service not authority.

In responding to Liefeld, Mickelsen (1989: 165) agrees that it is important to be a servant as a mark of ministry and leadership. She says that no one can desire power and still be faithful to the teachings of Christ. One thing that stands out regarding women in ministry is the fact that all authoritative teachings and positions of authority seem to belong to men in the church. Women's ministry rides on the positions of authority as belonging to men. She strongly argues that authority belongs to no one. In fact it was foreign to Christ. It would appear that those who have a plural view of women's ministry miss the point. Authority in the church has been taken over by men. It is easy to say that it belongs to no one but God. The reality is that at the present moment it belongs only to men in the ECSA. For this reason it has become imperative that authority in the ECSA be shared with women as well.

7.4 A Modified View

A modified or male leadership view allows for women to teach but not hold positions of authority. This view holds that the principle for understanding women's roles in society, are found in the first two chapters of Genesis (1, 2). The principles are that men and women are equal in being (Genesis 1:27), the man is the head and women was created to help man (Genesis 2:21-23) and husband and wife are one flesh (Genesis 2:24). After the fall, the harmonious working of these principles was destroyed. Because of sin there seems to be a constant battle between the sexes.

There is a desire by the woman to control the man and in order for man to maintain his headship and authority he must fight for it (Foh 1989: 74-75). This modified view goes on to suggest that a woman's position is not equal to man's position. Women therefore cannot occupy a position of authority, such as a priest. The reason for this is that the priest typifies Christ, who is our eternal high priest. The women must therefore be subordinate in the church (Piper and Grudem 1992:22). The suggestion is that although women are subordinate they must be treated as persons of worth.

Jesus himself treated women with respect and as persons of worth, made in the image of God. At no stage in his ministry did he treat women as being subordinate (Langley 1983:43).

Many women have been responsible for the spread of the gospel. Foh (1989: 96) suggests that women were involved in various ministries in the early church but there are no examples to suggest that there were female apostles, evangelists or elders. Other offices are open to women and women may have input on the use of funds, choice of programs, church property, teaching in the Sunday school and the like. She may teach but his should be done in private. Foh (1989: 94-100) further asserts that women may not preach or evangelize because nowhere in the New Testament are there examples of women preaching and evangelizing.

In a response to Foh, Mickelsen (1989: 119) suggests that Fohs' basis of reasoning is not clear and very subjective. To suggest that Christ saw men and women as equal in the church, and for women to be treated differently from men in the church, is contrary to what Christ taught in the Bible. If women profess to be believers in Christ

and they want to use their gifts in the same manner as men then they *must* be afforded the opportunity.

Mickelsen (1989: 123) goes on to further say “the concept of keeping women in a restricted place runs counter to the “freedom in Christ” that Jesus demonstrated and that Paul preached.” All men and women have freedom in Christ. To put a yoke around the necks of women and restrict them in ministry becomes a bondage that can handicap the church. We must become aware that we are not to resemble the exclusively male dominated Jewish synagogues but rather we must resemble the Spirit-filled church of Jesus Christ where the gifts of all persons, men and women, will be used for the glory of God.

In concluding this chapter it is necessary for the ECSA to take cognisance of what has already been discussed thus far. The following chapter puts forward some areas that need to be re-examined in the ECSA.

Chapter 8

8. THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE ECSA

8.1 Introduction

Whether we like it or not the world is moving to a new order. Change will take place and no one can stop it, change is inevitable. One of the hurdles facing the ECSA is religious tradition. In so far as the doctrine and policy of women is concerned people serving in the ECSA need to become comfortable with these changes. I do realize that these changes cannot take place overnight. In the world of today we are forever discovering that many customs and traditions have become meaningless and out of touch. Jesus himself spoke out against traditions. I am in no way saying that there is something wrong with traditions because some traditions can be very positive and valuable. What I am saying is that the change in status of women in the ECSA demands re-examination.

8.2 Changing our Leadership Positions

The most important of the structures in the church is leadership. Any position of leadership in the church or in society is automatically assigned to men. Even the most committed and able woman is assigned a secondary place.

At any rate, within the church, able men are not prepared to work under the leadership of able women. It is in an area such as leadership that change needs to be made. The entire concept of the leadership position needs to be reexamined. Several leadership positions are available within the church at large and its programmes. In many other institutions, such as hospitals, nursing homes, banking institutions etc. many women

serve as heads of these institutions. There are many men who are willing to serve under these women. The secular world has broken this tradition, of only men being heads of such institutions. The churches are yet to follow this principle. In the church, women are only allowed to teach Sunday school or become leader of the ladies group.

Ministries and programmes exclusively for women naturally perpetuate this kind of oppression, which leads to division. Church tradition must be broken. Why should a man be prevented from leading a ladies group and a woman from leading a men's group? Is it not wise to combine them and have leaders of such programmes according to their ability?

The only way this can be done is to outline a programme for genuine change with clear objectives, goals and a definitive method of operation. This must include placing women into those positions, which represent genuine expressions of equality (Massey 1990:372). In terms of our culture and tradition, women have been relegated to second place. For this reason more opportunities for leadership must be given to women.

The general attitude is that the man is the breadwinner in the home. In the last few years this has changed dramatically where the women makes remarkable contribution towards the upkeep of the home. In many cases some women do more for the home and the church than men do. In view of this attitudes should change and women should be considered as equal in the church and home (Kumari 1993:136-137).

Participation of women's leadership in the worship service is another contentious issue in Christian circles. This goes back to the structures of the church. Most women are not allowed to lead in worship. There are many women who are capable and who are willing to lead in worship but they have been sidelined. Women are allowed to lead in their own groups such as the ladies group.

When it comes to the Sunday services women are totally barred from leading these services. They are told that they could be part of the choir but that is as far as it goes. Women need to be given the opportunity to use their talents and gifts as best they can. Leading worship is one of the ways that they can be greatly used.

8.3 Other Structures Which Need to be Broken

Patriarchal structures need to be replaced so that, both male and female members are awarded equal opportunities to work together as partners. The church is a community and it needs to operate as a community of believers. What better way to show equality as men and women work side by side with each other in the community? God has given both men and women gifts that can be used in the kingdom.

We need to make use of those gifts that women have. We can do this by encouraging women to undertake theological studies and when they have completed their studies we must consecrate them into various ministries according to the gifts of the Spirit of God has imparted to them. It is not fitting for male leadership to give them ancillary roles but as members who have leadership qualities, allow them to become leaders in the church (Yinda 1997:50).

I firmly believe that women should be represented at all levels of the church, local council, regional and executive so that their aspirations, goals and visions can come to the fore of the denomination. Men and women need to be deeply conscientized about the role of women in the church. The constitution of the church says that women cannot participate in roles of leadership, but that they should be considered as lady workers (Article 4.5 of the Constitution of the ECSA). One way to promote women's participation is to constitutionally require their participation, provide for their participation and provide for representation of women in all committees. This participation should be shared with men equally.

Stereotypes need to be broken. Very often women are used in the roles of welcomers, chefs, food servers and accommodation providers and I believe that this should change. Most importantly we need to develop a gender of equality, a gender that wrestles with the meaning of sex according to God.

8.4 Changing Traditional Orientation in Women

Massey (1990: 374) says, "clearly female liberation is not merely a battle against male chauvinism, it is a battle against traditional orientation in women themselves." Women must believe in themselves and have confidence in whatever they do. In terms of our own culture women themselves are opposed to their leadership role in the society. Some women may feel that their place is at home and that they should be supporting their husbands in leadership.

A proper climate should be created so that woman can be informed and educated about the role of women in the church. Women very often oppress themselves by

thinking that they are powerless to do anything (Kumari 1993:137). Once women believe in themselves they can liberate themselves from this patriarchal thinking. Women cannot wait for change to take place they must initiate the change. They can do this by seeing men as their equals and by worshiping the God who sees them as he sees men, on that same equal footing. Women need to become owners of their own lives. If they are owners then they must take authority and develop the spirit of ownership as men did when they owned power and authority.

8.5 Ordination of Women

Many women in the ECSA have been trained theologically yet they can never perform functions of an ordained minister. There are many men who are elders in the denomination and who have only received formal Bible Study training yet they are allowed to perform all the duties of an ordained minister. Many of the elders are very capable but this proves blatant discrimination against women who have spent three years in a theological institution training for the ministry.

Women's ordination is therefore a serious question for discussion and debate before churches. It has already been said that there are a larger percentage of women than men in the church today. Women need representation and who better to represent women than an ordained woman minister. This needs to be questioned when the debate on women's ordination is considered (Kumari 1993:138).

8.6 Liberation of the ECSA from Sexism

In order for the ECSA to be freed from sexism it needs to interpret Scripture with new insights given to Christians by the Holy Spirit. The manner in which believers may interpret and use Scriptural texts can become oppressive. The church must focus on Jesus' life and ministry so that it can become concerned with human conditions especially the concerns of women. It must take on the prophetic character of the life and ministry of Jesus so that it can become a witness to the world that God is calling them to be. This prophetic character should be in line with Jesus' proclamation of the good news to all people especially the oppressed (Swart-Russell 1988: 373).

Jesus saw all people as equal and he rejected those who dominated others. In the gospels we find that Jesus shared his love with the despised and the rejected. He treated all people with respect especially the women who came to him. The church must love both God and neighbour and that love includes both personal and social dimensions (Swart-Russell 1988:371-376).

Jesus treated both male and female equally. He understood fully that sexual stereotyping violates the integrity of the person and that sexism could give rise to unbalanced personalities. His concern was for the whole person. Swart-Russell (1988: 375) says, "Jesus' concern for healing and wholeness thus stands as a direct challenge to Christian sexism and its divisiveness and destructiveness." He dealt firmly with sexism by helping those who were poor. Women and children were the poorest and most helpless in society.

Hierarchy and male domination are not part of Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of God. Jesus taught servant-hood. If the church can again discover servant-hood, humility towards others will become evident. The church must return to a humble and Christ-like role in society. This humility and Christ-like role must be actualized in the loving egalitarian behaviour of all members. Witness is the task of all members including women (Swart-Russell 1988:386).

Chapter 9

9. CONCLUSION

Many women have made great strides towards claiming for themselves a place in the church. In Protestant and some of the Evangelical denominations women continue to enter the ministry in large numbers. MacHaffie (1986: 154) sees this as a positive step for women when she says,

As we have already seen, an important part of the move toward full equality and participation for women in the churches has been a critical exploration of the past...men increasingly realize that women have made significant contributions to the Christian community and women are deriving inspiration from past female role models whose courage and single-minded pursuit of what they perceived as God's way enabled them to transcend cultural barriers

Women's lives enshrine a deep grammar, whose morphology need to be learned for the sake of better human inter-relationships. They are persons with their own stories – stories laden with anecdotes (sad and joyful, deep and trivial), plans, struggles and dreams (Furlong 1991:57). But their life stories are either dismissed as inferior or passed over. Women are culture texts – they are in a culture, motherhood, womanhood, and sexuality. The strands of a woman's body mould her as feminine in sex. It is essential for women to recognize their lives as being sacred, as something to be cared for and defended, although through culture and background, they might have been told, or made to think otherwise (Furlong 1991: 18).

But once women in the ECSA see themselves as creatures that have also been called for a divine purpose in the kingdom of God, this is sure to send off a ripple effect.

The male dominated leadership will begin to see the worth in women and will begin to respect their leadership and ministry into which God has called them. The Bible tells us that the great Christian commandment is love. Through love we are bound to each other, all men and women in the church of Christ, are bound together in trust journeying together so that we can accomplish much for the kingdom of God. That which women want to sow back into the church can do much to restore the gospel presence within the church. Many women are available and committed to service in the body of Christ (Byrne 1988:97-107).

In light of this, it is necessary for the male dominated leadership, to come to terms with structures in the ECSA. But in the same token, to acknowledge that the present context in which they find themselves may call for social change in order for women to take their rightful place and create an impact in the kingdom of God. As a pastor in the ECSA I would like to definitely see women in positions of leadership as well as being ordained as ministers. Women have much to offer and I personally believe that the denomination can benefit much from the leadership of women.

Appendix A

Survey

A general survey was conducted amongst a group of 20 Ladies at a meeting at Salem Evangelical Church on 23 October 2001. The reason for the survey was clearly explained and it was concluded that the women were willing to involve themselves in the survey. The questions put to the group was solely to establish howmany had the desire to become involved in the leadership of the local church. The following questions were put forward:

- 1) Should women become leaders in the ECSA?
- 2) Should women be ordained as ministers in the ECSA?
- 3) Should women be allowed to teach and preach in the ECSA?

The women indicated by either being in favour or not being in favour. The following table is the result of the survey.

In Favour	Not in Favour
1) fourteen (14)	1) six (6)
2) thirteen (13)	2) seven (7)
3) sixteen (16)	3) four (4)

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