Reprinted from the Christian Science Journal, October 1998
All rights reserved.

Women as “elect of God”

By Elise L. Moore

It was a live television broadcast. Four women - a Baptist, a Christian Scientist, a Hindu, and a Muslim - were discussing an upcoming religious conference with a male moderator. The topic of women's rights and role in religion came up. The Baptist, a university professor and ordained minister, answered a question by paraphrasing a Bible verse that would have us call Jesus “friend” rather than “Master.” Her point was that Jesus did not promote a servile role for men or women.

The phone lit up. The first caller quoted John 13:13: “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.” He then proceeded to challenge her to name the Bible reference she had just paraphrased, strongly implying that not only was her Scriptural knowledge mistaken but so was her view of the relation of women to men and to God. That awkward moment was eased by going to a commercial break.

Immediately after the break, a female caller provided the reference: John 15:14, 15. Here Jesus told his disciples: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” The moderator then moved the discussion to the various roles that Hindu and Muslim women assume in their religious traditions. The controversy of women's rights in Christian religion was quietly avoided.

Domination of theology and religious practice by society and cultural tradition has led to the subordination of women to men in some denominations. Liberal and conservative theologians can enjoy a lively debate, exchanging Bible passages to support their viewpoints. But the rights of women to receive revelation, preach their inspiration in church, and be considered equal members of the elect should be indisputable. The writer, as one student of Scripture, has noted that “the elect” is not a gender-oriented concept.

In the New Testament, the elect refers to those who acknowledge Christ, Truth, as the message of salvation from sin, disease, and death. The concept of the elect is associated with the coming of angel messages of God to gather and protect those who remain faithful.[1] Sometimes the presumption in interpreting Scripture is that men are more elect than women, even though John specifically refers to "the elect lady and her children."[2]

The Church of Christ, Scientist, cares about the recognition of women's rights. It was founded by a woman (Mary Baker Eddy) in 1879, and women figure prominently and equally in the church and healing ministry. While women are still not accepted in the pulpit of some Christian denominations, Mrs. Eddy was preaching, teaching, healing, and exercising administrative church leadership in an era when this was unprecedented. Her role as Discoverer of Christian Science, as well as Founder and Leader of her Church, still stirs controversy in some quarters simply because she *was* a woman.

The need of the hour, however, goes beyond Scriptural debate. The need is for inspiration and moral courage. Nothing less will break the fetters of human hierarchy and cultural tradition and restore a recognition of women's equal status as elect of God.

In order to recognize the spiritual status of woman, one must start with an elevated understanding of God. Christian Science gently reveals God as Father-Mother. Neither a biologically gender-based nor an obscure concept, the perception of Father-Mother God expresses the complete nature of God as divine Person. Deity is all-inclusive, is Spirit, rather than exclusively masculine.

Since Spirit, God, is the source of creation, from Deity emanate all qualities, whether identified as masculine or feminine. God does not value one aspect of His nature over another. So, for example, patience and love are equally valued with strength and authority. Purity and holiness are as important as wisdom and spiritual power. Seen from this perspective, gender is a mental concept, expressing a variety of qualities instead of a physiological and limiting, sexual notion.

But it was neither a feminist nor a humanly liberal theology that prompted Mrs. Eddy to write of the motherhood as well as the fatherhood of God. Incidents recounted in her autobiography, *Retrospection and Introspection*, indicate that she

[1] See Matthew 24:31
[2] II John 1:1

learned of God's mothering nature through personal experience. Here's one telling example: "For some twelve months, when I was about eight years old, I repeatedly heard a voice, calling me distinctly by name, three times, in an ascending scale. I thought this was my mother's voice, and sometimes went to her, beseeching her to tell me what she wanted. Her answer was always, 'Nothing, child! What do you mean?' Then I would say, 'Mother, who *did* call me? I heard somebody call *Mary*, three times!' This continued until I grew discouraged, and my mother was perplexed and anxious.

"One day, when my cousin, Mehitable Huntoon, was visiting us,... the call again came, so loud that Mehitable heard it, though I had ceased to notice it. Greatly surprised, my cousin turned to me and said, 'Your mother is calling you!' but I answered not, till again the same call was thrice repeated."

Then at her cousin's urging, Mary went to her mother, who again said she had not called. When Mary explained that her cousin had also heard the voice, Mrs. Baker took the cousin aside in a separate room to question her. And Mary overheard her cousin confirm what had occurred.

The autobiography continues: "That night my mother read to me the Scriptural narrative of little Samuel, and bade me, when the voice called again, to reply as he did, 'Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.' The voice came; but I was afraid, and did not answer. Afterward I wept, and prayed that God would forgive me, resolving to do, next time, as my mother had bidden me. When the call came again I did answer, in the words of Samuel, but never again to the material senses was that mysterious call repeated."[3]

While God spoke to Samuel in an audible masculine voice, here She spoke to Mary in a feminine voice. For Mrs. Eddy, the motherhood of God was not a theological doctrine but the result of direct religious experience and divine revelation. In Mrs. Eddy's primary work, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, she writes, "Father-Mother is the name for Deity, which indicates His tender relationship to His spiritual creation."[4] To Mrs. Eddy, *divine Love* most clearly communicated the healing nature of Deity.

Mrs. Eddy found evidence both in her life and in the Scriptures for God as Mother. In her discovery, the revelation of God as Father-Mother, or infinite Person, is

---

[3] Ret., p. 8
[4] *Science and Health*, p. 332

related to the Scriptural concept of God as Spirit. Writing of what Christian Scientists hold true, Mrs. Eddy says: "We believe, according to the Scriptures, that God is infinite Spirit or Person, and man is His image and likeness: therefore man reflects Spirit, not matter."[5] *Man* as used in this context indicates generic man, including masculine and feminine.

That God is divine Spirit, the source of all being, was Christ Jesus' teaching. He established the essence of Deity as infinite, limited to no sect, location, or gender. Through this revelation of the nature of God, Jesus exploded the traditional theology of his era regarding the subordination of women and Gentiles to men and Jews. In Spirit's creation, man and woman are subordinate to divine authority and to none other.

This is illustrated in the account of Christ Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.[6] In answering the woman's question about the location or nationality of God, Jesus responded by assuring her that God did not live in a specific location (a mountain or Jerusalem), nor was Deity the God of only one nation or sect. "God is a Spirit," Jesus told her, "and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."[7] The ever-present, universal nature of God as Spirit enables individuals to learn of their direct relation to God. Whether male or female, Jew or Gentile, "they that worship" must worship God spiritually. No hierarchy. No secondary status for woman. Each individual is free to receive the Christ-healing message, be transformed, preach, and practice.

While it might seem comfortable for some women to look to men for spiritual and moral leadership, Jesus taught that each individual is responsible for seeking and finding God and His kingdom for herself or himself. He spurned competition or complacency as unworthy of his followers.

The issue of "who shall be greatest" or human hierarchy was thoroughly rejected by Jesus. When his disciples elbowed for priority, Jesus rebuked them all. "He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve…I am among you as he that serveth."[8] At no point did Jesus indicate that these truths excluded or subordinated the rights and role of women.

---

[5] *Message to The Mother Church for 1901*, p. 5
[6] See John, chap. 4
[7] John 4:24
[8] Luke 22:25-27

In his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus overturned gender hierarchy not only by speaking directly to her but also by openly revealing that he was the Christ. When she questioned him, "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things," Jesus bluntly said, "I that speak unto thee am he."[9] It is remarkable to realize that, according to the Gospel of John, she was the first person to whom Jesus directly confirmed his identity as the Messiah other than perhaps his most intimate disciples.

The tradition that women should keep silent before men regarding religious matters was also rejected as a result of this revelation. The Samaritan woman immediately went to the men of her community and preached to them, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"[10] The men received her inspired message and responded by going to meet Jesus and discern for themselves his identity.

This incident is in remarkable contrast to a meeting with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, described in the previous chapter, John 3. Nicodemus had all the religious qualifications that the Samaritan woman did not have. Yet when Jesus revealed to him the nature of God as Spirit and the demand for rebirth, Nicodemus balked. His response drew Jesus' rebuke, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"[11]

Whereas Jesus ordained the Samaritan woman by openly revealing himself, Nicodemus received no such approval. The woman immediately preached in her city among the men. Nicodemus held on to familiar traditions and missed the opportunity to be a practicing disciple. What a contrast between his tradition-bound response and the receptivity and discernment of the unnamed Samaritan woman.

In general conversation, we always seem to list woman second after man, wife after husband. The mythical Eve was created second after Adam. There is no such order in Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."[12] The Christ erases the age-old stigma of the Eve-woman just as Christ replaces the Adam-man.

---

[9] John 4:25, 26
[10] John 4:29
[11] John 3:10
[12] Gal. 3:28

Throughout the Scriptures there are glimpses of a higher concept of womanhood. In Revelation the Babylonish woman could be thought of as representing the sinning notion of womanhood.[13] This false notion is totally destroyed, making room for the true concept or bride of Christ to appear. Just as the serpent of Genesis, symbolizing evil, swells to become the great red dragon of the Apocalypse,[14] so one might say that the false concept of woman represented by Eve finally appears as the Babylonish woman swollen with sin and worldliness. In Revelation, this false view of woman is overthrown, never to be heard again. Then the ideal woman, unstained by sin, emerges. Spiritually interpreted, this woman represents the pure, spiritual ideal, which both men and women can express.

The joyous revelation of the new heaven and new earth, the new Jerusalem, is represented symbolically as the bride of Christ.[15] What fulfillment and glory is expressed! Woman now represents the ultimate harmony of life, the highest spiritual revelation, the heaven of God. This most holy revelation of spiritual reality concludes with the Spirit and bride bidding all who hear, who are athirst, to come. And this certainly includes the call for each one to come to the recognition of the original and ultimate spiritual nature of man and woman.

The elect of God are actually His spiritual ideas. The divine order is established; the ideas of God express the divine nature of Father-Mother. This spiritual truth frees men and women from human hierarchy and prepares each one to preach, to heal, and to practice Truth as the elect of God.

---

[13] See Rev., chaps. 17-19
[14] See *Science and Health*, p. 565
[15] See Rev., chap. 21