

# In Search of an Authentic

By Fleming Rutledge

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**T**o be a feminist, to be a woman, to be a theologian, to bear witness before the rulers of this world, to be radically evangelical in obedience to the commanding priority of the divine initiative: these are the imperatives which, in ascending order of importance, give shape and meaning to my life at the same time that they daily call my life into question. To be this kind of person, to be called to give this kind of testimony, to be set under this authority (Luke 7:8) is sufficient, it is enough; it is to walk an unknown path with a known guide. It is to know with John Bunyan's Mr. Stand-fast that

... I stand easy, my foot is fixed upon that which the Feet of the Priests that bare the Ark of the Covenant stood while Israel went over Jordan. The Waters indeed are to the Palate bitter, and to the Stomach cold, yet the thoughts of what I am going to, and the Conduct that waits for me on the other side, doth lie as a glowing Coal at my heart.

That sounds more like the ending of an article, not the beginning of one. New Testament eschatology has that effect on a person's writing. "In my end is my beginning" (T. S. Eliot). It is only out of this set of convictions that I feel able to speak at all concerning the subject of this article.

My subject is the peculiar difficulty of being a woman, a feminist, a theologian, and an evangelical (a Calvinist, if

you will) at this present time in America. It is not just a matter of the scarcity of models; even more, it is the confluence of currents in American life that combine to create a climate highly inimical to the growth of a genuinely Biblical feminism. I propose to take a look at some of these currents and at the ways in which they flow together, with the hope that a descriptive article might prove to be thought-provoking.

**F**irst on the list is the well-known *anti-intellectualism* of American culture. This pervasive phenomenon has been endlessly remarked upon and does not need to be developed here. The significance of American anti-intellectualism for our present purpose is its spurious connection in our own time with women's issues; I am particularly interested in those issues which are related to woman's role in religion, as evidenced in seminaries and church-related groups, though the insidious connection probably holds true across the spectrum.

What I have in mind is much more specific than the generally familiar notion that a girl shouldn't appear to be too bright lest she frighten off the men she must attract in order to be approved by society; many women are making significant inroads against that attitude. What is rather more alarming, I think, is the deep-seated suspicion of the intellectual enterprise within the Women's Movement itself. Although feminists vehemently protest against gender-based stereotyping (e.g., men deal with abstract

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# Biblical Feminism

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ideas while women rely on intuition), very often the content and style of the protest simply reinforces the stereotype. For example: in one recent seminary dispute, almost (not quite) all the women students and their male supporters lined up on the side of an experimental, experiential "learning model" over against the traditional curriculum, which was seen as the enemy. I am, of course, guilty of some oversimplification here; part of what was going on was an extension of much that was good and useful in the student protests of the 60's, and in that respect is not pertinent to feminism *per se*. What I am attempting to emphasize, however, is the widespread feminist mistrust of classical Biblical and theological scholarship. The fields of study which were most closely allied with the women's protest in the aforementioned seminary were the practical and pastoral. In the Biblical and theological fields, the only professors whose courses attracted significant numbers of women students were those who were willing to experiment freely, substituting clay-modelling for traditional exegesis, assigning the keeping of autobiographical journals rather than the writing of scholarly papers, offering Gestalt exercises instead of closely reasoned lectures on the Trinitarian controversies. I am not suggesting that Gestalt exercises might not be a helpful technique in certain instances; however, there is certainly some kind of antipathy being expressed here by women seminarians for classical scholarly work. Most disturbing of all is the way in which this attitude is encouraged by faculty sympathizers, many of whom seem to assume that because very few women choose to specialize in dogmatic theology, therefore dogmatic theology must, *ipso facto*, be oppressive and most go (or, alternatively, must be altered beyond

recognition in order to "meet women's needs").

**T**his brings us to a second current in American Christianity and in Christian feminism, namely, its *anti-theological* bias. We ought to say here what we mean by theology, so I offer the following as a working definition:

*theology is that activity of the Christian church which seeks to give a coherent and systematic account of the present-day significance of the Christian Scripture and tradition.*

Now: if that definition is anywhere near the mark, it will be seen that we are already in trouble. First of all, it is a very narrow definition, and the tendency of late has been to broaden the definition. (We hear that poetry is theology, dance is theology, successful stewardship campaigns are theology, liturgy is theology, *Life* (wow) is theology — and that means that what has been traditionally called theology is, like, man, dead. I vividly remember a conversation I had with a clergyman friend just after I started seminary. He asked me what my favorite course was, and I happily answered, "systematic theology." He looked at me as though I had turned into a toad and said with distaste, "systematic theology! Well! Let me make a suggestion for your next paper. You should call it 'Why There is No Such Thing as Systematic Theology.'" I am quite sure that if I had told him I liked *feminist* theology, his reaction would have been altogether different. I was duly intimidated, but by God's grace survived to become at least a systematic theologian

*manque*.) From the feminist standpoint, another problem with my definition is those crucial words “coherent” and “systematic”. If it is true, as I am suggesting, that women have been encouraged to avoid rigorous scholarship and systematic theological thinking, then this is an example of the confluence of currents that I mentioned earlier — in this case, the anti-theological and the anti-intellectual.

Is it true that there is an anti-theological strain in American Christian feminism, and if so, why? I must refer here to a widely praised recent book by Ann Douglas, of the Columbia University faculty, which has been an important catalyst for my thinking. The thesis of Douglas’ book, *The Feminization of American Culture* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), is that in 19th-century New England there was formed an alliance between liberal Protestant clergyman and the literarily-inclined women in their congregations that was to have a profound and far-reaching influence on American religion and society. The ministers and these ladies produced a torrent of mawkish books and magazine articles that contributed conspicuously to the transformation of American Christianity into its sentimental stained-glass, eyes-upturned, Sunday-School, Mother’s Day, funeral-parlor, child-centered, tender-hearted Victorian version. One of Douglas’ chapters is tellingly entitled “The Loss of Theology.” It is her belief that when the liberal clergymen abandoned the older Calvinist doctrine of the Atonement, a “basically paternal (or gubernatorial) and authoritarian view” was exchanged for a “fundamentally maternal and affective one.” One might quarrel with Douglas’ representation of the severity and “masculinity” of the substitutionary Atonement, but she is right, surely, in suggesting that the replacement of the doctrine of the Atonement by the ideal of a beautiful, suffering Christ who evokes sympathy and tears is a step in the direction of extolling weakness — weakness, furthermore, in a sense that was specifically identified in the days of Horace Bushnell as “feminine.” Douglas says, in describing this process, that

the new Bushnellian Christ has become a being who tactfully refuses to overwhelm those favor he courts; he wisely prefers to prove his power of infiltration (rather than to test his capacity for onslaught. Newly sensitized and feminized in image, defined as a lover of all the world’s ‘little ones’, the liberal Jesus too is interested in discovering and tapping the world’s unconscious . . . (he) is connotative, even derivative; he must suffer rather than command, precisely because he is dependent for his reality, not on (our) abilities to perceive objective truth, but on (our) capacities for subjective impression and reaction (p. 130).

One is tempted to say, here, that Christ is not dependent on *either* of those human perceptions for his reality, but Douglas’ main point is none the less well taken. It is the identification of “the loss of theology” with femininity that I particularly want to emphasize. As American theology became “softer,” so also the corresponding new version of Christianity became more and more associated with women, with children, with emotions and sensations, with nurture and pastoral care, with play and fantasy. Does anyone need to be told how much this sounds like contemporary American “theology”? To be sure, the authors of Christian education materials in the 1970s would vigorously resist any suggestion that such associations were more feminine than masculine; nevertheless, the decline of respect for doctrine, dogma, and rational adult discourse in the

American church has entered into partnership with Christian feminism in a very particular way. To mention one curious manifestation of this situation, there has recently been a marked emphasis on the participation of small children in the rites and ceremonies presided over by women clergy. In my own denomination (Episcopal), children and babies were prominent in the recent ordinations of various women priests to a degree unknown in ordinations of males. I recently received an invitation to a procession and “celebration” of ordained women in my area; I was instructed to process in my “worship attire” (that sounded like a fashion show to me. Don’t clergypersons wear vestments or robes any more?) and to bring my children, who would also process while playing rhythm instruments. My own children would sooner have

endured an afternoon at the dentist, I’m afraid, but the thing that is truly puzzling is that whereas many of these very women would be highly incensed at the suggestion that child nurture is a specifically feminine function, yet they have been at great pains to advertise their peculiar esteem for and relationship with young children. I do not see how we can have it both ways. Careful exegesis of the famous passages of the New Testament in which Jesus brings children into his circle reveals an utterly un-sentimental and adult-oriented message about entrance into the Kingdom. Unfortunately, the weakening of theology, as described above, has deceived us into believing that Christianity is really a happy-hearted, permissive, inclusive religion that is especially well-suited to children. (The children themselves know better, which accounts for the fact that they hate Sunday School. I am reminded of a splendid little book called *Teaching Your Child About God* by members of the Max Odorff group, based on the child-development theories of Jean Piaget (St. Mary’s College Press, 1970). Two of the chapters are

called "The Bible is for Big People" and "Jesus is for Big People." Bravo.)

**T**here is a crucial misunderstanding at the heart of all this. If it is true that many women have been cut off, or have chosen to cut themselves off, from a commitment to strict Biblical exegesis and dogmatic theology, then there is likely to be a corresponding tendency to undisciplined *syncretism*, a third trend in American life. Though it is certainly possible that I am not being fair, it seems to me that the anti-theological, anti-intellectual stance of American Christianity in general and feminism in particular produces more than the average amount of eclecticism, gnosticism, heterodoxy and (dare I say it?) heresy. I do not wish to disparage the important role of heresy in theological debate. However, when wildly unorthodox positions are uncritically hailed on all sides as newly revealed truth, it seems to me that theological debate has broken down.

Let us look, for example, at a widely distributed (Published in *Ruach*, Newsletter of the Episcopal Women's Caucus, December 1974) Eucharistic "liturgy of thanksgiving" written by and for Episcopal women (and this is a denomination noted for its liturgical orderliness and discipline!):

*Celebrant:*

Blessed be God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer (official Prayer Book reading: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit").

*Community:*

And blessed be God's presence, now and forever (original reading: "Blessed be God's Kingdom. . .")

*All:*

And behold, all that God created was very good.

All plants, animals, earth are good.

All women and men are good.

All bodies, minds, souls, feelings are good.

Behold, it is all good.

Come, God creator into this place, into us, into me. . .

Come into us Adam's and Eve's equal in your image,

And breathe into us mystery,

Breathe into us.

Later in the service, in place of the usual acclamation, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again", we find:

*Celebrant:*

God is not dead

God is bread

And the bread is rising.

On one level, this "liturgy" is merely hilarious. On another level, though, I find myself asking about the significance of the fact that it was written and distributed by *women*. Call it monism, call it pantheism, call it mush, but by no stretch of the imagination can this liturgy be based on a knowledge of anything remotely resembling Christian theology. What are we to infer? that women do not know theology? That they do not care? Surely we are not to fall back on the belief of the early Fathers that women are more susceptible to heresy than men? Or are we simply to get off the hook by saying, with most contemporary people, that heresy is a useless concept?

**T**his brings up to yet another characteristic of American feminism and feminist theology, and that is its *non-critical* stance. A few feminists have called attention to this from within the Movement, but for the most part their warnings have gone unnoted. An article by Elinor Langer in *Ms.* magazine takes Kate Millett to task for producing the undisciplined, self-pitying, confessional *Flying* in the wake of her solidly researched *Sexual Politics*; Langer says,

Confession protects. By pretending we are presenting 'life', not art, we avoid criticism...*Flying* remind(s) us of the absence of a genuinely critical tradition in the Women's Movement ("Confessing," *Ms.*, October 1974).

Millett did not heed this wisdom; her third book, *Sita*, is even more blatantly confessional and self-protective than the second.

Karl Barth insists that

theology is an eminently *critical* science, for it is continually exposed to judgment and never relieved of the crisis in which it is placed . . . by its living subject (*Evangelical Theology*, p. 8).

Compare and contrast this statement by Penelope Washbourn, writing in *The Christian Century*:

The Hebrew religious tradition, the imagery used by Jesus, Pauline theology, Aquinas, Luther, Barth, Tillich, contemporary women theologians, I myself stand under judgement — the judgment of relativism. There is no absolute authority, no inspired word safe from the limitations of being conditioned by a human perspective. Each theologian, including Jesus, reflects the thought patterns of a time and expresses the meaning of the divine within the conceptual, spatial

and temporal framework available to him or her. Feminine theology need not ask Christian theologians of the past to justify today's changes in theology or church structure and practice. It does not matter whether Paul was a chauvinist or a liberationist. It is not our business to ask the past to see what we see now, to understand what we understand now . . . ("Authority or Idolatry? Feminine Theology and the Church." *Christian Century*, October 29, 1975.)

On a superficial level, it might be thought that Barth and Washbourn are saying the same thing, since Barth is scrupulously careful at all times to maintain the tentative, incomplete, humble character of theology. In actuality, of course, the two statements are poles apart. Washbourn has removed herself so far from the critical arena as to make any judgment on her work impossible. Her position is an extreme example of the lengths to which the women's movement in the church has sometimes, oftentimes, gone in its renunciation of memory, tradition, and revelation. The "Eternal Now" has gobbled up the gospel. There is nothing and no One left to judge the theologian and her theology.

**T**he emphasis on experience as a source of data for theological thinking is one of the most characteristic traits of American religion, from fundamentalist right to radical left. A typical statement is found on a seminary syllabus, serving as caption to a unit on experience and tradition: "That may be true, but it's not true for me." Here the anti-theological, anti-intellectual, and non-critical currents come together. The final appeal is to one's own experience, which no one can dispute. Sample arguments: Many people who are medically resuscitated after apparent "death" have visions of lights, music, and Jesus, therefore there must be life after death; a hymn proclaims, "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart"; a woman seminarian encounters nastiness from a certain professor, therefore that professor is a sexist oppressor and any woman who holds otherwise can only be pitied because her consciousness has not been raised.

Theologies based on religious experience, or on experience in general, often claim to be less tyrannical, certainly less dogmatic, than theology based on Scripture, tradition, revelation or even reason. This is true, obviously, for those who have had the prescribed experience, whether it be the "Baptism of the Spirit" or feelings of impotent rage at every member of the male sex living or dead. Those whose experiences have been different, however, will find the in-group to be very tyrannical

indeed. All kinds of subtle and not-so-subtle methods can be used to discount or disparage the testimony of those who do not share the attitudes of the majority. Most difficult of all in such a setting is any attempt to espouse the view of Barth-cum-Kierkegaard that "no soul-and-sense experience can bridge the gulf" between man and God (*Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford, 1933, p.163). Trying to convince an American, whether of left or right, of the merit of this theological tenet is about as futile as trying to book Jacques Ellul into the Rose Bowl.

The quest for experience is epidemic; we can no longer "see" an exhibit or "hear" a concert — we have to "experience" them. Everything from roller-coaster rides to human-potential weekends is advertised as a "total experience." The appeal to experience in theological discourse is the polemical device *par excellence*, because a person's experience cannot be effectively refuted. Since it is women who are supposed to be more open to feeling, emotion, and sensation (somehow the idea of an *intellectual* experience is not so highly regarded these days), there is more recourse to experience-as-argument in the Women's Movement than there is almost anywhere else. It was widely noted at the Episcopal General Convention in Minneapolis last fall that most of the speeches in favor of the ordination of women centered on personal experiences of injustice and expressions of individual conviction, whereas the speeches for the opposing side were much more likely to be built on Biblical and theological foundations. Some of these latter speeches were ill-considered at best and vicious at worst, but the point I am making is that Christian feminism is, by and large, scornful of or indifferent to traditional theological discourse. It is not supposed to be "where we are at." We cannot "relate" to it. It does not meet us "where we are." Perhaps it is silly to bring in these well-known contemporary phrases, and yet it seems to me that, ridiculous and trite though they are, the attitudes toward the educational process that they embody command near-complete allegiance in most American schools, universities, and main-line seminaries. "Meet the students where they are!" is the almost universal rallying cry.

In my not-so-long ago student days (it was 1974), I listened as a woman seminarian, sitting over coffee in the student center, complained bitterly about her morning class in Patristics. Her exact words were, "I don't give a s--- what Tertullian thought about the Trinity!" This could, of course, be dismissed as the kind of thing that disgruntled students have always said, but in this case, as (I think) in many others, her remark was received with solemn assent by those sitting around, as though it were a serious theological formulation — which, indeed, it was; it is the equivalent of Washbourn's view that it does not

matter what Paul thought about women. Behind the student's statement, and behind the acquiescence of her companions, lie several assumptions: that the content of the tradition is easily grasped, that its relevance to modern life should be readily apparent, that if such relevance is not readily apparent it must not be present, that professors who teach irrelevant material are oppressors, and that (this is the clincher) the tradition may at any time be hailed into the court of subjective impression and judged before the unassailable bar of personal experience and emotion. In this view, theological education should be instantaneous and free of cost. No effort, no pain, no suffering need be involved. The idea of a confrontation between the student and a possibly alien body of tradition is by all means to be avoided.

**P**aul Minear has recently attacked this attitude head-on. "An effective study of the Bible," he says, "produces culture shock; the more intense the study, the greater the shock."

Like Americans junketing in Asia, we can carefully select the itinerary, stop only at Western-style hotels, use guides who speak fluent English, eat only American food, albeit with quaint seasonings, and shop for foreign bric-a-brac with Bankamericards. Indeed the guiding of travelers through the world of the Bible with a minimum of culture shock is often assumed to be the chief function of ministers and teachers. They are expected to limit the questions and to select the answers which will not threaten the self-assurance of their customers. They are duty-bound to translate words or ideas, one at a time, into contemporary American jargon and ideology, so that any emotional disturbance will be minimized. They preserve the illusion of travel, without its risk or its profit. They remain blissfully unaware of how completely they have destroyed the integrity and independence of that other world.

But past shock can be as devastating as future shock. To achieve a genuine penetration of the ancient world can actually destroy a person's at-homeness in his own habitat. In fact we cannot fully grasp the cogency of ancient ways of thinking without surrendering that habitat. In ancient literature we encounter people who are marching to the sound of a different drummer; the tempo of their life is vastly different from ours . . . . As long as a student shies away from that alien world, so long does Bible study remain bland, superficial, and tepid. But each step of penetration will increase his excitement, though also his bewilderment, for at each step he encounters a collision between two languages, two mentalities, two modes of existing in the world, in

fact, two worlds. Each collision threatens that world in which the student has heretofore found shelter (*To Heal and To Reveal: The Prophetic Vocation According to Luke*. Seabury 1976.).

I quote Minear at some length because, as a conclusion to this article, I intend to say a few things about the "collision" between the "two worlds." We move from the explicitly theological realm to the explicitly political realm (implicitly, we have been in both all along). My particular concern with regard to Christian feminism is the way it takes shape in the political arena, and the way in which political action arises out of commitment, or lack of commitment, to theology as I have attempted to define it.

Am I wrong to suggest that the "bland, superficial and tepid" Bible study that Minear attacks is particularly characteristic of women? Perhaps. But I think not. Certainly it is true that male professors and students have collaborated enthusiastically, but if Ann Douglas is right about the flight of liberal Protestant clergymen into the feminine subculture, then this collaboration becomes intelligible:

. . . . As we have seen, disbelief in female capacity for scholarship and real intellectual or artistic achievement was widespread in American culture. The clergy, anxious to preserve their claim to distinction . . . . fostered such skepticism; its effects on women and on their attitude toward religion were largely and predictably negative . . . . (Douglas, *op cit.*, p. 142).

Assuming, then, that Christian feminists and their male supporters continue to avoid hard-nosed confrontation with unvarnished Biblical ideas, we can easily account for the very understandable failure of the Women's Liberation Movement in the churches to deal seriously with the crucial Biblical concept of power and authority (*exousia*). Christian feminism, to use the terminology of Luke 22:25, has been operating according to the rules of the "Gentile" world, as though it alone were real — that is, women in the Movement see *exousia* being wielded by men in the church (men who call themselves "benefactors", of course, as Luke reports), and the feminist counter-move is either to fight for a share of that *exousia* or, more drastically, to maneuver so that it can be given solely to women. Then, naturally, the women can be the "benefactors" instead of the men. The call for this kind of shift in the power structure is frequently called "radical", but in fact, it is not radical at all. In such a power struggle, there has been no collision between worlds; there has simply been a change in the faces at the top.

**W**hat would a really radical power shift look like? This is the fundamental political question. I do not see how Christian women can hope to come to terms with this question in any genuinely theological way without the most serious, diligent and obedient attention to the sometimes tiresome, sometimes threatening, sometimes painful task of listening to Scripture — not our ideas and feelings about Scripture, but the thing itself, the living Word. Of course, if the Bible is thought to be merely one good book among many, then there is an assumption gap between evangelical feminists and the Christian feminist leadership of such mammoth proportions that no amount of “dialogue” can hope to bridge it. If there is no commitment to the veracity of Scripture as the Word of God, then, naturally, the interpretation of a given text will arouse only mild interest, and that of a rather academic sort, unless of course the text is seen to be a helpful slogan for the cause. Thus, Galatians 3:28 has been endlessly flaunted (literally — on banners — as well as figuratively) as a party cry of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the churches; unfortunately, the only Episcopalians who have made public their interest in the context of the verse in the Epistle to the Galatians as a whole have been the women’s opponents.

In view of this characteristic feminist non-commitment to a Biblical-theological view of things, there really is not much point in continuing the dialogue across the assumption gap. In lieu of dialogue, let us offer proclamation. He (sic!) who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The *exousia* question is, as we said, crucial. Let us look once again at the Lukan text.

A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:24-27)

In this text, the two worlds, that of the “Gentiles” or unbelievers, and that of the Christian community, are set over against one another with truly radical sharpness. *Exousia* is exercised in the unbelieving world in ways that we all recognize, and it seeks to justify itself by its works (hence the appellation “benefactors”). “Among you”, says Jesus — that is, in the believing community which is the church, it is to be altogether different. The key word in the text is *diakonos*. Who wields *exousia* in the community of Christ? It is the *diakonos*, the one who serves,

the lowly one, the one who is in the subordinate position, even as Christ comes among us as a *diakonos* (“I am among you as one who serves”). The crucial (Latin *crux*, cross) distinction between the two worlds is made; one world defines *exousia* according to its own rules of competition, rivalry, greed, and self-seeking, while the other world offers an *exousia* of lowly, patient self-giving even to death.

The truly revolutionary political implication concealed in the passage is the astonishing link between *exousia* (power, authority) and *diakonia* (service). As John Howard Yoder puts it in a particularly striking comment on our text:

Jesus recognizes — As Luke reports it — that “doing good” is a claim the powerful make for themselves. He doesn’t say outright that the claim is false. Nor does he affirm it. He simply sets the idea aside in favor of servanthood as his way to be the expected King, and therefore his disciples’ way as well.

*But servanthood is not a position of non-power or weakness. It is an alternative mode of power . . . So it is that when we turn from . . . self-righteousness to service, this is not a retreat but an end run . . . (my emphasis)*

There is no more disastrous misunderstanding in all of Christian ethics than the one which assumes that power (*exousia*) must be relinquished altogether in order to render service (*diakonia*). To put it another way, the person who chooses quiet, patient service instead of “Gentile” routes to power is considered weak, if not an actual traitor to the cause. We are Biblically illiterate because we do not know that *diakonia* IS *exousia* — though, to be sure, it is an *exousia* of a different order. “When I am weak,” said Paul to the Corinthians, “then I am strong” (II Cor. 12:10).

The way that this misunderstanding works itself out in practice can be illustrated by a quotation from a letter sent out prior to the Episcopal General Convention in Minneapolis last year, asking for funds to support the cause of the ordination of women:

(Our) concern is with the appropriate political strategy for successfully accomplishing our objective at the 1976 General Convention. We intend to win and we are already defining and implementing a strategy that will succeed.

If anyone in the National Coalition for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood had seriously suggested the Biblical idea that the “appropriate political strategy” might be repentance and prayer, he-she would have been hooted out of the circle of power brokers. The miraculous irony is that the Holy Spirit seized control of the meeting

anyway; at the request of the convention special committee on women's ordination, the entire convention and gallery (some 3500 people) stood in silent prayer for five whole minutes just before the vote. The overwhelming spiritual power of those moments, and of the committee chairman's plea for reconciliation in Christ, will be remembered and talked about long, long after the machinations of the "strategists" are forgotten.

It has been said many times, of course, that if it had not been for the lobbying and fund-raising and "operating," the vote would not have turned out as it did. This assumes the dependence of the Holy Spirit upon "Gentile" political tactics. This is something less than faithfulness, something less than a truly serious regard for Jesus' clear command that it be "not so among you." This belief that the work of the Spirit needs augmenting, that we can teach him a thing or two about how to get things done, seems to me to be one of the most drastically wrong-headed trends in the American church. In feminist circles, the error is compounded because women are understandably sick of waiting on tables and being subordinate, and are consequently unwilling to consider the possibility that *exousia* might actually have something to do with *diakonia*. In denominations (like the Episcopal) that have a catholic tradition, there is a particular irony in the fact that many who believed that a woman could not be a priest were more than willing to declare the suitability of her being a deacon (*diakonos*). Women deacons therefore found themselves in the position of expressing public dissatisfaction with their ancient order; it seemed as though the much longed-for *exousia* could be exercised only by the "Gentile benefactors," while the lowly way of *diakonia* was once again despised.

I have tried to describe some of the pressures that prevent Christian feminism from taking its Biblical-theological roots seriously, and I have attempted to show how this failure has sent us down the wrong path. We have unwittingly allowed ourselves to be patronized and exploited by men who, however well-intentioned, have encouraged us to continue to think of ourselves as impulsive, sentimental, non-verbal, undisciplined, emotion-driven, in need of special courses and special treatment, too delicate to handle abstract ideas, too weak to commit ourselves to scholarship, too fragile to face the severity of the Bible. Men who allow us to carry our own packages and open our own doors but continue to try to protect us (and themselves) from the Wrath of God do us no favors.

Christian feminists, it seems to me, have chosen the way of the "Gentiles" when it comes to political activity.

We have not considered the way of authentic discipleship, which is the harder way. We have listened instead to the voices of those who have told us we must fight with the weapons of the enemy if we want to be effective. We have rejected the *exousia-diakonia* connection because we have not cared to understand what it really means. We have allowed our "benefactors" to convince us that the end justifies the means; if "liberation" is the goal, then "appropriate political strategy" is, of course, the time-honored way of getting there.

To the unbelieving eye, the "Gentile" world, with its shifting patterns of power, seems like the only reality. The War Between Men and Women, as James Thurber limned it with his unerring pen, goes on apace, creating its own batterfield ethic as it unfolds. In this world, *diakonia* looks like failure. There is no human possibility in such a situation except that of eying one's fellows with sleepless suspicion.

Have we any other alternatives?

There is only alternative for faith. Nothing short of a radical confrontation with the Word of God can deflect us from our haunted path. Men and women alike, feminists, chauvinists, professional theologians and amateur Bible-readers, revolutionaries and reactionaries, we all stand together in the same place: under the relentless scrutiny of the Divine Word.

*For the word of God is alive and active. It cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the place where life and spirit, joints and marrow, divide. It sifts the purposes and thoughts of the heart. There is nothing in creation that can hide from him; everything lies naked and exposed to the eyes of the One with whom we have to reckon. (Hebrews 4:12-13). □*

