

# Breaking the Stained-Glass Ceiling

By Dr. Kluane Spake

spake@mindspring.com; www.kluane.org "Glass ceiling" is a term that describes the artificial plateau (barricade) beyond which women and other minorities have been denied the opportunity to advance. The routine practice of the job market to deny thousands of totally qualified women the top level jobs is well known. Many of us have lived to see this situation begin to change.

But, we also see this barricade still evident in the stained glass arena of the church. Archie Bunker aptly exhibited his male dominance on "All in the Family," when he said, "Stifle yourself, Edith. God don't want to be defended by no dingbat!" It's still going on. In spite of these progressive times -- and improved conditions -- women are still systematically overlooked for many jobs in the church. As a woman pastor, I had to find out what happened?

Looking at early church history, we can easily see that Jesus continuously reached out to women. In the early church, women had churches in their homes, they were deacons, and they were apostles. We've thoroughly examined the scriptures of Paul and learned that when accurately understood, he really did defend the rights of women.

So, when did the church change? What happened to the rights of women? Why did the church put a ceiling, an upper limit, a maximum boundary over what they could do? What was said and done that restricted her rights of equality?

What we have to realize is that historically, as time went on (after 300 AD), the church began to add more and more structure. Tradition insisted that the all-male clergy pass down their "authority." Their special "authority" supposedly relegated to them the necessary God ordained sanction to distribute sacrament, and to pronounce absolution. The church was trying to maintain cohesiveness and keep people from straying outside the confines of this particular doctrine. We know that many of the decisions and edicts of this early group still greatly affect the theology of the church (both Protestant and Catholic) to this day.

Knowing this fact, in no way reflects upon the Catholic believers -- they didn't do it. This historical mandate is just one of many written throughout the ages, where those in ruling spiritual government established edicts to inhibit and impede the freedom of womankind (and in fact, all "laity" or non-priests) throughout the world. Much of these early findings suggest that sometimes the things that "everyone has always known in their heart" were simply not true.

## THE CLOUDY WINDOW OF THE PAST:

Lurking in the background of this problem of inequality, is the SUPPOSEDLY flawed character of the first woman (Eve), who because of the weakness of her sexuality, single-handedly caused the downfall of all "humankind." Of course, we believe that there was a Fall, but to say that ALL blood-bought, forgiven, Christian women are still held accountable for actions of another so long ago, is Biblically unsubstantiated. But, for centuries, women have been seen through this distorted window of biased theology and psychological theory.

Many Gnostically influenced Church Fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, and Cyprian (Bishop of Carthage in 248), all decided that sole authority belonged to the Bishop, who alone had the "keys" (of Peter).

These who built the first "stained glass ceilings" were most likely well intentioned men who felt totally justified in using whatever means necessary to achieve their purported objective. Be assured that not everything these early Fathers said and did was sinister. Obviously, they were desperately trying to maintain a structure of what they considered legitimate and correct. But even though many of their thoughts were wonderfully inspired -- many were not. We will confine our study to their ideas that adversely affect womankind.

There were many other contributions to this problem. An unofficial existence of underground sects of mystics, monks, and seers rapidly increased. To contest the influence of this so the called malcontents, Irenaeus (@130-202) established that the apostolic leadership of the Church Fathers was divinely inspired, and their words were commensurate with Scripture and not to be questioned. This succeeding rule was called Apostolic Authority, or Apostolic Succession.

Apostolic Succession assured the continuity of the faith as set by the first Fathers. The bishopric was seen as the guarantors of the unity of the church and the Eucharistic liturgy. This process affirmed the hierarchical structure of authority passing from Christ through the apostles to the ruling priests. These priests were to "act in the person of Christ."

The Fathers viewed this Apostolic Succession, the Apostle's Creed, orthodoxy, infallibility, and fixed norms as the way to stop divisiveness that was fracturing the church. Hippolytus directed an official orthodox reply that specifically demanded the suspension of all prophecy, stating that true action of the Spirit ceased when the apostle John gave the

last valid prophecy. The gradual solidification of this dogma became fixed, closing the functioning time of laity moving in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is vital to notice that at the same time that women were legislated out of church leadership, the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased to be recognized.

Catholic theology also stated, "The reason for denying women the right to teach is a reason that is absolute and universal, based on the natural condition of inferiority and subjection, that is the position of women."

The essential quality that marked the continuing future of the Orthodox Fathers was their loyalty to previous tradition, and appointment of the succeeding (successive) ruling male priests. As we have discussed, this idea of male divine leadership was used to maintain a unified doctrine. This powerful principle of MALE APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION still influences our present day theologies and commentaries that exclude women in leadership.

Church law book "Corpus Iuris Canonici" said, "A female person may not minister" If there's no male present she may give responses from afar (can. 813). New Canon Laws from 1983 (906) state that only a man may oversee the "acolyte." In 1980 Pope John Paul II re-ordered that "Women are not allowed the function of mass-server."

#### CATHOLIC PRIESTS:

The recent Vatican declaration of 1976 concluded that women can't be ordained as priests because, "There must be a physical resemblance between the priest and Christ. The possession of male genitalia becomes the essential prerequisite for representing Christ, who in his maleness is the disclosure in earthly culture of the male God. The celibacy of the priest, confirming the celibacy of Jesus, links both to a realm distant from that of nature, embodiment, and the reproduction of women." This declaration later states that women are incapable of receiving the "indelible character" of male reproductive organs necessary to handle ministry.

Recent Canon Law forbade non-menopausal women from sweeping a priest's bedroom dusting his furniture. It said that the "biological fact of menstruation is the obstacle to women's participation in liturgical functions."

Three main hindrances for Catholics not ordaining women:

1. Natural condition of inferiority of their gender because of the Fall.
2. The scriptural need for them to be kept in subjection.
3. Biological fact of menstruation (uncleanness).
4. Lack of external male genitalia.

#### PROTESTANT PRIESTS

The Protestants broke away from the idea of Apostolic Succession. They had some wonderful revelation about the faith of the individual believer. Significant to this topic is that they believed that we don't need a "human" priest or mediator. They claimed that every MAN is a priest. Luther said that "the man is the priest of the home." (Believers are all priests.) Many still say that man is the "head of the house," (which is a misuse of the word head). Statements like these are still said so frequently, that most of us don't stop to realize that these limiting ideas NEVER OCCUR IN SCRIPTURES.

Some Protestants continue to suppress women by using terms like "keys, ruling authority, and God's superiority of the order of creation." They teach about their determination to preserve the truth of the patriarchal order. Present groups (you've probably heard them) herald their newly found slogan, "Man first but for the right reason!" As though being hypnotized, many blindly support this claim without substantiation. They say that man unconditionally carries the role of ruling, while the woman gets the beautiful task of supporting.

Some may wonder who could contend with "facts" like these. But... Truth would ask, "What saith the scripture?" Gal. 4:30. Many men today, even as much as women, are questioning the reasons for their own beliefs and want to "clean the windows" of the narrow-minded past and change the present atmosphere to more correct understandings.

James 2:9 says, "But if you show partiality you commit sin."

#### THE GLASS CEILING IS STAINED:

Yes, my friend, many of those beautiful stained glass windows are "stained" (marked, blemished, tainted) with prejudice. Throughout the centuries, the idea of female subjection shape-shifted with chameleon-like certainty. It moved from one trend to the next — only partially disguised. But as we enter into this time of present truth, we will

find that once we are born again, we are forgiven of all of the past. Now, our future freedoms are based upon that for which each person is accountable -- the actions and the following consequences following that which he/she personally initiates.

The "Stained Glass Ceiling" is certainly an issue that engenders a great deal of emotion. But, as with any issue, it is always interesting to see if anyone has factual evidence to support their deeply-held beliefs. Those who have endured any kind of glass ceiling should remember that glass can be shattered if one keeps striking it hard enough and long enough...

MY PART IN THE ANSWER -- EVERYTHING IS ABOUT TO SHATTER:

During my visit to Rome about ten years ago, I received a divine plan&hellip;

I stood in a very exquisite older hotel room ironing my clothes for dinner when the plan entered into my consciousness. "Okay, Lord! I'll do it!" As soon as I said these words, the plug from the iron (plugged in a socket over my head in the old light fixture) came out. The plug and wire dropped down the side of my body sparking and sizzling all the way down. When the wire hit the floor, there was a huge explosion. The power went out in the hotel for hours.

Then, I knew that is was for this moment that I was born. It was a pivotal time. My certainty to accomplish the divine task was complete. No opposition could change my mind. "I WILL do it." And I made the plan and packed a little bag.

I had met another lady minister on the trip and asked her to come with me to the Vatican -- it was very crowded that day as we went to Saint Peter's. We prayed that we would be hidden in God's quiver and that no one would see us. The lady who accompanied me prayed from the pews. But, I had come to be the Celebrant Mass Server. I found the canopy where the pope and other priests stand to minister. No guards saw me. No one in the crowd of visitors stopped me&hellip; I slipped past the roped off area and climbed up the stairs. I stood behind the pulpit of the pope&hellip;

From the pulpit, I spoke decrees out loud. Then, I read the Biblical promises of coming unity in the body of Christ and enumerated the hidden things that would now become manifest. As a woman prophet, priest, and king, my presence became new authority to replace the long standing errors that have held women in hostage in their homes and their churches.

In my little bag was packed the wine, a glass, and bread. And there&hellip; upon that long held bastion, I served communion to the other lady (whom I had brought along for that purpose) -- forever re-establishing the proper stance for the equality of women.

It has been extremely exciting to watch the recent progress of women's freedoms that they have obtained in ministry! Fortunately, we see many of these restrictions gradually improving -- some women are regaining full leadership. But more and more must come forward. That stained glass ceiling that has kept most of us from full service is broken. How do we pass through it? We press through the shattered glass shards -- not with defensive arguments. Not with a chip on our shoulder. But with TRUTH that responds to the Lord's direction through Love.

A NEW WINDOW of SAFETY GLASS:

Biblical Church government clearly establishes a theocratic type of rule, which is unbreakable (safety glass). That correct principle is: God selects leaders and then equips them to rule -- according to His will. The word "authority" in Greek means, "to beget, project, and stand forth with power and dignity."

Jesus explained that ALL AUTHORITY in heaven and on earth was given to Him (Matt. 28:18-20). He gave that same authority to His disciples (Luke 9:1). Now He leaves it up to us to activate that dominion where we live. Our authority comes from using His name -- not from ourselves. All believers can totally experience this full authority.

Sure we think differently. Men and women are supposed to be different. That's an asset that we can use productively. Authority provides the essential order and guidance that enables other believers to mature and find answers. However, the greatest enigma most clergywomen ever have is actually walking in their God given authority, or "taking the oversight" that has been given to them. They hesitate to take it. That's why every leader must be firmly aware of what Christ has already accomplished for all humankind.

Solid leadership requires the competence to believe in your right to minister and then stand firmly behind it. This doesn't mean you should stand alone, but be a part of an integral team of equals who provide checks and balances for one another. The church needs both men and women who are content with their being, and able to

communicate fresh insight into roles of position. Many cultural and theological changes will occur as they begin to move into the emancipation of God's liberty.

#### THE WINDOW OF READINESS:

It's indisputably clear; the Holy Spirit of God doesn't manifest His power differently because of the gender of the preacher. Women don't just minister in God's permissive will, but in God's perfect will. Astounding works of the Spirit have come through men, women, and children. We must ask ourselves, "If the Holy Ghost doesn't distinguish gender/race/class/age then why should we?"

Both men and women must consciously strive to overcome ingrained attitudes that have led to distancing and distrust. That's why our goal shouldn't be to convince others that we're gifted or called. We must know who we are, and just be that person. We can't decide to "call" ourselves, or grapple for recognition. Only God enables. We aren't set apart just to challenge the system, or merely to debate rights. We must get that chip off our shoulder, and be filled with fruits of the Spirit. We can't let our culture or our society keep us from our calling

Even though Jesus knew that a prophet wasn't recognized in his own hometown, He continued to declare the Gospel there. You might not be accepted either, but God's Presence invades the work that springs forth from obedience. Jeremiah 20:9 explains God's call, "But His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay (quiet)." If He's in your blood, if you (male or female) wake and sleep to serve Him, then you're targeted for miracles!

Dr. Spake is a traveling minister and a member of the "International Coalition of Apostles." Some information in this article is derived from this author's book, "From Enmity to Equality." Further information is available in the book store.

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