

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
ELEVENTH GENERAL COUNCIL
OF THE
ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES
HOLDING
THE PRESBYTERIAN SYSTEM

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EDITED BY THE
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every side, the way made easy for a profession of our faith, undisturbed, unpersecuted, comfortable, fixed, and then in the face of these things, let us thank God and humbly go out and help our brethren. The test in the end of our Christian character and profession will be this—"What have we, the strong, done to help the weak?"

The Council then passed to the next Order of the Day, and the Rev. CLARENCE E. MCCARTNEY, D.D., of Philadelphia proceeded to address the Council on

THE PLACE OF WOMAN IN THE CHURCH

In the early seventies, when Dr Theodore Cuyler was brought before the Presbytery of New York for permitting a woman to stand and speak in his pulpit, one of his sentences of defence was this, "Woman and the Nineteenth Century are upon us." If Dr Cuyler were living to-day, with how much greater emphasis would he exclaim, "Woman and the Twentieth Century are upon us?" The two great branches of the English-speaking race have granted full political suffrage to women, and concurrent with this movement in the political world there now goes a movement looking towards the fuller recognition of women in the official life and work of the Church. I have communicated with nearly all the Churches, and let me give you a brief summary of the situation.

The Anglican Church is reviving generally the order of deaconesses, and the Bishop of London is willing to permit women to preach to women and children only. In the Episcopal Church in this country women may serve as members of the vestry, and the question of admitting them to the National Convention is now under consideration.

The Universalist Church, the Disciples' Church, some of the Methodist Churches, the Unitarians and the Friends admit women to all their offices on an equal footing with men; yet the significant thing is that in these Churches where they have such privileges there is no inclination at all to increase the number of women as ministers and higher officers of the Church. In the Congregationalist Church, out of some 6000 ministers only 67 are women; and in the Methodist Church only 100. In the Unitarian Church, out of 500 about 14 are women.

In the Presbyterian Church of England there is now before the Presbyteries an overture permitting the ordination of women as

elders, and the Clerk of their General Assembly assured me that in his opinion that proposal will shortly become a law.

In the United Free Church of Scotland women may serve now on the Board of Deacons. In the Northern Presbyterian Church of this country, the overture permitting the ordination of women as deacons and as elders has failed to secure a sufficient majority. There is now another overture before the Presbyteries asking for the election and ordination of women as deacons.

In the Methodist Church North there is a proposal, about to be considered, to admit them to ordination and full rights in the Conference.

So we say that in a great many Churches women already have full rights, and in nearly every other Church there is a proposal before the ruling Assemblies to grant them fuller rights.

If there is any one thing upon which the Churches seem to be agreed it is this—the advisability of some kind of order of deaconesses. The origin of deaconesses is veiled in obscurity. St Paul, in his letter to the Romans, commends his sister Phœbe, a servant and a deaconess of the church at Cenchreæ; to the fellowship of the church at Rome. A great many scholars think he uses the term “deaconess” there in its technical and official sense, but perhaps the majority hold that he uses it only in the sense of a helpful woman. Then in his letter to Timothy, when he names the qualifications for the office of deacon—male deacons—in the very midst of it he says: “The women also must not be slanderous, must be sober and faithful in all things,” and some scholars think that he means there the female deacons, others that he means the deacons’ wives.

In my opinion, an unprejudiced student of the New Testament will come to the conclusion that there is nothing very definite or binding in any New Testament precedent concerning the order of deaconesses; but this much is certain, that very early there arose in the Eastern Church a distinct order of women solemnly set apart, whose duty it was, among others, to assist in the baptism of women; to visit the sick, the afflicted and the poor, and in the churches to conduct the women to their places. In the Western Church this order never met with favour. First of all, ordination was taken away from it and benediction substituted for it; and then in the sixth century the Council of Orleans decreed that even benediction, because of the weakness of the sex, should be taken away from women serving in this order. In the Middle Ages the work of the nun and the abbess took the place of the deaconess, but in modern

times there has been a tendency to restore it. Even if there were no New Testament precedent, common sense and the obvious gifts of woman by nature would make it clear that she is fitted to do the work both of a deaconess and of a deacon; and I predict that in nearly all our Protestant Churches very shortly we shall be ordaining women, first of all, to an order of deaconesses, and then as deacons in general.

When you come to the matter of women as elders and ministers, I feel that we are on altogether different ground. If in the matter of women as deacons we were disturbed by the lack of New Testament precedent, here when it comes to women as elders and as ministers we seem to be confronted by what appears to be at first reading at least a definite inhibition. Let me clear the floor of all irrelevant discussion by saying that we all agree in paying our tribute to the beauty and the intelligence of our women. I think the best theological mind that I have come in contact with was the mind of a woman, and a woman who was very close to me in childhood. I believe in what St Paul says, that henceforth there is neither bond nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ, and everything that Christ has been to a man I believe He is to a woman also.

We expect, of course, extraordinary endowment of the Holy Spirit. What Peter said is true, that in these days the prophecy of Joel has been fulfilled, that "He will pour out His Spirit upon you and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your servants and your handmaids." We recognize our Deborahs, our Huldahs and our Hannahs. In the future I believe that God will raise up apart from any ordination women greatly gifted, and to them the Church will always listen. But here we are dealing with something else, with a working church and with the necessity of government and of form. It is not a question of individual ability. We pay our tribute to the women, and there is not a minister, perhaps not an elder, on the floor to-day who would not agree with what Thomas Gray said in a beautiful tribute he paid to one of those aunts who brought him up, "She taught me to pray."

What was said of the Magdalene is true of the generality of our women, the finest force that we have in our Church—

"Not she with traitorous lips her Saviour stung,
Not she denied Him with unholy tongue;
She, whilst apostles shrunk, could danger brave;
Last at the Cross, and earliest at the grave."

We are not discussing the individual piety and intelligence of the women, but their place and office in the Church. Samuel Johnson once paused on the streets of London to listen to a woman preacher, and Boswell, I think it was, asked him what he thought of it, and his answer is to the point to-day: "Why," he said, "it is like a bear dancing; it is not a question of whether it is done well or done poorly, but that the thing is done at all"—the eternal fitness of the thing.

For the sake of clearness, we might discuss the matter from two standpoints. First, the standpoint of authority; and second, the standpoint of expediency. Take, first of all, authority. Now I would not take the altogether untenable position that anything which is not provided for in the New Testament is therefore against its spirit and law. If that is so, we would have to rule out Sabbath Schools and a great many other institutions blessed of God. Nevertheless, we represent here New Testament Churches, and it is right and proper that in facing this question our first thought and last should be to the New Testament. Is there any authority there by precedent? I know it has been said that the reason Jesus did not put a woman in the band of apostles was because He knew better than to offend the deep prejudices of His day and generation. I do not believe that was the reason. He who spake of the Sabbath in a way that roused to a pitch of murderous fury the Scribes and Pharisees; He who permitted women to follow Him about and minister to Him, and He who said that "neither in this temple nor at Jerusalem should men worship"; He who said this by the well and shocked His disciples because He stayed with a woman, certainly was not afraid of disturbing the deep-seated prejudices of His day and generation.

Then when Christ was gone and the Church was left to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there is no instance of woman being elevated to any ruling office in the Church. The seven daughters of Philip prophesied—an exceptional office—but if you make your appeal to the New Testament on the ground of authority certainly the answer is in the negative.

But now, what about the authority of precept in the New Testament—that is, definite teaching on the subject? That brings us to the much warred-over passage of St Paul in Corinthians, where he is speaking of the order and decorum which ought to obtain in all the Churches, and says that "in all the churches women must keep silence, as the law says, be under subjection, for it is a shame for a woman to speak."

Now in interpreting that passage and others of St Paul on the woman question, there are three lines of interpretation that have been applied. First of all, we find the view even in Reformed and Presbyterian Churches that Paul did say that woman should not speak, should have no part or rule in the church, and meant this as a law for all generations. But Paul was talking nonsense. He had no authority to say such a thing, and his dictum is to be dismissed without a thought to-day.

Then the second and most popular way of interpreting these passages is that Paul's advice was local, national and transient. That because of the peculiar social conditions existing in the East it would have cast discredit on the Church to have women coming there with head uncovered and praying and taking part in the public services. He meant that the woman was to keep silent in Corinth and in these other Græco-Roman cities. And the last thing we are to do, so they tell us, is to take this inhibition of St Paul centuries afterwards, after the presence of Christianity in the world has revolutionized the position of woman, and apply it to our Churches to-day.

Then there is the third view, that Paul here definitely, universally and for all time prohibits the active participation of woman in the sacraments and in the rule of the Church. That was the position taken by the eloquent chief of Calvinistic theologians, Dr Benjamin Warfield, of Princeton. Indeed one of his last utterances was a pronouncement on that subject.

Well, there are difficulties in the way of any one of these three interpretations. The first, that Paul was talking nonsense, you cannot accept and listen to Paul in any other part of his gospel. And the second position, that the advice is merely local and transient and national for that place and for that time, has great exegetical difficulties in the way. St Paul introduces the subject by saying, "as in all the churches," not Corinth alone. And then he finishes his argument by saying that he utters this truth "by the commandment of the Lord." More significant still, he says to these people who are introducing this new custom, What, came the gospel unto you alone? or went the word of the Lord forth from you? As if by thus changing the order and custom of the churches these people were inventing a new gospel and a new kind of Christianity.

Then the third interpretation, that this is a binding law for all time and for all churches too, has difficulties. To be absolutely consistent, any woman here who has her hair braided or wears any

gold or silver ornament or precious stone should at once disentangle her hair and take out her hair-pins and other contrivances, or else be expelled from the Church. And when a man and a woman come to you to be married, by the letter you ought to tell them you will marry them if they insist upon it, if they can't help it, but that you advise them not to get married.

To my mind the whole subject is to be decided not by the exegesis of any difficult passage in St Paul's letters, but by common sense, by expediency, and by a regard for the law of nature and by what the Church has found to be good in the past. Now, you may interpret those passages as you please, but is not this the fact, that the principle there laid down has been accepted as sound by the Church in all generations? Take even those Churches that have long admitted women to ordination on the same footing as men. Why is it that there is no tendency to increase the number of women as ministers? There must be some great and almost indefinable law of nature that is against the thing; and my reasons for opposing the ordination of women as elders, which is an introductory step to their ordination as ministers, I might sum up under six heads.

First, we are following a wrong precedent in being disturbed by the political unrest and agitation of the world. Most of the people who are pressing this measure urge it upon us simply because women are being granted free political suffrage among the nations. But the Church is not a political body and we do not take our cue from what happens in the State. That multitudes of women are going to the polls to-day is no reason at all why women should be advanced to the eldership and to the pastorate in our Churches.

Secondly, it would tend to feminize our Churches. There is enough of that now. Why, our Churches would become women's guilds and the present disposition to throw all the responsibility and burden upon the women of our congregation would merely increase. What we need is a shaking among the dry bones of the *men* of our Churches, and not women as elders and as ministers.

Thirdly, it would tend to the danger of scandal and faction and Satanic quarrelling in our congregations. Euodias and Syntyche are bad enough in the membership, but when once they transfer their differences to the session room and to the floor of the Presbytery and General Assembly, then it is a far more serious matter.

Fourthly, this measure if taken is a measure against the unity

of the Church of Christ. One of the beautiful things of our day and generation is that dim groping in all our Churches after the ideal of unity; but if you do this thing, you deepen and widen that gulf which now yawns between the Roman and the Protestant Churches, and you introduce a divisive factor within the Protestant Church. One of the most hopeful signs in this country is the drawing together of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches after the unhappy bitterness and schism of the Civil War; but if you ordain, for example, in the Northern Church women as elders and as ministers, you greatly retard, if you do not altogether arrest, that happy and longed-for movement; and the same thing is true of the other divided Churches in our country on the ground of the Civil War, the Methodist Church North and South, and the Baptist Church North and South.

And last of all, I am opposed to this measure, because it will tend to increase heresy, fanaticism, the distortion and the perversion of Christian doctrine. What is the history of Christian Science, of New Thought, of Spiritualism, of all these fly-by-night cults of which you read in the newspaper on Saturday evening? To ask that question is to answer it. They have been advocated by and floated upon the brain and the enthusiasm of woman, and from Eve down to Mrs Eddy and Mrs Besant the place that woman has taken in Church doctrine and leadership is not an enviable one.

For these reasons, I feel that the measure to ordain women as elders and as ministers is unwise, but I greet and hail the movement that will admit them to full standing as ordained deaconesses and deacons.

A discussion on Dr M'Cartney's paper then took place.

HON. MARTIN YÇAS, of Lithuania:—

I hope that this opinion expressed by Dr M'Cartney is his own personal opinion and not the opinion of our Reformed and Presbyterian Church. Lithuanians are more against Woman Suffrage in politics and in affairs of State, but we are very willing that our women should occupy themselves with Church affairs, and we welcome them to equal rights with men. I want you to notice that in this Council we of the Lithuanian Church have sent a woman as a delegate. (Mrs Yças accompanied her husband to Pittsburgh.)

Rev. W. L. ROBERTSON, London, England:—

I am a member and a minister of a Church that in this matter has advanced somewhat further than the other Churches in England,

Scotland and Ireland, for we have passed a resolution admitting women as deacons and admitting them also as elders. We have also declared in our Assembly that there is no barrier to admitting them to the ministry, but we have not acted yet on that resolution.

With regard to Dr M'Cartney, I have sometimes heard ministers talk along that same line—which personally I utterly repudiate; and I notice that the same ministers, being married, cannot except at extreme peril maintain their positions within their own home. There a woman certainly is not in subjection to anyone. But I do not agree with Dr M'Cartney in another point. In mentioning that there are three views of certain passages of Scripture, and then brushing them aside; the modern view, which I share, may seem at first sight to lessen the authority of Scripture, but, on the contrary, it makes it really much more binding. I am of opinion that the passage in Timothy is of very doubtful authenticity. As for the passages in Corinthians, it is evident to me that though St Paul as an individual did not like the idea of women as ministers, and some of us may share that feeling, yet he acknowledged their place in the practice of the Church as to prophesying and praying. As for his words requiring the silence of women, there are very serious reasons for regarding them as an interpolation. They bear the mark of much later usage than in the time of St Paul, and were evidently inserted by the editor to promote his own ideas of how women ought to behave. The authority of the Scripture in the true Protestant sense is the authority of the word of God, to which the Holy Spirit in our hearts bears witness. If I take the position on this matter that we are not forbidden to use women in our Churches as elders or deacons, it is because I do not believe there is any authority which forbids it in Holy Scripture. And I would go further and say that St Paul was speaking as one who was dealing with a matter concerning the organization of the Churches in those days. To carry forward his utterance to our times means to deny that the Holy Spirit is ever present in His Church and is leading us onward and enlightening us in these matters. As has been suggested, the social position and condition of woman is altogether different—happily different to-day, and to say that we must now forbid women, for the reasons indicated by Dr M'Cartney, seems to me to deny the intelligence which God Himself has given us.

Rev. A. J. BROWN, D.D., New York :—

I think we may observe a distinction between the ordination of

women to the ministry and their ordination to the eldership. I am aware of the technical objection to such distinction. As a matter of fact, the women of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches are not asking for ordination to the ministry and do not care a copper whether it is granted or not. Ordination to the eldership is quite a different matter, because eldership is very largely an office of counsel and of administration. I have had some opportunity to judge as to the value of women in administration and in council as administrator of the foreign missionary enterprise for a considerable number of years. There are no more splendid women, no more splendid administrators or advisers, than those who constitute the Boards and Societies of Women's Missions, or the women missionaries of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.

On the foreign field we give our missions right to determine what shall be the voting power of women. A considerable number of them have thus far given women the right to vote on all main questions, and women take their place beside the men with full equality, and in every respect they vindicate the wisdom of the choice. I tell my missionaries what my personal convictions are, that of course if a wife and mother has not learned the language and is not assigned missionary work she ought not to vote, but otherwise she has that right.

Reference has been made to Satanic jealousy and controversies that might be engendered if women came into our Council. In my experience of twenty-five years as a missionary administrator we have had five times more trouble from the Satanic jealousies and controversies of men than we have had with women. Finally, while this discussion may be very interesting from an academic point of view, we might just as well make up our minds that whatever we vote, the thing is going to come anyhow.

Rev. R. F. RUTF endorsed the remarks of Dr Brown, and protested against the implication that slander and jealousy would be more common in the Church if women were admitted to sacred office.

Rev. ADOLPH KELLER, Zürich :—

We are just having a very interesting experience on this question in our town of Zürich. We have given women the right to the ministry and have ordained already two young women who are preaching in our church, and they have got such great influence in our parishes and are so liked as preachers that they mean a real danger to their colleagues in popularity. The Government, which

has something to say in this regard, has not accepted them as official preachers, but the public feeling in their favour is very strong.

You see we are rather advanced in Switzerland, and our opinion is that when God has given such a great and deep influence to women to preach the gospel and to act on people who have not listened to the gospel until now, we should let them have that right and that influence and that power.

The CHAIRMAN :—That is my opinion.

Rev. DANIEL COUVE, of Paris, France :—

We have a lot of women elders in our Evangelical Churches in France and things are going on all right. Many thousands of men have been called during the war, and the Church has to do something for the education of young people. We believe that mothers who have given their husbands have some right to discuss the matter of Christian education for their children. The Council of Elders in the Church is in charge of Sunday School work and the preparation of catechumens. About the ministry, we are not so far advanced as our Swiss friends, and our women are not asking for ordination. I do not know one woman who is preparing to be a minister, and I do not think the danger is very great. I should not like to go in that direction, and I agree completely with my friend Dr Brown. Now during the war the wives of some of our pastors who had gone to the front went occasionally into the pulpit if there was no elder who could preach, but none of those who preached during the war have ever intended to ask for any sort of ordination.

Rev. Dr M'CLELLAND :—

Whatever we may think about the position taken by the opener of this debate, Dr M'Cartney, I think you will all agree with me that his speech was admirable from beginning to end. It has been said in reference to some brethren beloved that in order to get a joke into their heads you have to use an auger, and the pleasantry about Satanic influences seems to have an unduly disturbing effect.

The CHAIRMAN announced that the hour of adjournment had arrived.

The Session was thereupon closed with prayer.