

The Role of Women in Transition: Building a Ministry Model for the Women on Campus

By Sarah Frances Anders

Recently I delivered the lectures for a very distinguished series on one of our Baptist campuses. Specifically, I was requested to present a "state of the union" message on the status of women in the Southern Baptist Convention at the one general chapel session. That address was basically a research report and moderate on editorializing—and apparently was very well understood and accepted by the student body and some 450 church women from across the state. As you might expect, in spite of better-than-average reporting integrity on the part of the public relations department of the campus, some statements were lifted out of context by readers and a few vitriolic letters came into the Baptist paper of that state. Of course, no one saw the positive, affirming letters that came to me nor heard the numerous favorable phone conversations.

After more than two decades of such experiences, I should be either totally undaunted or a quivering bowl of jello from such widely varying reactions to my "telling it as the qualitative and quantitative data demand" and not simply with some soap-box bias! But here I am, bruised and boosted, damned and decorated, speaking again under as adequate a topic as possible to a very complex, closer-than-skin social and ethical condition.

Looking Over My Academic Shoulder

My academic experiences in five different settings spill over into the four most dynamic decades not just in American history, but in human existence; not just in secular technology but in spiritual and religious humanology; not just in techniques of aggression but in patterns of otherness.

The past two-fifths of a century have included:

The Fractured 40's when a global war and peak divorce rate did radical surgery on our lifestyle in general and on families in particular;

The Smouldering 50's when surface unanimity was cloaking a festering among an array of minorities who were fomenting for equity, if not equality;

The Violent 60's when those same American segments took extreme defensive measures to fight being poor, being young, being female, being 'poped,' or being drafted into a morally questionable war—and surely you were among us by then!

The Liberating 70's when the shift began, but did not consummate, from defensive violence to creative measures and solutions.

During that period when I was both being educated and educating, I struggled with my own tension between necessary defensiveness and the essential creative offensive. I have struggled to keep my ethical balance while involved in the battle for human rights, environmental rights, gender rights and the rights of the disadvantaged. I never wanted the "I am furiously defensive stage" to blunt my spiritual, academic and civic pursuits for imaginative solutions to some age-old problems which I had not created, but inherited and was obliged to face with integrity.

Defining the Task

You and I are now well into the last fifth of this twentieth century, and hopefully the last fifth has not stifled the challenge to tackle the oldest issue to trouble society or church. Can the college generations of these two decades be any more honest and successful in confronting the inevitably changing roles of men, women and children than those of our past? Ever since the Adam and Eve episode, we have been struggling with the significance of the man-woman thing in moral and spiritual matters. Indeed, we have spent far more time building obstacles to an equitable society and a genderless church serving a genderless God than trying to see the world and ministry through God's eyes. Perhaps it is time that you and I look at the role we **should** play in removing the time blocs, cultural boundaries, technologies, sex myths, and biblical translations that have too long blurred our vision concerning ministry. We are a part of the campus scene—that is a given. The question is, "Can we accept our responsibility for helping to draw the blueprint for the numerous and diverse roles of the church active in society?"

Very seldom has Christian leadership seized the drawing pen and etched out both the secular and sacred roles for men and women. More often they have simply accepted the biological determinism adequate for procreation roles as equally appropriate for secular and spiritual ones. At rare times when business and industry have dared to reject old and inadequate prototypes for masculine and feminine, those in education, the family, or the church have lagged woefully behind.

We need to remind ourselves periodically in academe and in the church that feminism is not borne of women in government, banking, the Susan B. Anthony movement nor even in Germaine Greer's **The Female Eunuch**. It was conceived as an integral part of, not a separate entity from, the theology of Jesus and reborn in the philosophy of women like Mary Daly, Phyllis Tribble and Rosemary Reuther in some of the more conservative and orthodox church climates. They dared to suggest that the super-women, the bionic females of Christendom recorded by history, were not the prototypes of what women could be in the church—or what God's intention has necessarily been. They are exceptions to the same kind of separation of power and privilege rule that allowed the Willie Mayses and Joe Louises to be accepted in the Hall of Fame as super-jocks, rather than as typical achieving blacks.

Today's Campus Woman

Today's campus woman lives in a world of over 4.6 billion people, a population that is exploding at the rate of 159 new persons every minute of every day. It is a tragic, hungry world where one-half of the inhabitants suffer outright hunger and as many as two-thirds are probably undernourished. More tragic since women cannot do much about such physical and social hunger because easily one billion of them are illiterate and powerless to change the status quo. The United Nations reports that women are fifty percent of the world's people, do sixty-six percent of the world's work, receive ten percent of the world's income, and own one percent of the world's property (reported in **Fact Sheet**, National Ministries, American Baptist Convention, Valley Forge, Pa., December, 1982.)

Today's coed lives in a nation with 115 million other females; at least 18 million of whom are brown, black, red or saffron-colored. It is a habitat of affluence where one out of ten will live in poverty families of which a large percentage

have aged, widowed or female heads. She is a part of the twelve percent who live in a college environment, with hopes for equality, affluence, and urbanity.

Today's college woman expects to fill many roles. I identify with her emerging, exploding selves as I consider that I am a godmother, sociologist, professor, head of a household, Sunday School teacher, board member of five civic organizations, speaker, writer, counselor, administrator, and until a few years ago the caretaker of a quaint and alert 85-year-old blind, shut-in mother. Of course, realistically, I acknowledge that the list for me will not include astronaut, governor, seminary president, ambassador, corporation chairman, or pastor—probably not even deacon. But some of the young women I teach (and **we** influence) may add on those roles.

On many of my days spent in the typical patterns of an American college woman wearing a variety of hats, I am in agreement with Dr. Jessie Bernard that we are sitting in ringside seats watching a revolution going on. The seats are not at a theater-in-the-round with a single drama in progress. More aptly we are in a multi-ring circus tent, where the top may blow out. And education has played a vital role in sparking the possible explosion.

From Campus to Career

From the campus has come the four-fold increase in women lawyers and judges, engineers and doctors. Yet none of these occupations boasts that women comprise fifteen percent of their numbers. Women are entering professional schools in greater numbers, but still are not swelling the ranks of their professions. Schools of business management have enticed women students, and in the last decade women in management have become much more visible. In 1973, a study of the top 1,000 industrial companies and the 300 largest non-industrial companies included only eleven women in management, nine of whom got there by marriage and family connections or by starting their own businesses. Now women make up six percent of all such management types—a giant step, only if you look backward.

Since our government was formed, there have been only 109 women in Congress:

Twenty-one percent of them are serving now—two in the Senate, 21 in the House;

989 women serve in state legislatures, representing thirteen percent of those bodies;

28 hold top statewide offices (governors, secretaries of state, treasurers)—an increase of seventy-five percent over the last decade:

In cities of 30,000 plus, there are 72 women mayors, an increase of five hundred percent over 1973.

Seven percent of the federal judges are women, 40 of them appointed by President Carter;

Indeed, Carter appointed as many as all of the three Republican presidents surrounding his administration.

Women are still only twenty percent of college educators and a minority among political scientists, but someone on the college or local political scene has been convincing women students that political offices need not have "For Men Only" signs on them ! Over the past eight years, there has been an increase of 11,000 elected women officials although they still represent only twelve percent of the total.

Inspiration must have come largely from the academic environs, since real life role models were not too visible for the women who make up ten percent of the scientists, ten percent of the doctors, and twenty percent of the well-shown artists. The record shows that woman's place is still with other women in the work arena, primarily in lower white collar positions. Some changes have come in a few formerly all-male occupations—women are now one-third of the accountants, bakers, bank officers, bus drivers and tailors. They are fifty-four percent of the factory assemblers and that has not been true since World War II.

But what doth it profit a woman . . . if she gain a toehold in the business, professional and educational arenas? Not much! She still earns an average of 59¢ to each male wage dollar. Women in the same jobs with men are paid less. For example: a woman computer operator last year earned \$33 less per week than a man in the same position; a female elementary school teacher \$68 less per week; a woman engineer \$167 less per week.

The Washington Spectator reported in March of this year that women, and in many cases women with children, are:

Seventy-five percent of all people living in poverty;
Sixty-nine percent of all food stamp recipients
Sixty-seven percent of all Legal Service clients;
Sixty-six percent of all residents of subsidized housing;
Sixty-one percent of those depending on Medicaid.

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From Campus to Church

Granted, it is inaccurate to declare "one giant step for womankind beyond the campus into careers"—surely, you say, a coed's view of role possibilities found in the church based on the liberating theology of Christ is much more promising?

The current ecclesiastical scene is probably more homogenized, though possibly as paradoxical as Charles Dickens' England, when he wrote 150 years ago; "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times . . ." True, some theologians and ethicists today seem to be attempting to rise above a seventeenth century translation of the scriptures to know and achieve the equity required by Jesus, who in a 36-to-40-month ministry could not effect a complete metamorphosis among his culture-bound, very-human, first century followers. We admit that there were the Phoebes, Marys, Priscillas and Dorcases who apparently were more than tolerated; they were accepted on much the same leadership credentials as required of Paul, Peter, Timothy or Barnabas. In only a few decades, however, a great eclipse of equity developed and covered most of the next 1600 years of Christendom. The minority of women of the cloth pursued religious roles in literacy, the arts and healing through the lifestyle of the convent until a few rays of Christology began to break through in the early settlement of America.

There was no great rush, however, in early American religion to equalize the status of men and women. The Friends (or Quakers) saw all members as ministers or servants and they provided some of the "bionic" women evangelists and missionaries in the new world. Along with the Cotton Mathers and the George Whitefields, there were Super Women like Ann Hutchinson who mothered 16 children and simultaneously preached religious liberty in seventeenth-century New England. In the 1800's, foreign missionaries Ann Judson and Lottie Moon proved to be as intelligent as they were devout pioneers of the faith. Baptists even provided the local church in which

Congregationalist Antoinette Brown became the first ordained woman in America (1853)—a bionic woman she proved to be, too, for she birthed six children and nine books, obtained a divinity degree and preached her last sermon at 90!

Women were as colorful as men among the founders and charismatic leaders of sects or cults in this land. Television spectacles could be produced on the lives of Ann Lee, founder of the Shakers, Mary Baker Eddy of the Church of Christ Scientist, Aimie Semple McPherson of the Four Square Gospel Movement, and even Katharine Kuhlman among twentieth century healing evangelists.

It was Christian education in the mid-nineteenth century that first put the woman on the campus. The female academies/seminaries awakened her to learning and social awareness. Education was a catalyst for many of her crusades—playgrounds, abolition of slavery and demon alcohol, suffrage and other human rights—but it was not a significant catalyst for women into church offices and policymaking. Learning helped them help others in secular arenas more than themselves in church or society.

A hundred years later, the newly-organized World Council of Churches set up a task force in 1948 to study women's place in church and society. Nevertheless, it was another two decades before the Declaration on Women's Rights was adopted by the United Nations (1967) and twenty-five years before Presbyterians and American Baptists established the first task forces to assess the roles of their churchwomen. Almost every major Protestant evangelical body had demonstrated concern about women's roles before Southern Baptists held a conference on women in denominational work at Nashville in 1978. Some of the same denominations that had such pioneer fervor on other human issues drug their feet—neither talked nor moved effectively—on subordinate roles of women in church life.

The Distaff Status Among Southern Baptists

You are on the cutting edge, the rim of the arena for young collegiate Southern Baptist. Your vantage point places a unique responsibility on you to be informed about these better-educated, soon-to-be Southern Baptist leaders as we make the transition into the twenty-first century. Considering where Southern Baptists are in general and whence we have come,

what is the prognosis for Christian, yea Southern Baptist, college women becoming equal partners in denominational ministries? Would you grant them an "E" for Effort or "A" for Achievement?

How well informed are you about the distaff status in our denomination, in the year of our Lord 1983? Let me give you a cursory, thumb-nail sketch of the feminine SBC profile.

She constitutes probably more than one-half of the 13 million Southern Baptists who belong to over 36,079 churches, which have ordained the approximate 50,000 living clergy. Her probability of being among the clergy is .4 percent, less than those for women in seven other denominations among the top ten evangelical bodies in the U.S. She is virtually invisible as a congregational pastor, since hardly more than one dozen of her ordained sisters serve churches in a senior minister role.

She may be among the eighteen percent of our female seminary students who are preparing for a church vocation. Yet the world of realism has led her to prepare for religious education and music roles in the local church. Women students comprise only 7.5 percent of the theologs, but forty-two percent of the religious education and thirty percent of the music students. She hopes her opportunities will exceed the bare ten percent of current staff professionals who are women.

One out of every four denominational employees is a woman, but she probably will not be found among the management or administrative positions. The most recent survey of these women indicated that over one-half of them were over-qualified for their positions and they felt certain that men would not do these jobs for the women's salaries.

The Southern Baptist coed has the same number of role models for Executive Director of a state convention as she has had for president of the U.S. Only three women hold the position of State Assistant Secretaries. Less than two percent of approximately 800 Associational Directors are women.

Her profile and role in missions remains classic and impressive to a greater extent.

More than half of the home and foreign missionaries are women, who are as bright, specialized and committed as the male appointees. They are in one-half of the 72 foreign mission job categories. Only six of those are female only, whereas 36 are all-male positions. Women are in all of the eight areas of home mission work. They are concentrated, however, in social ministries, language missions, and in rural, urban and metropolitan ministries.

In volunteer ministries through the local church, women abound more in mission organizations, teaching of youth, and music committees than on finance, personnel, and deacon boards.

There are only 89 women (about ten percent) on SBC committees and boards, a somewhat lower figure than past years.

You are a better artist in sketching the current status of women in campus ministries. My investigation suggests that their role models among campus program directors is about equal to those on the college faculty—or twenty percent. Hopefully, their volunteer status approaches a more equitable percentage, as it did in my college and university experiences and as I now see on my own campus. How many women have been presidents of your councils or president of your state Baptist Student Union?

The Ministry Model for Any Campus

The sub-title for this presentation is an ambitious, if not an impossible, undertaking: Building a Ministry Model for Women on Campus. Although it certainly was not the intent of the program planners to suggest that ministry should mean something different to male and female students, I must start with a fundamental assertion. Any ministry model, I believe, begins with the biblical assumption that **all** are called to **only one** vocation or ministry— to live the lifestyle of Jesus Christ. We work out that calling on the basis of our gifts, education and opportunity. The lifestyle of Jesus incorporated creativity, witnessing, redemption and service; so must ours. Thus, our vocation is broader than livelihood or job, although it certainly embraces our work arena. Support for drawing strong ministry boundaries between clergy and laity, between male and female becomes more and more spurious as one studies the scriptures and grows in the faith.

There are some watermark characteristics of any campus ministry that springs from such a premise. I do not intend them to be a paradigm sculpted in mosaic tiles. Their perspective emerges from an experiential origin as much as from a philosophical one, for I have spent all but one year of my life on or adjacent to some kind of school campus or personnel.

1. The first watermark of campus ministry is its **theological base**. "Theology" demands a definitive adjective or it is meaningless. Are there separate theologies for all the "worlds" in our vocabulary these days: "old world;" "new world;" "third world" of oppressed, disadvantaged nations struggling to emerge in a new age; a "fourth world" inhabited by the second sex, oldest and most deprived minority of the ages? If the plight of the third world called for a "liberation theology" and the fourth world for a "feminist theology,"

is there a “fifth world” composed of the campus minority of all nations who require yet another “theology?”

Would campus theology fall closer to “liberation” or “feminist” on such a theological continuum? Liberation theology would break the social and spiritual shackles of a culture-bound people and offer them all the opportunities of Christian freedom, education, and technical achievement. Kathryn Rabuzzi in her book, **The Sacred and The Feminine**, contrasts feminist theologians with traditional theologians. The latter, she indicates, start with deity and move toward humanity asking, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” Feminist theologians begin with humanity and ask, “What does being human mean in female form?” Then they move toward what some still call ‘god,’ others call ‘goddess’ and few refuse to call by any name at all!

Perhaps you feel that campus theology needs more than **Christian** as a modifier. Do you see the campus world as the last bulwark of hope for an enlightened faith, able to do what even the local church cannot do—focus on the fifteen percent who are collegiate believers in America and probably less than one percent of world Christians capable of being liberated from the earth-bound poly-cultures to redeem a world? For me, there is only one Christian theology—it is the theology of full personhood, which makes the labels “liberation” and “feminist” redundant. They are useful only for **emphasis**, since full personhood implies freedom, equity, and growth with no man-made boundaries for serving a genderless God.

The designs for some campus ministry programs have already been based on such a view of Christian theology. Thirty years ago I was a part of a Baptist Student Union that helped me discover areas of potential that I had not seen even in a literate, Christian home. I was encouraged to be creative in areas that had no gender labels or adolescent restrictions. It is my conviction that the experiences of that 16,-17,-18 year-old on that state campus helped establish a life stance that refused to be defensive as a Christian, as a woman, or as a professional in two work arenas. At a period of weaning and growing independence in thought and action, I began a pilgrimage that over the years was diverse and dynamic, but never swerving from a theology that really became my own in college and only became embellished and underlined through seminary and other graduate programs.

2. The second watermark of the campus ministry ought to be the **servant model**. Now if you think determining what is the appropriate theology for Christian college students is difficult, presenting the role of servant as the goal of the Christian pilgrimage appears ludicrous and antithetical when put alongside the success image propagandized on ninety-nine percent of our campuses! It is also diametrically opposed to the goals of "hard feminism." Many bright young women on our campuses are not into "being servants;" they are not in college to invest four years toward becoming what that term may mean in traditional roles of house-cleaning, dishes, diapers, and kindergartens!

The success model in much of higher education does not promote tenderness, social service and turning the other cheek—it conjures up visions of being the college provost, the chairman of the IBM board of directors, the scientist whose name denotes a new medical technique. As John F. Alexander suggests in **The Other Side**, it takes mammoth courage for any Christian program to stress another species of success. This success spotlights personal traits which he calls "soft feminism," for want of a better term: character elements worthy of Christian men **and** women. They are the traits Jesus extols in the Sermon on the Mount, when he blesses those who are **humble, weep, make peace, show mercy** and are strong enough to **care** for those who would exploit or abuse them. What will ultimately get the job done in transforming this world does not lie in the traditionally masculine behaviors of dominating, violence, cold logic, computerized detachment. Nor is it virtuous for the intelligent Christian to cultivate or tolerate the typical feminine stereotypes of passivity, mindlessness, irrationality, or "weepiness."

The Christian solution for the success model is not in hard feminism—that is not drastic enough! Christian women want to do more than match this world's view of masculine success—so do Christian men. This is a call for new values in a new order. "It isn't glamorous, it doesn't pay well" . . . but they who lose their lives find it.

3. A third watermark in the campus ministry designed for all students, with special concern for college women in today's world is **assertiveness training**. Don't write me off until you hear me through now; I am not negating everything I have

just proposed in the second ministry criterion. By assertiveness I mean something akin to the personal thrust which seems to be implicit in the concept of “**bold missions.**” Assertiveness is not synonymous with aggression, intimidation nor pushiness, although those are the negative connotations when assertiveness is used to describe women of any ilk and even some men who are Christian. I agree with John Scanzoni when he defines **assertiveness** as determining what one must do because it is right in God’s sight and is just and fair to self and others. It is neither offensive nor defensive in nature, neither domination nor oppression.

Sanzoni once observed, “Christian women seem to be able to be assertive toward other women and to children, but not toward men.” Biblical and historical examples of women who possessed this gift provide good role models for men or women: Deborah, Lydia, Florence Nightingale, Jane Addams, Catherine Booth, Dorcas, Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Chase Smith.

4. An effective campus ministry program must constantly evaluate traditional and **diverse new arenas for service**, open equally to male and female students. I question the authenticity of any timely ministry model that cannot be staffed with any committed capable Christian student. I challenge any teaching effort of BSU that does not promote the doctrine of gifts and opportunities without regard for gender, marital status, race, and perhaps even age to some extent. The campus model of ministry need not conform to the local church model, if that model is unscriptural or discriminating.

The campus ministry should include **critical Biblical study of church rituals** and lead students to discover for themselves whether ordination and ordinances are traditional or scriptural. There should be training in carrying these theological positions to their logical practical applications; if ordination is valid, then should a mature Christian coed not be considered for the deacon board membership in her college church? If “calling” is an authentic Christian experience, essential to any vocational arena, does the local church or denomination have the right to decide that the call to missions is more appropriate for the woman than the call to pastor or to become a campus minister? Is the ordination of campus ministers any more a determinant of which sex should fill that role than it is to acquire unique

tax benefits for a churchman who devoutly proclaims separation of church and state?

A part of the teaching ministry of Baptist Student work is to **provide role models for all students**. In my years as a college professor, I have considered my lifestyle to be a primary teaching vehicle. When I have served as BSU campus sponsor or state-wide advisor, I have been unable to separate my Christian lifestyle from my femaleness. How many feminine models have you provided your students—your men need them as much as the needed the mother or sister models in the home, as much as the coed does. Many of you serve on chapel and assembly committees which plan for local and visiting speakers and performers. The witness and example of outstanding women in this medium on my campus has been as effective in the understanding and growth of male students as it has been for women on campus. Invite a woman pastor or engineer. Use a woman missionary who teaches in an international seminary. There is no doubt in my mind that you have an inescapable obligation to use Christian women in non-traditional roles to broaden the perspective of students about roles in church and society that not only can be but must be shared if we are to be all we can be to each other and to the world we seek to transform.

Ending in Mid-Air

Never did I intend for this time with you to have closure. If there be any benefit in what we say to, and do for, each other here on this occasion, it is a commitment to openness. I see our roles on the college campus as equally compelling, demanding, and awesome. If either of us dares to present ourselves and vocation in any other way than what is in God's mind for young adults living and preparing for today's world, we woefully fail the One who called and calls us. We must complement each other and demand of the other that the campus ministry model be a never-completed one. We can determine its goals more than its projects, its watermarks more than its daily arenas. Let's not let each other forget for a semester that we walk along a four-year pilgrimage with each male and female student, providing impressions and experiences of what ministry may mean for the rest of their lives. And who is to say what they will add to our perspective of ministry!