



Response to A Caring People -- by Frances F. Hiebert

I could hardly agree more with Herb Kopp when he urges us to remember our vocation as servants/slaves of Jesus Christ. Voluntary servanthood and mutual submission, as Herb points out, clearly are the social norms for life in the kingdom of God. They apply to all who are "in Christ" in every possible relationship. The paradigm of Galatians 3:28 covers all the bases. The paradoxical freedom/slavery status "in Christ" means that the slave-owner is servant to the slave; the Jew is servant to the Greek; the male is servant to the female. And in all those relationships, of course, the reverse is true as well. This radical equality based on equal and mutual obligation and responsibility also is one of the most definitive aspects of our Anabaptist heritage. Whenever we fall prey to ideas and practices that put one Christian above another, whether by virtue of their ethnicity, their gender, or their assigned role, we have departed from the New Testament teaching and our own Mennonite tradition.

Herb rightly calls us to rediscover the concepts of doulos and desmios. He notes that this runs counter to our American "me" culture with its focus on self-esteem and self-actualization. My only addition would be to point out another notorious paradox of New Testament teaching. The suffering of the servant/slave is undeniable and yet the joy and rewards are beyond measure. In some inexplicable way, the yoke is easy and the burden is light; those who lose their life will find it.

Servanthood as a starting point lays the proper foundation for discussing clergy/laity tension. I believe that Church Growth emphasis on the strong, *individualistic*, leader/decision-maker has us confused. We have strayed away from servant models toward a model of priestly function that is validated and transferred by ordination rather than an identification of spiritual gifts and vocation within the community of believers.

All this is extremely relevant to the ministry of women in the church. If servanthood and gifts are the starting point, how can women be denied any function for which they have been called and gifted? With regard to women's ministry, Herb's point on consistency must be heard. What we often use to keep women from the position of "leading pastor" and ordination, if we are consistent, would also keep them from all speaking or teaching in the church (I Timothy 2:11-12). Furthermore, to be consistent with that kind of hermeneutic means that in the congregation, men must pray with their hands raised (I Timothy 2:8). We recognize that this was the assumed prayer posture for Jews and early Christians; we do not consider it to be a universal imperative. Some restrictions on women in the Ephesian church may have been necessary; should that be considered timeless and universal? Gordon Fee doesn't think so. Both injunctions are made in view of the struggle against heresy in the Ephesian church (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

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of it -

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