

## **Women in Church and Society**

### **Presbyterian & Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue**

**1970**

We, the members of the Worship and Mission Section of the Reformed/Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Consultation in meeting at Morristown, New Jersey, May 14, 1970, have begun a study of the difficulties encountered by women as they live out their role in society, and especially of Christian women as they seek to fulfill their ministry within both the church and the world.

We have begun our study by listening to a cataloguing of many grievances by two female leaders within our respective churches—one a Roman Catholic and one a United Presbyterian. We have found the evidences of discrimination based upon sex to be so substantial that we are obliged, being led, as we believe, by the Holy Spirit, to confess our guilt as members of our respective churches and as members of our social order.

Within the fellowship of the church, it would appear that we have obliged women to exercise a secondary and often demeaning ministry. We have either denied them part in the ordained ministry or have granted them to have part with reluctance, and then have proceeded to hedge their ministry with severe limitations. We have in effect denied that God has created us male and female and has called us to one ministry in Jesus the Christ.

We confess, moreover, that our way of life, our folk cultures, and even the very idiom of our speech have assigned to women a secondary and, at best, a supportive role, and moreover, that we have failed to challenge the injustice of these concepts as they have rooted themselves within the life of the church. We found ourselves inclined to believe that the whole Christian community must summon the will and discover the ways whereby the equality of the sexes is boldly confessed before God and man – confessed both in word and in deed. This equality of personhood, whether male or female, whether married or unmarried, can no longer be stifled.

We are also aware of massive discrimination against women in the secular order and in the work-a-day world. We are asking ourselves whether we have discharged our responsibility by way of insisting upon free and equal treatment in the secular order or whether we have been content to “pass by on the other side”? We, here and now, acknowledge that it is also our concern and our responsibility that women suffer neither rejection nor discrimination within the world and its secular patterns of life.

With these thoughts and purposes in our mind, we wish to report to our respective churches that we plan to continue our study. It is our purpose, by consultation and by research, to ascertain more fully the facts and to do our part to discover and to create new patterns of life wherein women will experience no disadvantages by reason of their sex.

Moreover, Christian women must be welcomed into decision-making positions within the church, must participate fully and freely in the priesthood of all believers, and it is our belief that further study should be given to the ordination of women to the special ministries within the church, lest we deny them the full potential of their ministry. Such is the trend of thought and the scope of study which we intend to pursue.