opened now, and they realize that they are naked.

In opposition to the tradition of insult, then, there is one of liberation. Schiller regarded the so-called Fall as the happiest moment in the history of the world. The words “sin” and “fall” do not appear in the Genesis story. We do read, though, that Adam and Eve were sent forth and driven out of the garden. Being driven out is what happens to us when we are born. The fetus is driven out of the womb where it was nourished and could live and breathe without any effort on its part. But when we are driven out, life begins; we encounter work, care, sexuality.

Adam and Eve leave the garden and emerge into the cold and harshness of life. “Coming out” is a phrase that has assumed great importance in gay liberation. It means that people no longer keep their sexuality a secret and no longer suffer the humiliating and self-destructive effects that such secrecy entails. “Coming out” is liberation. Let us read the story of Adam and Eve as a “coming out.” In the first human beings come out and discover themselves; they discover the joy of learning, the pleasures of beauty and knowledge. Let us praise Eve, who brought this about. Without Eve, there would be nothing in the trees. Without her curiosity we would not know what knowledge was.

In the Jewish tradition, there is a morning prayer in which every man, every adult male, thanks God for having created him a man. Let’s add a new prayer today. Let’s say: I thank you for creating me a woman. I thank you that I was born and driven out from my mother’s womb. I thank you for the tree of knowledge. I will eat of this tree until I die.

But isn’t there something missing in this interpretation? Didn’t God curse Adam and Eve for their disobedience and their coming out? The story in Genesis 3 goes on with the three curses which the Godhead throws upon the serpent, the woman, and the man Adam (Gen. 3: 14-19).

This part of the story doesn’t seem very compatible, with the tradition of liberation. It explains why life is so full of care and pain. The key words in this part of the text are curse, enmity, pain, rule, sweat. The tradition of insult comes to the fore again here. Adam will be long punished in his life because he followed Eve’s initiative just this one time. Eve, who will share Adam’s curse in having to work too, will be doubly punished because she will also bear her children in pain and have to submit to her husband. Work and sexuality, the most important areas of life for adult human beings, are described as curses and put under a negative sign. Within the tradition of oppression, these curses have been gradually codified into humankind’s fate, as if thorns and thistles, labor pains, and the subtraction of one part of humanity to another were necessary and inevitable.

This is what our tradition has selected out of this story and made use of. But if we consider the text more carefully, we see that these curses are not meant to represent eternal verities but that they simply describe the realities of peasant life in Palestine. These curses do not define the way things have to be for all time. The harshness of nature, the extremity of hunger, the dangers against nature, the rule of men over women — these are all bitter experiences. Freedom has its price. Every child is punished for coming out. Every human being who grows and leaves a stage in his or her life behind has to pay for that. But we should not let this realism of the Bible thwart our efforts to come out. We should not let it destroy the belief that creation is good and that its ultimate goal are the reconciliation of man with nature and freedom from tyranny.

The patriarchal God who has lost his exclusive possession of knowledge because human beings have eaten of the tree of knowledge is in an unhappy position. In the reproductive tradition, God is jealous of his privileges, just as parents are when they see their children beginning to move beyond them. These are the final verses of Genesis 3:

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, and he may reach out and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” - there the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, till he stood in the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24).

Our existential situation is that we have eaten of the tree of knowledge but that the tree of life is unattainable for us. We understand, gain knowledge, take responsibility, but life is not in our hands. Eternal life is denied us; and our deepest wish, which is to return to paradise, amounts to eating of that other tree and becoming one with life. When Christ drives away the cherubim that guard paradise so that we can return to Eden, this does not mean that we will be able to live in a kind of Adamic innocence. It means that we can participate more fully in life and eat from the tree of life. As long as we are here, we have knowledge but no eternal and perfect life.

Is reconciliation possible between these two traditions of oppression and liberation? Is God an oppressor who guards his privileges jealously, or does he want to see us strong, growing, coming out? Do we bring guilt down upon ourselves if we take charge and choose freedom, knowledge, the unknown? Or are we - as both men and women - capable of becoming human beings together?

The ultimate message that emerges from the Bible is that God is on our side, that he wants to see us come out. He does not just curse us as we leave the garden; he also accompanies us. He helps us on our long road to becoming human. The verse I like best in this story is verse 21: “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”

It was cold in the world, and it is still cold. There is a doctrine in the Jewish tradition that says human beings should imitate God. They should do God’s work, which is to say they should practice justice. Let us do what God does. The serpent did not lie. It is possible to clothe the naked of our cold earth today, too.

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**ECUMENICAL FORUM**

**Women And The Churches In Early Christianity**

By Bernadette J. Brotoen

Did women preach the word in the early church? Yes. This is not, however, the justification for women preaching the word today. That demand rests on justice, and even had there never been justice for women, justice would be called for today. What follows is then, not a set of proof-texts for women preaching, but a brief survey of some of the New Testament evidence for the activity of women in the ministry of the first-century church.

The apostle Paul is a good source, not only for his views on women, but for the history of women - for a glimpse of women's own experience and not just for what men thought about women. The reconstruction is, of course, partial, because the bits and snippets of information do not constitute a full historical description such as that which men produced concerning their own lives.
Paul’s Letter to the Romans contains greetings to more individuals than any of the other Pauline letters, and just over a third of those greeted by name are women. The letter is very important to the study of the Roman congregation Phoebe, diaconos of the church at Cenchreae. The word *diakonos* appears twenty times in Paul’s writings. (I am here drawing upon the commentary by Ephesians 1 and 2, Timothy, and Titus, believed by most scholars to be post-Pauline.) Eleven times the word refers to men, and nine times to women. King James Version (KJV) translates "minister," which is very important in civic terms in England at the time the translation was made, and once it is translated as "deacon." In the twelfth case, where the word refers to Phoebe, the KJV has "servant." The Revised Standard Version (RSV) renders "deaconess" for Phoebe, but this creates the impression of an order of deaconesses as existed several centuries after the New Testament. Since Paul refers to himself three times as diaconos (1 Cor. 3:4, 2 Cor. 3:6, 4:4; 2 Thess. 2:8), the term must refer to something he and Phoebe have in common. A good translation might be "minister" (in all cases) or, as the New English Bible has it, "one who holds office in the congregation." Phoebe is further called proostis, "one who stands (statis before [pros])," i.e., the presiding officer. Proostis can also mean "patron, guardian, champion, leader, chief, regent," according to the standard dictionary of classical Greek. The dictionary does not list the meaning "helper," which is the RSV rendering of proostis in the case of Phoebe. It is clear, rather, that Paul, by calling Phoebe both proostis and diaconos, was indicating that she deserved respect as an important church leader (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12).

In Rom. 16:7 Paul greets two persons he calls "outstanding among the apostles"—Andronicus and Junia. Through the Middle Ages, commentators considered the latter name (in Greek, "Junia") as a feminine, and so it was counted among the New Testament authors of whom we have no further information. Junia was a common female name, just as Claudia was the feminine counterpart of Claudius. No male name "Junianus" has been found in the literature or inscriptions of the period. But by the time of the Reformations, commentators had begun saying that the person could not be a woman, because no woman could have been an apostle. Therefore the woman must not have been a woman, but a man.

Paul did not hold the view, espoused by Luke, that there were only twelve apostles. How could he have called himself an apostle? And he calls several others, not among the twelve, apostles. For him, to be an apostle meant having seen the risen Lord and having been sent by him to proclaim the gospel. In Rom. 1:5 we find another instance of a woman with a house church: there Nymphas (or Nymphas?) is greeted along with the church in her house. Most scholars believe that Nymphas is a woman and her house church. Some ancient manuscripts have "his" instead of "her," which may indicate that one or more scribes took offense at a woman having a house church and changed the pronoun accordingly. If so, this could imply that the scribe or scribes took this connection with a house church to imply leadership.

What about the familiar New Testament passages telling women to keep silent in the churches (1 Cor. 14:34), saying women are not permitted to teach (1 Tim. 2:12), or that they must be veiled when they pray or prophesy (1 Cor. 11:2-16)? This last passage, which also says that men should not wear long hair, is ambivalent. On the one hand, it shows that women did speak aloud in the congregation. In fact, prophesying may structurally have been to the liturgy in Corinth what preaching is today. On the other hand, Paul does say that "the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is the man, but the head of Christ is God." This idea of a Christ-based hierarchy of the sexes is as much a part of Paul as his willingness to recognize his women colleagues and work with them. There is a tension between these two aspects of his personality. The first aspect does not undercut the second quite the contrary. It may have been the independence and initiative of women that caused Paul to draw back from his views on equality. Rather than as>L

Many scholars believe that 1 Cor. 14:34-35, in which women are told to be silent in the churches, is a later addition to the text. But, given the already documented ambivalence in Paul, it is not impossible to imagine that Paul could have been inconsistent, especially in matters relating to women. Paul’s ambivalence is reflected in the later traditions. Paul, whose works were included in the New Testament, the authors of Colossians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, picked up on Paul’s last strand in his thinking and carried it further. Other followers of Paul, such as the churches represented by the extra-canonical work called the Acts of Paul and Thecla, carried on his tradition of collegiality.
These few examples give some impression of the complexity of the history of early Christianity with respect to women. Some early Christian women, I think, accepted authority and power. Others probably internalized subordinationist views. Some early Christian men seem to have encouraged women to accept leadership while others did not. And some women probably had internalized subordination and yet wanted to accept power. That is the situation of most women today. Perhaps we can learn from those who have gone before us how subordinationist structures pervade our lives and how to accept the power and authority that could be ours.

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EDITORIAL

The Wisdom Of Ecumenicity

By Bishop Marjorie S. Matthews

In the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Scriptures, the book of Job tells of the inaccessibility of wisdom. "...where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know the way to it, and it is found in the land of the living." Also, "Whence then comes wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? It is hid from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air." Those who have been involved in ecumenical relationships must often echo the Joban plaint, asking themselves (and others): "Where is the wisdom in ecumenical relationships to be found, and where does it come from?"

Answering the second question first, those of us who are deeply committed to this cause believe the ecumenical spirit to be that of the Holy Spirit working in the midst of God's faithful men, women and even children toward greater understanding of one another and our relationship to the one God whom we claim to worship and serve. The nature of the Holy Spirit is such that it is not bound by dogma or creed, and is free to move from person to person, church to church, synagogue to synagogue, nation to nation, even heaven to earth, as God directs.

How, then, can we find the wisdom or truth in the disparate views of ecumenism that are often presented? Even as I prepared to write this guest editorial, I received two letters in the same mail each promoting a publication for religious faiths in America. You may have received these yourself, but in case you didn't, I will quote:

"American religion has lapsed into mutually hostile camps - theological, ethical, and political. As a result, religion's culture-forming tasks have been fragmented and, in the eyes of many, discredited." (Richard John Neuhaus, The Center on Religion & Society for The Religion & Society Report)

"The government is worried about what is happening in the churches. A new wind is blowing among Christians. Like on the first Pentecost, the wind of the Spirit is transforming lives, causing conversions, establishing communities, bringing a new love for the poor, creating a hunger for justice, turning lives toward peace, filling hearts with worship and praise." (Jim Wallis, Sojourners Magazine)

The truth of our present ecumenical situation (and therefore, the wisdom) must lie somewhere between the fragmentation of hostile camps and the euphoria of the establishment of God's reign (shalom) on earth. All that most of us can do is rate ourselves and our respective faiths on that well-worn scale of 1 to 10 - the extremes of which are represented by the above quotations. Our ratings are subjective, of course. Not everyone has the opportunity to attend the assemblies of the World Council of Churches or of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. However, everyone can open his or her eyes to the progress toward understanding and mutual support that is being made in one's own community.

I was a student in undergraduate school when Pope John XXIII became the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church. I can still recall the excitement of the new freedom in the various religious communities to be open with one another, to be allowed to exchange plans for greater cooperation and dialogue between our respective faiths. These experiences did not have the goal of changing minds or faiths, but of greater understanding and appreciation.