

## **Women Ministers Not Warmly Received in the UC**

What role should women have in the Church? The ordination of women issue occupied the United Church, beginning with its first post-union General Council in 1926. The 1936 Council agreed to make a change in the Basis of Union and Miss Lydia E. Gruchy, B. A., became the first ordained woman minister in the denomination.

But women ministers have not received a warm welcome throughout the UC. Rural congregations across the country have seen women succeeding women as pastors. But in the Maritimes only three women clergy serve single point charges. And in Manitoba only two of its twenty-five women ministers are in Winnipeg.

### **Uncomfortable With Sexist Language**

The current feminist movement within the UC wants more than equality for women in ministerial roles. They feel uncomfortable with the "sexist language" used in church liturgy. That means language which refers to people as "man" and to God as "He." These feminists have been lobbying within the church for changes. Five presbyteries and conferences petitioned the 1980 General Council to "clean up the Church's sexist language. "One feminist wrote that if the extremists have their way, it's going to end with a supreme being who may be described as a goddess.

Their theology is a liberation theology. They use the Exodus model of the liberation from Egyptian slavery. They believe that historic Christianity legitimizes oppression. Their theology is not based on the inerrant Word of God but on experience, with what is happening among people. "While theology is about the self-revelation of God," writes Patricia Clark in the *Observer*, "it has to be written down by people (up to now male) who are conditioned by their own experience and the thought forms of their time. For Old and New Testament times, those thought forms are unavoidably patriarchal."

### **What Is At Stake?**

Most of the UC people have not been very receptive to the feminist movement within their denomination. They blame it for bringing division. They refer to the movement as just "women's lib." "The traditional women in the church have a deep suspicion that the feminists may gain power, take the liturgy which has come to mean so much to them, and change it so they are no longer comfortable." says Margaret Houston of the National Division of Mission in Canada.

What is at stake with the extreme feminist theology and the push for a change in the so-called sexist language? It involves the very way the Bible speaks about God's intricate being, and the Church's view of revelation and Scripture.

Dr. Carl F. Henry pointedly observes in his essay "The Feminist Challenge to God - Language, "It says something about our age that many of its intellectuals, including some theologians, are more concerned about eliminating supposed aberrations in

sexual God-language in the name of feminine libertarianism than about stemming sexual aberrations and licentiousness in human relationships in the name of a holy God."

I believe that he is right in his assessment.

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