

A “Female Ministry”?

by Bill Crews

An article in the **Houston Post** of December 15, 1979 was titled, “Bible supports female ministry, report concludes.” The article was written by George W. Cornell, a well-known Associated Press religion writer.

Conclusions reached by a “seven-member task force of the Catholic Biblical Association” after “a three year study” were the concern of Mr. Cornell’s article.

The association is said to be “made up of about 1,000 U.S. church experts on the Bible.”

It is common knowledge that many individuals and organizations are pressing for the admittance of women into the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church. These seven “experts on the Bible” spent three years in searching the Bible and concluded that “there are no Scriptural obstacles to the ordination of women.”

It needs to be remarked that the Roman Catholic Church itself, its hierarchy in its entirety, its pope, its priesthood, its sacraments, its sacramentals, its liturgy, its peculiar doctrines are nowhere to be found in the Scriptures. It maintains that tradition is of equal authority with the Scriptures and that neither is as authoritative as the “voice of the Church.” It is a human organization, conceived and governed by human wisdom, the result of gradual, over-the-centuries, departure from the New Testament pattern of the Lord’s church. It has often given in to accommodation and change, and I predict that it will in time ordain women into its priesthood. Men can and do change the rules they have made.

But my principal concern in regard to the report by this panel of “authorities” is the twisting of Scriptures to which they have resorted to reach their conclusions. Be it understood that I do not have access to the full report of the seven-member task force and that I must rely upon Mr. Cornell’s quotations and summary. But it all sounds exactly like the usual Catholic stretching of Scripture to support peculiar dogma — try to make a pope out of Peter using New Testament Scriptures; Catholic theologians think they can.

These “experts” speak of the apostles being “part of a wider circle not restricted to males,” and they think that the wider circle which contained males and females “after the resurrection provided the early church’s leadership.” Where does the New Testament teach this? They evidently think that women, as well as men, “administered a local church” and led in “public worship.” But no examples of such can be given.

Mr. Cornell writes: “Citing Scripture references for it, the report says women founded churches, held leadership positions, functioned in public worship, were ministers and teachers and among those acclaimed in Rom. 16:7 as ‘outstanding apostles.’” Romans 16:7 mentions Andronicus and Junias, and some translators believe the latter was a woman (in that case, Junia), but it does not teach that these were apostles; it does teach that these two were Paul’s kinsmen and fellow-prisoners and “of note among the apostles.”

This panel claims that “women’s activities may have been somewhat limited by what was culturally permissible.” They say, according to Mr Cornell, that “exclusion of women from church office cannot be deduced from passages in Paul’s epistles admonishing women to be silent or submissive, inasmuch as the passages relate to proper congregational decorum ‘motivated by social and cultural factors.’”

This seven-member task force of four men and three women seems to be saying that women would have functioned in the churches in the first century in the very same capacities as men except for the customs and attitudes of the times, and now that customs and attitudes have changed they should be permitted to function in the same capacities as men. They do not fail to refer to the passage in Galatians 3:28 which teaches that there can “*be no male and female*” in Christ, but their use of the principle is not the same as Paul’s. Their interpretation would force Paul into contradicting himself and other New Testament

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