

# SPECTRUM

## Metanoia by John Valk

*Last week I asked whether the feminist cause—defined as that struggle for freedom and equality for both genders—could see the Scriptures as a strong ally, in spite of its perceived patriarchal stance.* I argued that when one reads the first two chapters of Genesis, the case for freedom and equality of both men and women emerges strongly. God calls both men and women to a common task; both are equally mandated. Without each others uniquely different input, insight and assistance, the common task cannot be properly exercised.

That is what God instituted "from the beginning." That is what God wants of men and women. But in each moment that arrangement can be quickly shattered. Rather than exercising our freedom in conjunction with God and each other, to ensure its continuation, we often seek to do it independent of God and each other. That has consequences. From the past to the present, and in each subsequent moment, it becomes our "fall into sin." Among its results "in the beginning," was the following, which God uttered to the woman: "your desire shall be for your

husband and he shall rule over you."

It has been argued that because of "the Fall" God has divinely ordained male authority, sanctioned by all of Scriptures.

The legacy of this view in Western society has been male dominance, most noticeably in the home and the church. That legacy, as feminists have convincingly argued, has taken a toll.

Male authority and dominance is a result of "the Fall." But rather than perceiving it

as divinely ordained or sanctioned, I believe it to be a divine prediction; a prediction of what would follow self-centred acts of independence and defiance. That male authority and dominance has continued to this day is not because God willed it, but because it has been allowed to continue, largely by men but also by some women. Not

God, but men and women have perpetuated it. And, God predicted it would happen, to the extent that men and women consciously, or

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unconsciously, operate independent of God—by implementing their own religious, cultural or social norms or customs. The assumption of divine sanction is thus hardly surprising.

History, as well as nature, has given men certain advantage in perpetuating an oppressive situation. Traditional child-bearing and child-rearing

practices, industrialisation, pure physical strength, etc., frequently leads to dominance and suppression. But these are wilful choices men make. When God mandated men to freely exercise dominion over all created things, men have often chosen to do so independent of both God and women. That not infrequently leads to distortion. History is replete with examples of subtle and not so subtle forms of

oppression. Distortion of another kind has also surfaced. It has also resulted from rejecting something God created pure and good, namely, the intimate bond between male and female. The desire for intimacy, so strong in all of us, becomes distorted and destructive.

Rather than returning intimacy in a gentle, caring and sensitive fashion, men particularly have responded with self-centred behaviour. Many still seek to "score" with women, or shirk responsibilities when new life is created.

The intimate bonding ought to be most intense when new life is created. Here women are most dependent on

their partners to return love and care, when they are most emotionally and physically vulnerable. But, as statistics tell us, the opposite is often the case, with the most destructive outcome producing domestic violence and abortion. In this common task of producing new offspring, men may freely choose how they will behave. But God expects, and tolerates, only that which is life-affirming.

From time to time social problems receive major redress. When those in positions of power and influence refuse justice, freedom, and equality for all, God will not be thwarted. From those least expected, God causes great things to be accomplished. The Scriptures are full of examples. Perhaps the women's movement, and even the men's movement, are the latest party to divine action.

*(To be continued)*

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