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A REPLY

TO

“THE PLACE AND WORK

OF

Women in the Church”

—•••••—
BY JOSEPH S. DAVID.
—•••••—

PICTOU, N. S.
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1878.



A REPLY

(to)

“The Place and Work of Women in the Church.”

NOTE:—Deeming it expedient that a reply be made to the pamphlet entitled, “The place and work of women in the Church,” the following pages are published, in similar form, with the earnest prayer that justice, liberty and rights may revive and flourish in the social worship of our common Lord.

JOSEPH S. DAVID.

—o—

A DIALOGUE.

Witness.—Mr. Pastor, I had the pleasure of listening to an interesting dialogue between Mr. Elder and Mr. Novice on the place and work of women in the church. Are you acquainted with the character of either of those men?

Pastor.—I am personally acquainted with Mr. Elder, and highly esteem him for the rectitude of his character, and for his zeal in the cause of Christ. But he adheres strictly, perhaps too strictly, to the principles in which he was educated. Any deviation from the rules and customs of his church, and any ideas in worship or doctrine new to him, he does not fail to denounce. With Mr. Novice, I have but slight acquaintance. What circumstances led to the dialogue?

W. Mr. Novice is a member of his church; but while attending a revival of religion, in which women took an active part, he became convinced that it was his duty to identify himself with the good work. But, having carried his convictions to his minister, Mr. Elder succeeded in allaying them by advising him to be cautious and to observe the signs of a true revival, and what do you suppose they were?

P. From what I know of Mr. Elder, I suppose he would acknowledge a revival to be of God if conducted solely by the clergy, if shouting and all signs of enthusiasm were carefully avoid-

ed, and if women were not permitted to speak or pray, except to express a desire to be prayed for. Such ideas would naturally lead to the conversation about women's place and work in the Church.

W. Just so: but I could not help smiling to see Mr. Novice so pliable; for Mr. Elder made many assertions that he did not attempt to prove, and yet Mr. Novice yielded to them, and relied upon them, as if they had been followed by the most convincing arguments.

P. We can easily account for that. He was convinced more by his respect for Mr. Elder than by arguments, for Mr. Elder is greatly beloved and adored by his congregation. Many of them so rely upon his words that a "yes" or "no" from his lips is sufficient to settle any religious dispute that may arise among them. Let it also be observed, that it is extremely difficult for men to renounce the prejudices in which they were educated; and when they do become partially extricated, it requires but a feeble effort to get them back into the same old rut. Indeed, few there are who possess sufficient originality of thought, and independence of spirit, to think and speak and act unmoved by natural prejudice. Can you mention any arguments that Mr. Elder produced?

W. His chief argument was founded on 1 Cor. 14., 34-36, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak;" &c., and 1 Tim. 2, 11, 12. That command he considered binding upon all churches, under all circumstances, throughout all ages. Is that idea correct?

P. Far from it. Every minister of the Gospel has authority, in his own congregation, to make certain rules and regulations, and change them as he sees fit; but he has not the same authority elsewhere. That particular command given to the Corinthian church, was not binding upon the church of Ephesus, nor the church in Philadelphia, nor any other church in the world. It was a special command, given under peculiar circumstances.

W. Will you explain their peculiar circumstances?

P. With much pleasure. Observe: there is something in the carnal mind that tends to degrade or lower the female sex in the estimation of man. This tendency increases with the increase of moral darkness and degradation; so that "where Christianity does not prevail, women are degraded, and often enslaved." The properties most prized, are physical strength, and warlike courage; while social refinement, tenderness, and delicacy of feeling, are ignored. But, as the world emerges from moral darkness and degradation, and advances in the light of Christianity, social refinement, tenderness, and delicacy of feeling, become more prized, the female sex rises in the estimation of man, and sexual partiality vanishes. Thus, justice, liberty, and equality of rights and privileges flourish with the growth of Christianity. In the apostolic age, Greece was sunk in darkness and idolatry: was civilized, but not christianized.

While the men were famed for their learning, and skill in arts and sciences, the women were despised and degraded—had no learning, no intelligence and no influence in society—the laws and customs of the land kept them down; and though many women, as well as men, were converted to Christianity, they lacked proper language to express their newborn zeal. Being utterly void of learning and influence, any attempt on their part to teach or exhort in public assemblies, would only bring shame and reproach upon the cause. Paul wisely saw this, and hence his regulations.

W. I now understand their unfavorable circumstances. Such regulations were truly necessary; but Paul, in the same epistle, approves of women praying and prophesying with their heads covered,—ch. 11., 5, 11.

P. True; but there he gives information concerning the general custom of the Church in his day. Women wore long thick veils in the presence of men but not in private. But what is it to prophesy?

W. Mr. Elder defined it thus:—“The word, ‘prophesy’ is used in a variety of ways; ‘to foretell,’ Matt. 13., 14; to divine, Matt. 26., 68.; to teach, Cor. 14., 3. ‘He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.’ Also for the service of praise.—1 Chron 25., 1, 7. ‘Six under the hands of their father Jeduthun who prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the Lord.’”

P. Perfectly scriptural. We thus learn concerning the general custom of women in the Church that they prayed, taught, exhorted, and praised God in promiscuous assemblies. But what were Mr. Elder’s ideas concerning the famous prophetesses named in the Old and New Testaments, from Miriam down to the women who labored with Paul in the gospel?

W. He referred to Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Hannah, Anna, the woman of Samaria, Mary Magdalene, the daughter of Philip, Paul’s helpers and others; but recognized none of them as public worshippers in the Church.

P. What about Miriam the prophetess?

W. He said that “Miriam led the women and united her song of triumph with that of Moses and Aaron.” That “she indeed claimed equality with Moses; but for her presumption became a leper. Num. 12.” He also quoted a similar remark from Calvin.

P. What arguments were produced to prove that Miriam’s song led to pride?

W. None whatever. The assertion was simply made, and left there.

P. And well might it be; for there is not a word in the Bible to support it. There is no more connection between Miriam’s song of praise, and her sin for which she became a leper, than there is between Moses’ triumph over Pharaoh, and the sin which prevented his entering the land of Canaan; or between David’s

victory over Goliath, and the sin he committed, years after, in numbering the people. Miriam's song is recorded in Exod. 15, her sin in Num. 12.

W. What facts may be observed in connection with that song?

P. We may observe, first, that Miriam was eminently pious, and occupied a high standing in the Church, Micah 6., 4; secondly, that in her public exhortation, she gave unto God all the glory, Ex. 15., 21; thirdly, that she prophesied in a promiscuous praise meeting, v. 1. What did he say about the prophetess Deborah?

W. "Deborah judged Israel and led their armies to victory. Judges 4., 5."

P. True. She was called of God to fill a high office and she filled it nobly.

W. But Mr. Elder said concerning women, "we never read of them being elected or set apart to office, among the Patriarchs—in the Jewish or Christian Church—they were not allowed to preach, to govern, or to dispense the sacraments."

P. It is true that they were not allowed to dispense the sacraments; for that rite belonged wholly to the priesthood; but they were allowed to preach and to govern. Mr. Elder must have forgotten Deborah just then, for she was both prophetess and judge; and the judicial office was one of the highest and most sacred offices in the Jewish Church; the judge was considered a sacred person and was sanctified for that office by the direct appointment of God. Wars too, were in those days religious, being connected with the Church. Success and victory in battle depended on the faithfulness of the people, the piety of their leaders, and their firm trust in God. They were generally attended by prayer, exhortation, and songs of praise. Did Mr. Elder make mention of the lengthy prophecy that Deborah uttered on a certain day of victory?

W. No; he did not even mention that Deborah was a prophetess.

P. What about the prophetess Huldah?

W. He only said, "Huldah exercised her prophetic office in the college, though probably in private—2 Kings 22., 16."

P. But, as the college was connected with the church, it was more likely to have been a public institution, and her office in the church, a public office. She was well known by the king, the priests and the common people. It was in the presence of Hilkiah the high priest, and a number of other men, that she delivered that thrilling prophecy concerning Josiah, so soon afterwards fulfilled, 2 Kings 22., 15-20. But as it was delivered in the Church, and in the presence of men, I suppose Mr. Elder would say nothing about it.

W. He made no mention of it whatever.

P. What about the public prophecies of Hannah?

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W. He said, "Hannah sang praises individually to God in the tabernacle, 1 Sam. 2., 1, 11."

P. She did truly praise God with her lips, but she also prayed and exhorted. As she stood in the temple, she poured out her soul to God in prayer that he would give her a son. Her prayer was answered. After the child was weaned she took him to Shiloh, and the priests slew a bullock, and presented the child to the Lord in due form. Then after Hannah had delivered a personal address to Eli concerning the child, this aged priest worshipped the Lord. (1 Sam. 1., 28,) evidently by engaging in prayer, after which Hannah also prayed: ch. 2., 1. Her eloquent prophecy contained in the second chapter, is more properly praise than prayer, and may be divided thus:— v. 1,2, praise to God; v. 3, address to adversary; v. 4-10, prophecy on the judgments of God. Her prophecy was delivered in the tabernacle and in the presence of men. What about the prophetess Anna?

W. Mr. Novice, speaking of women said, "part of the temple was assigned them, 'The Court of the women.'" Mr. Elder replied, "Undoubtedly: it was probably in this apartment that Anna testified concerning the birth of the Messiah, 'to all them who looked for redemption in Jerusalem'."

P. But the women formed only a part of them who looked for redemption in Jerusalem; therefore she spake to men as well. The parents of Jesus were both in the temple. The aged Simeon was there, and prophesied concerning the child. Then Anna the prophetess, "coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them," &c. Observe, (1) she was in the Church, (2) she delivered a public address in the temple, and (3) she spake to a multitude of men and women.

W. What an illustrious example of true piety.

P. Did Mr. Elder attempt to prove that Anna spake in "The Court of the women?"

W. No; he made no attempt whatever.

P. Just as well, for such an attempt would have exposed him to ridicule, there being no such place mentioned in the Bible. The expression is either one of Mr Novice's inventions, or is drawn from some novice affair; for it does not once occur throughout the entire range of the Sacred Scriptures.

W. I suspected that it was a fallacy by the peculiar manner in which it was introduced. But immediately after this, Mr. Elder spoke of the low state of Israel when Deborah and other women ruled, and remarked, that "it is not for the honor of man, or the well-being of the Church, when women are under the sad necessity to occupy the place which should be bravely and faithfully held by men."

P. He might with equal propriety assert, that it is not for the honor of sovereigns, or the well-being of Britain, that Queen Victoria is under the sad necessity, to occupy the throne, which

should be bravely and faithfully held by a king. The one assertion is as absurd as the other. Under Deborah, Israel prospered and triumphed over her enemies, "and the land had rest forty years," Judges 5., 31.

W. The next person that occurs to us in the order of time, though not in the order of dialogue, is the woman of Samaria, John 4., 29. "Did she not speak publicly?" was Mr. Novice's inquiry, to which Mr. Elder replied, "yes but not in the Church—she was not yet baptized;" at the same time acknowledging that "it was a personal effort to save souls most commendable in man or woman."

P. Here he discovered a flowery spot for women: an arena upon which they can save souls without offending God. That spot occurs immediately after they believe, before they get baptized. If that be so, all unbaptized converts among the women had better remain unbaptized; had better never enter the Church of Christ, lest they fall again into bondage, and their mouth be stopped. The pious women who are now church members had better leave the Church, in order to have liberty to work for the Master and bring multitudes to Christ, like the woman of Samaria.

W. But can it be proved that she was not baptized? Christ's disciples, whose right it was to baptize, witnessed her conversion; and she may have been baptized then and there.

P. On this point we are uninformed. Be it as it may: whether a member of the outward visible Church or not, she was a believer, a branch of the "True Vine," a member of Christ's spiritual Church; and in this spiritual Church she proclaimed the Messiah.

W. But "the case was peculiar," said Mr. Elder.

P. Very true, for she was peculiarly honored. After the birth of our Saviour, the angel of the Lord, attended by myriads of the heavenly host, was the first to proclaim him to the shepherds of Bethlehem; Simeon and Anna were the first to preach him to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and the woman of Samaria was the first to carry the glad tidings to the Samaritans. Each case was peculiar. Thus, men and women and angels unite to proclaim the name of Jesus.

Lo! men and women join with bands
Of angels from on high;
While Mr. Elder, trembling stands,
And devils fear and fly.

We come next to Mary Magdalene: what about her piety and work?

W. Mr. Elder quoted the commission she received from Christ, "go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God:" but said—"it was a special message, given privately, under circumstances which can never again occur."

P. Truly wonderful! He unconsciously honored her with a position beside John the Baptist: for, as he was the last prophet to herald the Lord's incarnation, so she was the last to prophesy his return to glory. Both commissions to preach were special messages, given privately, under circumstances which can never again occur. Every true preacher of the Gospel is called of God privately, under circumstances that shall never be exactly repeated, that "can never again occur." What about the daughters of Philip?

W. Mr. Elder thought, with Calvin, "that they did prophesy at home or in some private place without the common assembly."

P. How did he support the idea?

W. Only by showing that Aquila and Priscilla expounded the Gospel to Apollos privately. Acts 18., 26.

P. When I wish to expound the Gospel to a certain individual, I do it privately too; but that does not infer that men never preach the gospel. Christ taught the learned Nicodemus privately; but that did not prove that the apostle Paul never preached in public. Aquila and Priscilla taught the eloquent Apollos privately; but that does not infer that women never preach the Gospel.

W. How utterly void of foundation is the argument: but can it be shown that the daughters of Philip prophesied in public?

P. We are not acquainted with their history; yet, it is evident that they did; for, "He that prophesieth edifieth the Church," 1 Cor. 14., 4, that is, speaks in the church and to the church. These devout women, undoubtedly, assisted their pious father in spreading the Gospel and edifying the church. What were Mr. Elder's ideas concerning the women who labored with Paul in the Gospel? (Phil. 4., 3.)

W. He only said, "the help afforded by pious women in dealing with converts of their own sex was quite as necessary, as their personal service,—perhaps more so."

P. Very true: but they dealt with converts of the opposite sex too. Paul says, they "labored *with me* in the Gospel." They labored, not merely in private, not by themselves, but, *with Paul*: not at their worldly occupation, not in domestic affairs, but "*in the Gospel*." They labored *with Paul in the Gospel*, as truly as one minister, in the present day, labors with another in conducting a revival. He calls them his "fellow-laborers," and commands the Philippians to help them in the good work.

W. Mr. Elder spake, also of the prophecy in Joel 2., 28,— "I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy,"—and made some appropriate remarks on the day of Pentecost, in which it was partially fulfilled;

but I should like to hear it further explained.

P. What about the other part of the prophecy, v. 29, "And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit?"

W. That part, he did not mention.

P. The expression "servants and handmaids," possess a meaning different from that of "sons and daughters." The former refers to the ministers of the Gospel only: the latter, to the children of God generally. In the scriptures, a servant of God is a servant of the church, being a servant or minister of the Gospel, and a handmaid is a female servant or minister.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was so richly poured out on preachers and hearers, that prophecy was but partially fulfilled. Its fulfillment is still going on, and will continue to go on until the Spirit will be poured out, not merely in this country or on that nation, but, "upon all flesh." Behold, in this our day, the sons and daughters of the Church of Christ, together with His servants and handmaids, prophesying and bringing souls to Christ.

W. I was just thinking about the celebrated Mrs. Phœbe Palmer. With what glorious success her labours were everywhere attended. How many thousands were brought to Jesus through her instrumentality: and how many thousands were led onward to the sublime heights of Christian holiness through her sacred teachings.

P. Truly. There are, undoubtedly, many successful preachers of the Gospel in the world to-day, who were, converted to God through her labors. Dr. Talmage, on a certain occasion, while applauding her life and work from the pulpit, asserted that twenty-five thousand souls were saved through her instrumentality. But she was only one example among hundreds of such noble women. Observe such women as Lady Huntingdon, Lady Pembroke, Florence Nightingale, Hannah More, Elizabeth Fry, Mrs. Gough, Mrs. Thompson, Mrs. M. C. Lathrop, Mrs. A. Whittenmyer, Mrs. M. C. Johnson, Mrs. Van Cott and hundreds of others, who, in their Gospel labors, their temperance enterprises, and charitable institutions, have shed blessings upon the world, the value of which eternity alone can reveal.

W. Mr. Novice, speaking of the good done by women, remarked,—“generally they have large audiences, stir up slothful men, and make the meetings lively,”—to which Mr. Elder replied, “the good is doubtful, the liveliness evanescent,” and endeavored to prove it by indirectly showing their disobedience to Paul’s command to the Corinthians.

P. That reminds me of the haughty Pharisees who denounced one of Christ’s miracles by saying, “this man is not of God because he keepeth not the sabbath day,” John 9., 16.

They witnessed the miracle, could not deny it, but made it all a delusion by declaring that, in performing it He broke the sabbath day. Just so with the Pharisees of the present day. Here are a hundred, there five hundred, in another place a thousand, of the most abandoned profligates, lifted from the gutter of wretchedness, and placed on the platform of honor. They gaze upon the work, and cannot deny it; but make it all a delusion by saying that they disobey the command of Paul. Who do it? Not merely the unconverted world: but alas! alas! members of the Church of Christ; and even shall I say it, ministers of the Gospel, who move in high circles, and wield wide influence in the Church! Nevertheless, we see the handmaids of the Church, not as ordained ministers, with power to administer the sacraments; yet, as preachers of the Gospel, exhorters, prayer-leaders, class-leaders, spiritual teachers and temperance lecturers, performing a work in evangelizing the world and edifying the Church, that is startling the intelligent world, bringing honor upon their sex, and bringing glory to God; while across the far off fields of the past, there rings into our ears, the ancient prophecy of Joel, "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy;" Acts 2., 17, 18.

W. You spoke of Dr. Talmage. As his life and labors are not only applauded by Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and all evangelical denominations, but are also owned of God in the salvation of thousands of souls, I would like to know his opinion on the subject.

P. Time would fail me to relate all that he has said and written in favor of women's rights; but I will read you a few of his own words, as I have them here, thus:—"We *dare* not close the mouth of any consecrated, godly woman, whose words of love for man, in the name of Christ, God honors abundantly, following them with blessing. A woman speaks in a prayer-meeting. A soul, two souls, ten souls are brought to the feet of Jesus by her words. My jealousy for the honor of God's house will not let me set myself against the instrument which He, in opposition to all human interpretations and protests, delights to follow with divine success and honor, "lest haply I be found to fight against God." He is abundantly able to take care of his own honor in this matter.

If any one, male or female, speaks a word *against* Christ or the Holy Ghost, we are bound to close his profaning lips, *if we can*; but let our arm be palsied, or our lips forever mute, if we be found putting padlocks on the mouth of the poorest, meanest, most unlearned follower of Jesus Christ, who sincerely pleads His

cause with the condemned and ruined sinner. We may not put ordaining hands upon her head, and set her in the sacred desk; but we may safely rest in the spiritual ordination secured of the Holy Ghost, and at least pray that she may be a prophetess of righteousness, and win souls into Christ's kingdom. If people were half as zealous to win souls to Christ as some are to close women's lips in the church or prayer-meeting, the millennium would be hastened forward several epochs."

Mr. Moody, also, highly values the labors of women, and has employed them to aid him in conducting those revivals in which thousands of souls have been led to Christ. Multitudes of the brightest divines, and most successful evangelists of all ages, have faithfully supported women's evangelical work.

W. It is true, that women possess a fineness of sentiment, a tenderness of feeling and a courtesy of manners, that can reach the better qualities that lie dormant in the wretched profligate, who cannot be moved by man; and this is probably one reason why God uses them as appropriate instruments in doing good. But what is the mind of Christ on this point. As he abolished certain old laws, modified others, explained the decalogue and founded the Christian Church, I would suppose that a word from his lips would be sufficient to settle all disputes.

P. Very well, observe. Our blessed Lord never ordained women as apostles, to be sent out into the world, as lambs among wolves, to spread and establish Christianity. The labors and persecutions and conflicts and sufferings through which the apostles were called to pass, could not be endured by the weaker sex. Indeed, it was only the most hardy class of *men* that were appointed to that work. Yet, among all the prophets and apostles of the bible, none gave the women more encouragement to preach the Gospel than Christ himself; while a word to discourage them in the good work, is not known to have ever escaped his lips. In healing certain *men* of their disease, he straitly charged them to tell no man of it; but, what appears wonderful to me is, that he never gave such a charge to a woman. It seems that he wished to destroy beforehand the prejudice and bondage that was to darken the future history of the Church. When a certain woman was healed privately by touching the hem of his garment, he made her confess the whole truth in the presence of the multitude that thronged him. Again while he was teaching in a synagogue on the sabbath, a woman who had been invalid eighteen years, came to him; and as soon as he healed her, she "glorified God," Luke 13, 13. Did he say,—"keep silence: you are in a synagogue; in a promiscuous assembly, and I am teaching?" No it was he who caused her to glorify God, and where is that prejudiced person who would have closed her lips and suppressed her emotions of joy? In the presence of Jesus, Anna prophesied, under his direction the woman of Samaria preached, and in obedience to his command, Mary

Magdalene proclaimed his resurrection from the dead and prophesied his ascension to God.

W. Mr. Elder quoted Albert Barnes, who allows women to speak and pray in a Sabbath School, or in meetings of their own sex, and affirms that "neither of these come under the apostle's idea of a Church," but makes no attempt to prove it.

P. Indeed, he might as wisely assert that a woman's speaking or praying in a promiscuous prayer-meeting, or praise-meeting, or class-meeting, or inquiry-meeting does not come under the apostle's idea of a Church. The one assertion must stand or fall with the other. In the Sabbath School, women not merely speak in Church, but even teach. As for female prayer-meetings, they are very good and useful in their place; but the like is not once mentioned between the first letter in Genesis and the last in Revelation. In the Scriptures, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, all unite in the worship of God. Sin and darkness raise walls of separation: light and holiness pull them down. The further we travel into the regions of darkness and superstition, the wider the gulf appears between the sympathies of men and women, until we come to monasteries and nunneries, where, looking around, we discover scenes of horrible superstition and unbridled cruelty. Then retracing our steps, as we move into the light, those isolating walls are seen crumbling into ruins, until we come to where the Church walks in the light as God is in the light, where men, women and children worship God in christian fellowship and enjoy religious liberty. Then moving onward till we come to the verge of heaven, we lift the veil that hides from mortal eyes the glories of the future world: and as we see the saints and angels shouting and harping and praising God, with sexual distinction lost in the glory of the skies, we are reminded of the scenes of early youth, and the innocence of childhood days, when at our mother's knee, we were taught to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."