



Response to letters on "Don't Bury My Heart"

by Desmond Ford

Magazines, including evangelical Christian magazines, frequently give news reports (if the issue is one of concern to many). The news report itself does not necessarily endorse the content of any speeches quoted.

Maryan Stirling reacted sharply, even bitterly, to the Indianapolis GC decision against the ordination of women. GNU's report was made on the basis of such **non-controversial** Scriptures as Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

We believe emphatically that male and female have distinctive roles, as indicated by Scripture and physiology. But in the matter of proclaiming the gospel that **distinction** must never become **separation**. 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 13 and 14:31-36 clearly say that women spoke in the churches. It is equally clear that they were warned against engaging in irreverent chatter or violation of prevailing social customs of decorum.

Not once in the Gospels do we read of a woman opposing Christ. Jesus had a multitude of male enemies, but so far as the record goes, not one female opposer. This is significant for any evangelistic religious group today.

Women are presented as last at the cross (Mk 15:47); first at the tomb (Jn 20:1); first to proclaim the resurrection (Mt 28:8); first to preach to the Jews (Lk 2:36-38); first prayer meeting attenders (Acts 1:14); first to greet Christian missionaries in Europe (Acts 16:13; and first in producing a European convert (Acts 16:14).

Ordination as practiced today is not in the biblical tradition. The separation of clergy from laity was part of the great apostasy after the apostolic age. In New Testament times any believer could preach, baptize, or conduct the Lord's Supper. But wisdom and humility prevented Christian women from asserting themselves in ways contrary to prevailing customs. They did not wish to dishonor the gospel.

Through Christ the barriers of race and class and sex are tran-

scended. This truth has not yet fully filtered down to all churches; even those which claim to be in the forefront of evangelicalism. While women constitute the majority in almost all churches (including SDA), they are too often passed by in situations where their Christian dedication, talent, and intuition could bring great blessing. The percentage of women on GC committees, for example, is a matter for sorrow and repentance.

Those with any knowledge of history are well aware that in most cultures and in most ages women have been terribly abused. Their cry has gone up to God century after century. We might not personally have chosen the words Maryan used; but we understand why she spoke with such strength. Understanding the agelong subjugation, unfairness, and cruelty experienced by her sex, without full redress anywhere in the world, leads some of us to weep in sympathy with her.

We recorded her cry that others too might feel, and ultimately do, what is right. ❖