

Each for the Other and Both for the Lord



John Arthur and Anne Eggebroten

by Anne Eggebroten

I spent so much time studying and reading books as a teenager in Bakersfield, California that, my mother sent me to the Presbyterian Church, hoping I would make some friends and become normally socialized. When my socialization at church resulted in an earnest conversion to Jesus Christ, my mother took it in stride: "You'll grow out of it, dear."

The ironic thing was that my trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior made me vulnerable to a socialization more profound than my mother could ever have anticipated. I learned, for example, that in Christian marriages the husband rules the wife. I accepted it, though I knew that in our home such a thing would have been impossible. My father watched television, read newspapers, went to work, and drank beer; he was not interested in ruling either Mother or the household.

My mother cooked, cleaned, sewed, baked, and supervised us kids when she wasn't teaching nursing at Bakersfield Junior College. As the oldest child of four, I filled the gaps in her management. If anyone ruled the household, I probably did. I had had enough ironing, dish-washing, and child-care to convince me at an early age that I did not want to be a housewife. Sometime along in my late high school and early college years I began proclaiming I would never get married. I would be smarter than my mother. Marriage meant dullness, drudgery, and, for a Christian, submission to one's husband. That was not the life for me.

Anne Eggebroten is currently writing a doctoral dissertation on women in the Church in the middle ages at the University of California at Berkeley. This article is condensed from a forthcoming book of Christian feminist autobiographies being edited by Virginia Hearn.

But in my junior year of college I met John Arthur. At the same time, I encountered "women's lib." Throughout my senior year, I gave lip service to women's liberation all the while becoming more and more attached to John. It was apparent that the dichotomies of my life were building toward a crisis. On the one hand, I was planning to go to graduate school and pursue a career. On the other hand, marriage was starting to become an actual possibility. I knew I had to choose between these two options:

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a career, or marriage with a side-dish of career. One part of me longed for the emotional and physical intimacy; another part of me recoiled in horror at becoming a wife. I was convinced that if I married, I would go through a complete metamorphosis into a non-person.

When John proposed to me, a year after graduation I provisionally accepted, planning to avoid all the oppressive roles forced on wives and husbands and asked John if he would agree to some conditions. I wanted to stay in graduate school in California (at this time he was in Boston), keep my own name, have an egalitarian marriage,

and perhaps draw up a contract. He agreed to all of it.

We made up a 15-point contract which included some of the following: sharing housework and cooking 50-50, sharing decisions affecting both partners, sharing child-care equally if we had children, taking turns on where to live, taking vacations from each other, retaining our given names, and maintaining separate checking accounts.

In spite of our efforts, I spent the next 15 months trying to adjust to the idea of giving away my independence. Freedom looked sweeter the further away it got. I looked through every book I could find on Christian marriage to discover whether they all held to submission of wives. They did.

John and I were married in 1972. I spent the next year holding my breath to see if I had turned into that monstrous creature, a "wife." But, instead, John and I were still the same. I could hardly believe we were married. We kept irregular hours and even more irregular mealtimes. John cooked every other meal and took his turn with all the household chores. He also looked for a job, while I studied for my classes and worked part time. At church we went to different adult education classes.

The most effective means of preserving my identity has been keeping my own name. There were no legal problems, and everyone we knew accepted it except our immediate families. My mother was strongly opposed to my "crazy feminist ideas" and embarrassed in front of John's parents that I would not take their name. My father was even more opposed. As he put it, "Why don't you just get divorced? You aren't married as long as you don't take John's name."

But once again, the strongest attempts at socialization came from Christians — an aunt and uncle

who we visited on the west coast a few months later. Over a roast beef dinner, my uncle began quoting Genesis about the husband ruling over the wife. I had no answer to that, except that I could not go along with it. Later my aunt strongly encouraged me to attend a Basic Youth Conflicts seminar where I would be straightened out, and pressed on me *Fascinating Womanhood* by Helen Andelin. When I looked through it, I was horrified. My Christian aunt had given me a book which was not only non-Christian but actually heretical at many points: "Your husband is your king; worship him" was the gist of one chapter.

A couple of months later I was teaching a series of classes on human sexuality for the college group at my church in Berkeley when the associate pastor and the seminarian who helped with the college group asked me to come into the pastor's office and "get acquainted." I went. I shared my reasons for keeping my own name and having a marriage based on an egalitarian rather than hierarchical model. They both questioned me on how I could do this in light of the Bible's teaching that the husband is the head of the wife, etc. We looked at some passages, and I was unable to defend my actions biblically. All I could say was, "I think I'm right and the Bible is wrong," an untenable position for an evangelical. My confidence dwindled to, "Well, I don't have the question completely resolved. Right now I think God approves of my egalitarian marriage, but maybe he will convince me of my error." I felt miserable leaving that possibility open and left feeling guilty, rebellious, and shaky.

I grew more defensive. I would either hide my views among Christians or angrily and aggressively argue them. I was alienated from God and angry at Him. If male domination was His will either in the Church or in the home, He was an unfair God whom I could not wholeheartedly serve. I didn't think that was His will, but I could never be sure. I was suspicious of Him, while trying to keep up a relationship with Him.

Then on September 30, 1974, I picked up a copy of *All We're Meant To Be*. I went to my study carrel in the English department and opened to chapters seven and eight on husband-wife relations. I read fearfully, expecting each min-

ute to come across the proviso that the husband should still theoretically be the head of the wife, however equal their relationship worked out in practice. But instead I found sentence after sentence of realistic advice and sensible ways of handling the biblical texts. When I came across the quotation, "Each for the other, and both for the Lord," a great burden was lifted off my shoulders. I began crying. I cried for my anger and anxiety in the past. I cried with relief and joy at being reconciled to God again, a God who loves me

and whom I could love with my whole heart. It was like a conversion experience. It seemed God had had the book written for me alone. He cared about me and my struggles, even when I thought I was furthest from Him. On that day I prayed to God, "Give me the strength to share this new Gospel with others."

Unfortunately, my consciousness has been raised to the point that a male-dominated worship service grates on me. I sit and look at the four male pastors at the front of the church, (continued on page 18)

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EACH FOR THE OTHER . . .

(continued from page 13) with the two laymen (usually) reading the scriptures, and I find it hard to worship God. When I am served communion by 25 male elders, I feel anger and am in no state to take communion. If I attend the right service, there may be one or two women serving communion; that does not impress me. Even when I give my offering, male ushers collect it (III Timothy 1:12 — "I permit no woman to usher in the church services"). And my money goes to pay a staff which is top-heavy with males; at the bottom are the underpaid women.

At the moment I do not have the patience or energy to work on conditions in my own church. Instead I am working to organize a network of feminists within the evangelical churches in the San Francisco area. Other women throughout the country are organizing chapters of Evangelical Women's Caucuses too. Once we have an organization we will have publicity, resources, and strength in numbers. Maybe then we can have some impact on our churches . . . Meanwhile I pray for patience to endure the sexism in the Church. Ω

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