



GOOD BOOKS

In *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendour of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) Marva Dawn expands comprehensively the theme of her previous book, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*. She takes the occasion here to address the misperception that she advocates traditionalism and retreats from cultural relevance.

Far from ignoring cultural realities, *A Royal Waste of Time* is an unflinching critique of the way Christians allow the post-modern, consumer-obsessed, and overly individualistic character of our society to shape our worship of God. Thus the title of the book reminds us that worship is "royal" because of whom it is directed towards and, seemingly, "a waste of time" because it accomplishes nothing for us for we have already been accepted by God out of pure grace. To truly worship God and be lost in his splendour is such a privilege for the people of God that Marva's main desire in her book is to help us understand how we can achieve that.

She does this first by exploring the cultural milieu of the world and what the church has to offer. Then she makes a very strong claim that worship is for believers and not for evangelism. She moves on to the building of the community through worship and the responsibility that this community has for the character formation of its members. She also examines the various contentions in the church regarding types of music, use of media, and other paraphernalia that continually divide congregations. While making a convincing case for not jettisoning the traditions of the past she reveals an immense sensitivity to the wealth there is in contemporary talent.

An interesting feature of the book is Marva's sermons that begin each of the sections (except the first), reinforcing the principle of worship, which is to focus on God himself. This is a book not merely about the technicality of worship, nor even about its theology. It is about who we are as a people of God, and what our chief end is, which is to glorify Him and if we need help to get this right in our lives, this is the book we can't not read. (PK)

NEWS BITS

Chapel on March 28, 12 noon. Mr. David Chan will give a special presentation on the Bible Lands Study Tour, Nov-Dec 2000.

New Courses at BGST! If you have not already signed up for any courses in BGST we invite you to consider taking the following new courses, all at BGST, 4 Bishan St 13:

- ✦ **Cyberspace Stress, Sabbath and Serenity** (1.5 credits) by Dr Marva Dawn. Intensive Course on 4 evenings from 7-10pm (Sun., 1st April, Mon. 2nd April, Tues., 3rd April, & Thurs., 5th April.). Cost: \$150.
- ✦ **Rethinking Worship for the New Millennium** (1.5 credits) by Dr Marva Dawn. Intensive Course on 2 days from 9.30am to 5.30pm (Fri., 6th April & Sat., 7th April). Cost: \$150.
- ✦ **Preaching Practicum** (1.5 credits) by Rev Edmund Chan. Only 3 places left. Four Tuesdays, 7-10pm (April 10, 17, 24, & May 8). Cost: \$150. To book please email Dr Quek at bgstdean@cyberway.com.sg
- ✦ **Children in a Changing World** (1.5 credits) by Dr Moira Lee. Four Thursdays, 7-10pm (April 19, 26, May 3, & 10). Cost: \$150. This course will run only if there are at least 6 students.
- ✦ **Understanding Adolescents** (1.5 credits) by Dr Moira Lee. Four Thursdays 7-10pm (May 17, 24, 31, & June 7). Cost: \$150. At least 6 students needed.
- ✦ **Cross-Cultural Christian Communications** (1.5 credits) by Walter Edman. Eight Thursday evenings 7.30-9.30pm. Cost: \$150.
- ✦ **Research and Writing** (1.5 credits) by Regina Lee. Commencing Monday 7.30-9.30pm April 9th. Cost: \$150.
- ✦ **Interpreting Judges** (1.5 credits) by Dr Philip Satterthwaite. Commencing Monday 7.30-9.30 pm. Cost: \$150.
- ✦ **New Testament Textual Criticism** (1.5 credits) by Dr Quek SH. Email bgstdean@cyberway.com.sg for more information. Cost: \$150.
- ✦ **Greek Exegesis** (3 credits) by Dr Quek SH. Email bgstdean@cyberway.com.sg for more information. Commencing May 2001. Cost: \$300.

We wish all these who celebrate their birthdays this week God's richest blessings

Mrs Tan Lee Lee 26/3

Mr Sahari Gunar 27/3

Ms Teo Kiah Woon Irene 31/3

Mr Fang Kum Kwong Benny 01/4

THE SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN

A Response by Dr Quek Swee Hwa

Recently the *Straits Times* of 7 February, 2001, carried an article by Kao Chen, entitled: "Is Confucianism relevant in the new economy?" I submit that the author has seriously misrepresented the position of women in Christian thinking. He wrote:

"[Our Senior Minister recently said] that the prejudice against woman was another Confucian value that should be changed.... But is it fair to blame nepotism and prejudices against women on Confucianist values? Does Confucianism, which originated from an agrarian society 2,500 years ago, need to be revised in the light of the new global economy? ... Assoc Prof Ong Yong Peng, a Confucian expert at NTU, points out that Confucius himself had complained in the *Analects* that 'women and petty men are hard to get along with, for they turn sullen if kept at a distance, but turn insolent when kept close'. The scholars interviewed all indicate that these ideas have become outdated today. Still, if Confucianism is guilty, so are all the traditional religions and ethical systems, **Prof Wang [Gungwu, Director of the East Asia Institute] says. 'Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, all had treated women as inferior because they sprang from male ideas in male-dominated societies.'** ... Taking a similar view, Prof John Wong, research director at the East Asian Institute, says that if some of its specifics are no longer valid, like the subjugation of women, that does not mean that on balance, Confucianism does not still hold much value. **The sayings of Confucius should be viewed no differently from the sayings of the Bible, he says. 'Why do people still go to church, despite the fact that the Bible also puts down the status of women? It is because on balance, the sayings in the Bible remain relevant!'** Confucianism stresses family ties and advocates harmony and the reduction of conflict. This can help moderate the stress in today's families caused by technology and globalisation, and reduce the alienation within the family, he adds. Other scholars also find much that is of lasting value in Confucianist thoughts.... Social position, and the value of communitarianism over the rights of the individual, both of which helped preserve order in the old-economy world, are coming into question. 'The Western emphasis on individuals, when pushed to the extreme, becomes self-centredness. The Confucianist tradition of communitarianism, on the other hand, can stifle entrepreneurship and leave no room for creativity.' The answer is in striking the right balance between the two, he concludes."

Here is my answer to the allegation that Christianity, like Confucianism, teaches the subordination of women and is therefore by implication outdated for the modern world, even though Christianity still has some value.

We begin with Confucianism. It is not my intention to defend Confucianism. But since that is the occasion which gave rise to the remarks we will look briefly at this ideology, which is more a system of ethics rather than a philosophy or a religion. Most Confucian scholars do not

try to defend the inferior position of women in society taught by Confucius (551-479 BC), Mencius (371-289 BC), or Xun Zi (298-238 BC). At most this outmoded view may be mitigated by the high value placed on filial respect to both parents. But that is skirting the issue. Women were given a raw deal in Confucianism; we cannot in any way see women as biologically or intellectually inferior to men. What irks us is that the writer in the *Straits Times* and Prof. Wang Gungwu have lumped Christianity with Confucianism on this issue without carefully studying the true position of the former.

What is our answer? First, we must read the Bible correctly. If the impression is given that in the Old Testament period, women were subjugated, it is because the Bible faithfully records the situation that existed in history where human society generally treated women as such. Within Israel the family was given a prominent place. The Mosaic laws gave rights to women that did not exist within the structure of most ancient societies. In the official genealogies women were featured and praised and that was most unusual. The examples of Hannah and Ruth are noteworthy. Even when God's blessings through Abraham were given to the descendants of Isaac, special mention was made of God's care over Hagar, the mother of Ishmael. One cannot read Proverbs 31 and Romans 16 and say that women were subjugated in the Bible. Hence when we read the Bible we must see its teaching in a total sense. Certainly the appeal of Judaism, which caused large numbers of proselytes or God-fearers to leave their pagan religions and go over to the Jewish faith, was not just because of the attractiveness of monotheism as against polytheism. It is also in the high position accorded to women, the loving-kindness of an Almighty God, and other such teachings.

Second, Christianity took this teaching further when it stated unequivocally that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). We all stand before God as equals and that means that we are all equally accountable before God. It does not mean, however, that we all have equal or the same or similar duties before God. That is the point where we can begin to understand why within the biblical understanding of the fabric of human society, the role given to women differs in certain ways from that given to man. The woman's duty is to bear children, if she is married, and to be the main caregiver at home, both for the physical as well as the spiritual upbringing of the children. The man is the main breadwinner. He toils hard to ensure that the family does not go hungry and is well-protected. But that was not meant to be rigidly enforced, both in biblical times and today. Why can't the husband be the main caregiver in the family and the wife also be a joint or even the sole breadwinner? The Bible recognises a basic structure for the family. It gives leeway for deviation from it and that does not abrogate the basic roles. With that we rest our case in this quick survey of the biblical teaching as regards the position of women. Only a prejudiced or careless reading of the Bible will arrive at the conclusion that women were subjugated in the Bible. The fact is that the Bible frees women to play a positive role both in the home and in the church.