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7

8 A SERVING PEOPLE

9
10
11 by Herb Kopp

12 Introduction

13
14 The title of this paper (and the subject headings) was determined by
15 the Board of Reference and Counsel of the General Conference. Four topics
16 are engaged to create a framework for discussion. The first establishes the
17 biblical base for service in the church and the next three topics deal with
18 tensions in our church community.
19

20 The intent of this paper is not to present final answers to difficult
21 issues, but rather to give direction to dialogue and discussion.
22

23 I. THE WAY WE SERVE (the biblical language of service)
24

25 Each society has a way of ordering work so that by its ranking we know
26 which is noble and which is demeaning. The service language of the New
27 Testament is notoriously paradoxical in that it ranks as highest and most
28 noble those qualities which, in the Roman world, are seen to be the most
29 base and ignoble. The parade of New Testament service words is long. Allow
30 me to highlight some of them.
31

32 A. The Dignity of Service (diakonos, latreia)
33

34 The New Testament uses two words to describe service, and it uses them
35 often. The first word is diakonos from which we get our English word
36 deacon. The second word is latreia. These two words are closely akin to
37 each other. Diakonos has moved through an interesting pattern of meaning in
38 the Greek/Roman world. The first meaning of the word was simply "table
39 waiter"; then it came to mean "to care for household needs"; and finally, it
40 developed a general meaning "to serve people."
41

42 The second word latreia, means much the same, except it has the added
43 nuance of meaning "service without pay." At the center of this word is the
44 idea that something must be sacrificed for the sake of the Gospel. Twice,
45 in the book of Hebrews, this word is used to describe Jesus, who served God
46 without demanding something in return.

1 So, now let's pull these two words together. Diakonos means to serve;
2 to wait on tables; to do menial household tasks; and latreia means to do it
3 without wanting something in return.

4
5 We must, however, make a distinction between how we see "waiting on
6 tables" and how the Greek/Roman word saw it.

7
8 Let me illustrate. In our first year in Winnipeg, I met an older man
9 in a sandwich and soup coffee shop who told me that he had been a waiter for
10 twenty-nine years. He loved his work and he earned a fine living often
11 earning more through tips than through salary.

12
13 This is not the flavor of the word in New Testament times. This kind
14 of work was considered unworthy and dishonoring to the free person. Only
15 the lowest of classes were table waiters--people who had no rights and no
16 strength to improve their lot in life. It is this word that is used to
17 describe Jesus--he was a servant. Jesus said, ". . . the Son of Man did not
18 come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many"
19 (Mark 10:45).

20
21 Sixty-five times this word appears in the New Testament. Paul calls us
22 to be servants of the gospel, servants of the church, servants of
23 righteousness, servants of God, and servants of Jesus Christ.

24
25 In other words, to be servants of Christ means that we voluntarily
26 stoop to the task of table-waiting for the sake of the Good News. To be
27 servants of the church means we serve others and wait on them as the
28 table-waiters would obediently and properly wait on the tables of the
29 master. Indeed, to be Christian means to be servant. The opposite of being
30 servant is to be master; and there is only one master--Jesus Christ.

31
32 There is a constant tension between what we know and how we live, and
33 nowhere is this illustrated more forcefully than in this area of life.
34 Servanthood is a great New Testament concept which is more easily spoken
35 about than lived.

36
37 The magic of the early church isn't magic at all--they simply outserved
38 the resistance to the Gospel, and the church multiplied and grew! There is
39 dignity in service.

40 41 B. The Grandeur of Slavery (desmois, doulos)

42
43 If the words just reviewed have a ring of servitude attached to them,
44 then these next two words describe, in their natural world, the baseness to
45 which humanity can sink. Desmios is a very strong word. It literally means
46 to bind, to imprison, to take away the right of free movement. The word was
47 used to describe the binding of a sheaf of wheat, or a bundle of sticks. No
48 longer are they free to be by themselves, they are "bound together", and
49 there is nothing they can do about it. A thief, when he is captured, is
50 bound so that his freedom is restricted and he no longer can do what he
51 wants to do. A person who has a serious illness is bound by the restraints
52 of that illness. The blind are bound because they do not have the freedom
53 to see.

1 Doulos, the second word, is a noun which described the condition of
2 60,000,000 people at the zenith of the Roman Empire. They were slaves.
3 These people had no rights, no privileges and certainly no collective
4 strength. They could be bought and sold at the whim of the owner. Their
5 work earned them no profit, they only did what was expected of them as
6 slaves. The master had unlimited control over them--for good, or for
7 unmerciful punishment of some fault or mistake. To be a slave was to be at
8 the lowest level of humanity possible. To be a slave was to be, barely,
9 above the level of animal.

10
11 Paul takes these two words, which have such a negative ring, and uses
12 them to describe our relationship to God. Frequently, he opens his letters
13 with the standard line, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ" And to the
14 Colossians he writes, "And above all these, put on love which binds
15 (desmios) everything together in perfect harmony" (3:14). Herein lies the
16 great paradox of the gospel; that is, we are no longer bound, we are free,
17 and yet still we are bound. We are no longer slaves, we are sons and
18 daughters and yet, still we are slaves.

19
20 } Elizabeth Achtemeier has summed up this paradox well: "There is no
21 } such thing as absolute freedom; either you are a slave to sin, or you have
22 } been set free to be a slave of Jesus Christ."

23
24 Every generation struggles with servanthood. Each generation must
25 affirm anew that Jesus, and not mammon, is Lord. Servanthood runs so
26 counter to our socially-conditioned way of thinking. We are taught
27 self-expression, self-actualization, self-development. We speak about a
28 good self-image, self-esteem and self-awareness. All these, in their place,
29 are fine--but strangely absent in our language is the concept of slavery.
30 We need to rediscover the concepts of doulos and desmios, and be prepared to
31 live as Christ's bondservants and slaves.

32 33 C. The Grace of Demanded Service (aggareuein)

34
35 "There are some words," writes William Barclay, "which carry in their
36 history the story of a nation's triumph or a nation's tragedy." Aggaruein
37 is such a word. It is used only three times in the New Testament and each
38 time it is translated "to compel." The central meaning of this word is that
39 one is forced to do something which is distasteful and which one would not
40 do, unless compelled. The first time this word is used (Matt. 5:41), Jesus
41 tells his followers that if only one mile is compelled, they are to go two.
42 The other two times are the synoptic accounts in Mark and Matthew about how
43 Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry Christ's cross to Calvary.

44
45 This word, "to compel" is a very interesting word with a substantial
46 history. Cyrus the Great was ruler of the far-flung Persian Empire. He
47 needed to be in touch so he formed a kind of Pony Express to carry messages
48 across the empire. This required many men and horses. His generals
49 calculated how far a horse could run without breaking down and established
50 posts at such points. Horses were then changed and the message continued on
51 its way. If no army horses were available, or a horse was lame, then

1 privately owned horses could be impressed into service. This is where this
2 word finds its origin. Soon, this became the law of the ruling nations.
3 And the Romans, in Jesus' day, used it fully. This action of impressing
4 into service either horses or man-power was the bitterest and most
5 humiliating evidence of servitude. It was a constant reminder to the Hebrew
6 nation that they were slaves, a vanquished people. And what made matters
7 worse was that the petty officials and minor bureaucrats abused the system
8 for their own gain. Grudgingly, the Jews gave this service. Roman law
9 demanded one mile and that is what they would give.

10
11 Then Jesus came along to blow this sensitive issue wide open. He said,
12 "If someone exacts from you the most distasteful and humiliating service, if
13 someone compels you to do that which you would never offer, if you are
14 treated like a defenseless victim in an occupied country, don't resent it.
15 Do what you are asked, and do even more, and do it with grace and
16 good-will."

17
18 What this text does not teach is that we are to be workaholics who
19 spend all of life running. God knows, too many families have been ignored
20 by men and women who were too busy serving God to help their families. But
21 what this word does say and confront is our mischievous ability to avoid
22 doing the difficult work. Being a lay person or a pastor is fulfilling
23 until aggareuein is encountered. Then we know what it means to be impressed
24 into service.

25
26 In summary, the New Testament teaches that we have been set free from
27 slavery to sin to become slaves of Jesus Christ. We do well to reaffirm
28 servanthood as the only way to live within the kingdom.

29 30 II. THE RESOURCES FOR SERVICE (the gifts of the Spirit)

31
32 There was a time when the Holy Spirit was called the neglected person
33 of the trinity. But things have changed. Beginning during the mid '60's
34 and sweeping into the '70's a tidal wave of enthusiasm regarding the work
35 and person of the Holy Spirit injected new life into many of our
36 congregations.

37
38 As with any new movement, excesses in enthusiasm soon lead to divisive-
39 ness and difficult church situations. However, one of the positive results
40 for the MB church was that many persons rediscovered the texts which speak
41 about the gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. 12; Eph. 4; Romans 12). From that
42 initial burst of interest, when everyone seemed to be using the language of
43 the gifts of the Spirit, either to find meaningful service opportunities, or
44 to rationalize a lack of interest in service opportunities, a settling down
45 has become evident.

46
47 We have learned from painful experience that love (I Cor. 13) is the
48 milieu in which gifts flourish best, both in terms of receptivity to a
49 person with a gift by the congregation and the practice of it by an
50 individual. We know and affirm that gifts are given by the sovereign will
51 of an all-knowing God; that they are given to keep the body of Christ
52 functioning rightly; and that they are given for the common good and not for
53 individual glory.

1 We have read the plethora of literature--everything from the
2 "touchy-feely" stuff to the hard, critiquing material--telling us how to
3 find and nurture the latent gifts of the Spirit, and have come to the
4 conclusion that through the affirmation of the body the gifts present among
5 us are best recognized and utilized. We also know from experience that
6 affirmation of gifts comes more readily to those active in service than to
7 those not actively serving.

8
9 In spite of all the richness that the gifts of the Spirit have given to
10 us, there remain some lessons for us to learn and relearn. Three points
11 deserve comment.

12
13 First, we need to affirm that the gifts of the Spirit are given equally
14 to men and women. Though I Cor. 12:1 addresses the matter of gifts to
15 "brethren" ("Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to
16 be uninformed") as well as Eph. 4:8 (" . . . and he gave gifts to men."), it
17 must not be assumed that men only have received gifts from God. The
18 inclusive language of I Cor. 12:7 ("To each is given the manifestation of
19 the Spirit for the common good") includes all of God's children in the
20 gifts of the Spirit. In other words, men and women are both given gifts in
21 the diversity of gifts which Christ has given to his bride, the church.

22
23 Furthermore, a quick glance through the lists of gifts, and the
24 membership of our churches, assures us that both men and women are equally
25 gifted by the Spirit. Though the degree to which the gift is exercised, or
26 the quality with which it is practiced, may vary from person to person, it
27 is, nonetheless, given widely and generously to both sexes.

28
29 Let me illustrate. Many persons, both men and women, have the gift of
30 teaching. However, some are better teachers than others. There are degrees
31 in "gifting" just as there are degrees in ability. This does not mean that
32 only those who are excellent teachers have that gift, but rather there is a
33 great diversity in giftedness. Jesus taught that to some are given five
34 talents; to others are given two talents; and some receive one talent (Matt.
35 25:11ff.)

36
37 One phrase in Eph. 4:8 (" . . . and he gave gifts to men") has
38 sometimes been used to mean that the gifts of apostles, prophets,
39 evangelists, pastors and teachers are given solely to men. The argument is
40 constructed that those are the formal leadership positions in the church and
41 therefore are not open to women.

42
43 However, it is very difficult from this text to separate between, for
44 example, the gift of evangelism (which many women in our churches possess)
45 and the office of evangelist; or, to make a distinction between the gift of
46 pastoral care (which, again, many fine godly women in our congregations
47 possess) and the formal office of pastor (shepherd).

48
49 It seems that the phrase "to men" is best read in the generic sense to
50 mean "to persons" (though in its original intent, since Ephesians was
51 addressed to a church in a patriarchal society, it was naturally addressed
52 to men). More on this subject later.

1 Second, there is no distinction in giftedness between "clergy" and
2 "laity." Indeed, we, as anabaptists, who celebrate the priesthood of all
3 believers, are adamant that the division between clergy and laity, in terms
4 of spirituality, vitality, giftedness and standing before God, is
5 artificial. The difference lies, not in giftedness, but in calling and
6 vocation. (More on this subject later.)
7

8 And third, since Paul instructs us to ". . . earnestly desire the
9 higher (greater) gifts" (I Cor. 12:31), we ought to be sensitive to the
10 primary needs of the church and foster those gifts which meet such needs.
11 Though these needs may vary somewhat in each congregation, the list of
12 basic, foundational needs remains discernible. We always need the speaking
13 gifts (prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, teaching and exhortation) and the
14 serving gifts (helps, giving, showing mercy, administration, hospitality
15 and discernment). The sign gifts (healing, miracles, tongues and
16 interpretation), though important and part of God's richness to his church,
17 are not as critical to the life of the church as the earlier noted ones.
18

19 In a day when voices in the religious world are suggesting that the
20 integrity of the gospel is authenticated by the miraculous and if such
21 evidences are not present then a truncated, incomplete gospel is being
22 proclaimed, we need to once again affirm that some gifts of the Spirit are
23 more critical to the wholesome life of the church than others.
24

25 In conclusion, the presence of the Holy Spirit and his rich gifts
26 within the church are the resources necessary for continued vitality and
27 growth of the church. We affirm that the Holy Spirit gives his gifts
28 equally to male and female, to clergy and laity, and that some gifts are
29 more important to the life of the congregation than others.
30

31 III. CALLING ALL PERSONS TO SERVE

32 A. The Clergy/Laity Tension

33 The trend toward a professional, salaried ministry has had both a
34 positive and negative effect on the Mennonite Brethren church. Through the
35 professionalization of leadership a degree of specialization and expertise
36 has begun to emerge which has brought many of our congregations to the
37 forefront in their communities.
38

39 New programs, to meet the needs of the community, have been initiated;
40 worship services are carefully put together; music and other platform
41 functions are in the hands of competent, well-trained persons; counseling
42 services which draw on specialized training and experience are available;
43 youth, evangelism, visitation, singles and a host of other specialities are
44 present in many of our churches.
45

46 All in all, the MB church has tried hard to keep abreast with a rapidly
47 changing environment. And indeed, if it doesn't change with the times, it
48 will soon be addressing the issues of the past.
49
50

1 But there has also been a negative effect on the church. As our
2 churches increase in size, and as programs develop and become more
3 sophisticated, they have become more dependent on professional ministers.
4

5 Two trends, in particular, seem to be developing. First,
6 decision-making, which was once congregationally based, has tended to move
7 toward a from-the-top-down motif. And second, going hand in hand with this
8 trend, is the tendency to have the vision of the church formulated and
9 articulated by fewer persons.

10
11 In practical terms, this means that not only is the vision of the
12 church held most strongly by fewer persons (and frequently centered in the
13 professional clergy), but that the calling of new leaders from the
14 congregation (or outside the congregation) is, in fact, a leadership
15 function since it is designed to fill leadership gaps in the total program.
16

17 The congregation, which once determined the direction of the church and
18 processed the candidates to fulfill this direction, seem to be less involved
19 in such process.
20

21 It seems almost axiomatic, but nonetheless necessary to note that the
22 broader the base for the vision of the church (that is, the more the people
23 are participants in forging vision and leading in that direction), the
24 deeper the commitment to that vision by the whole congregation; and
25 conversely, the more centralized and narrow the base of the vision, the
26 harder laity must be driven to support that vision.
27

28 A further matter needs to be noted. Any attempt to broaden the base of
29 the vision in the congregation is usually accompanied by frustration because
30 it is difficult to arrive at a consensus in a large group. Furthermore,
31 movement forward is usually slow. Centralized leadership makes
32 decision-making much more rapid and usually smoother.
33

34 So the church body frequently finds itself in a dilemma. On the one
35 hand, the pressures of society (and often the pressures from within the
36 congregation itself) demand a swift response to changing needs. This tends
37 to make pragmatists out of leaders in that they are charged to find ways to
38 make church "happen"--and the surest way to make a church "go" is to
39 centralize decision-making usually around the professional staff who do much
40 of the work themselves.
41

42 On the other hand, however, lies our understanding of scripture that
43 all believers are equally gifted by the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the
44 Spirit are not different for clergy than for laity. Moreover, the
45 priesthood of all believers, a doctrine to which we subscribe tenaciously,
46 means that all are equal before God.
47

48 There appears to be a distinct correlation between the model of
49 leadership chosen and the utilization of gifted lay persons. Some of our
50 churches have opted for "strong leadership" (frequently a euphemism for
51 pyramidal, centralized, top-down decision-making) where lay involvement in
52 leadership is seen mostly in support ministries. Other churches have opted

1 for congregationally-based decision-making style. They tend to move slowly,
2 and lay leaders frequently occupy key leadership positions.

3
4 ✓ We must guard carefully against allowing extremes to develop. We must
5 not over-react to slowness of congregational church government by giving all
6 decision-making power to the growing professional clergy class in our
7 churches and denomination; nor must we tie the hands of salaried leadership
8 by putting endless procedural roadblocks in the way of movement and change.

9
10 If there is a danger in all of this, it might well be that with a
11 growing, professional clergy class, lay persons will begin to think in terms
12 of a two-class system--"there are ministers and then there is us," as one
13 lay person put it recently. Our present practice of ordination seems to be
14 reinforcing this tension within our denomination. (More about this later.)

15
16 In summary, there must be balance. Gifted lay persons, both men and
17 women, must be nurtured, trained and released to become competent worship
18 leaders, evangelists, pastoral care persons, educators, youth sponsors,
19 administrators and a host of other ministering people. It must remain the
20 primary concern of the professional clergy to train and equip lay persons
21 for such service (Eph. 4:11).

22
23 Professional ministry need not be a negative force among us, but the
24 present trend of putting greater ministry responsibility into its hands will
25 not serve us well in the long run. We need to once again affirm the
26 importance of wide involvement by lay persons in the life of our
27 congregations and the need to set our leaders free to equip lay persons for
28 ministry.

29 30 B. The Role of Women in the Church

31
32 At the 1980 Clearbrook study conference a paper on the role of women in
33 the church was prepared by David Ewert. A comprehensive resolution flowing
34 from that paper was brought by BORAC to the 1981 St. Catharines convention,
35 which was again modified at the 1984 Reedley convention. Presently a paper
36 on the same topic by Edmund Janzen and Clarence Hiebert is being processed
37 by BORAC for publication.

38
39 The resolution accepted at the convention sessions does not reflect a
40 male chauvinistic attitude toward women, but rather an attempt to grapple
41 seriously with the biblical texts (usually known as the "restrictive"
42 passages).

43
44 At present all ministry functions are open to women except "leading
45 pastor." Ordination of women is also not practiced. In the minutes of
46 BORAC meetings, Dec. 13-15, 1985, the following notion appears: "We counsel
47 our congregations not to appoint a woman as the "leading pastor." When
48 discerning the women who speak of being 'called' to pastoral or preaching
49 ministries, our counsel must be faithfully biblical, honest and wise."

50
51 In all likelihood the current resolutions will not be substantively
52 changed. Therefore, it seems repetitive and unnecessary to review and

1 re-study all of the passages which deal with the role of women in the
2 church.

3
4 However, it might be profitable to address the matter from another
5 perspective, that is, the matter of consistency. The problem of consistency
6 is made much more difficult in that it appears to come down to a matter of
7 degree of where the boundary for service is drawn. Frequently, these
8 boundaries are set, not arbitrarily as some argue, but rather at the
9 farthest possible point where unity and consensus can still be maintained.
10 While we want to remain biblical in our discussion we still have
11 considerable difficulty being consistent.

12
13 For example, just what does I Timothy 2:11ff. mean? ("Let a women learn
14 in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no women to teach or to have
15 authority over men; she is to keep silent.")

16
17 Does this mean that women can't teach a Bible class or Bible study
18 where men are present? Does this mean that the word of exhortation given by
19 a woman, to a man who is in error, isn't proper? Does this mean that a
20 quorum at a business meeting must necessarily have a majority of men?

21
22 If we absolutize this passage and enforce its obviously clearly stated
23 prohibition, then a major revision of current MB church practice is
24 necessary both in our local congregations as well as in our support agencies
25 (MBM/S and MBBS).

26
27 John Redekop, in an Opinion column (MB Herald, April 18/86), addresses
28 this matter. He writes: ". . . how can we justify having one set of
29 'rules' for women in ministry in overseas mission and another for women in
30 ministry in the sending conferences? It seems to me that either it is
31 proper for women to preach or it isn't, either it is proper for women to
32 lead congregations, or it isn't."

33
34 Redekop is both right and wrong. He is right in that women
35 missionaries have had considerably more latitude in ministry abroad than
36 women in the home church. (As a matter of fact, Peter Hamm points out that
37 at one time women were ordained for missionary ministry, but the practice
38 has been abandoned in recent years.)

39
40 But Redekop is also wrong. Hamm reports that no woman missionary has
41 ever been the leader of a congregation anywhere in MBM/S fields. (It is
42 noted, however, that women are active in leadership in denominations with
43 whom we co-operate.)

44
45 Let me propose, for discussion, another way of thinking in this matter.
46 It has basically to do with our understanding of ordination.

47
48 John E. Toews, in two very helpful articles (Christian Leader, Aug.
49 28/79; Sept. 11/79) suggests that recent studies show that the distinction
50 between the Hebrew word samakh, which means "investing the recipient with
51 particular authority and communication power" by the laying on of hands, and
52 the Hebrew word sim which means "to touch or to bless", may have been lost
53 by the Septuagint translating both words with the Greek word epitithemi.

1 In other words, what do we mean by ordination? Do we mean a
2 transference of authority and power (samakh); or, do we mean the
3 communication of blessing for a task (sim)? John E. Toews concludes that it
4 is the latter rather than the former.
5

6 In one sense it is very difficult to separate "blessing" from
7 "authority" because blessing for ministry gives authority in service.
8 However, this authority has limits and is not an end in itself.
9 Furthermore, we reject the sacramental view of ordination (see the 1981
10 General Conference Yearbook, resolution on ordination) that grace or gifts
11 are imparted through the ordination act.
12

13 Though we understand ordination, in theory, to be blessing, we tend to
14 treat it as the transference of authority and power. Why else do we ordain
15 for life? Or, why do we do it almost exclusively to pastors? And why else
16 do we "defrock" those who betray its sanctity?
17

18 The laying on of hands is a biblical concept and is connected with
19 initiation into ministry in the church (Acts 6:6; 13:2; I Tim. 4:14; II Tim.
20 1:6).
21

22 In both the Acts texts, as Toews points out, it is clear that the laying
23 on of hands did not impart spiritual gifts or status, but rather, simply
24 recognized the gift as present.
25

26 In the I Tim. 4:14 text, the gift is given by prophetic utterance and
27 the laying on of hands is blessing for ministry with that gift. In II Tim
28 1:6 the grace (gift) given by Paul's laying on of hands is to encourage and
29 not let the gift die "which is in you."
30

31 In summary, the laying on of hands is a sign of favor, of a
32 personalized marking out of an individual as an object for blessing by God.
33 It is significant that the laying on of hands is for the particular purpose
34 of blessing those already gifted for ministry in the body, and is not a
35 transference of authority, power and status. Nor is it to be used to
36 establish and give credentials to a professional clergy class. In summary,
37 if the laying on of hands means blessing for a task, and if it does not mean
38 a seal for ministry and leadership for life (as it now seems to mean); or,
39 it is something we do mainly to pastors, regardless of age or experience;
40 then we ought to be laying hands on many more persons in our congregations.
41

42 I would like to propose that we drop the language of ordination and
43 ~~commissioning~~ entirely and speak only in the New Testament terms of "laying
44 on of hands." We ought to lay hands on our significant leaders: pastors,
45 teachers, missionaries, pastoral care persons, elders, counselors and other
46 persons whom the church calls forward to ministry.
47

48 By laying on of hands we invoke the blessing of God on their ministry
49 and give them authority to fulfill the task to which the church and God has
50 called them.

1 At this point in our collective understanding on the role of women, we
2 have drawn the line at "leading pastor" and ordination. We allow women to
3 teach, to counsel, to work in pastoral care, to administer programs, to lead
4 congregations in worship, to preach (in some congregations) but not to be
5 "leading ministers" or to be ordained.

6
7 If we can unwind the ~~idea~~ that the laying on of hands is to establish a
8 clergy for the church, and retrain ourselves to think it to be a way of
9 blessing persons for ministry, then we can accept and bless gifted persons
10 on the merit of their giftedness and integrity, and not on the basis of
11 gender.

12
13 Conclusion

14
15 With this paper I have attempted to address old issues in a fresh way.
16 May God grant us wisdom, insight and charity as we continue to search
17 Scriptures together to address the issues of this decade.