

# THE BEAUTY AND POWER OF WOMANHOOD

by James Tollerson

In the game of chess the queen is the most powerful of all the pieces, . . . Capture of the queen means, ordinarily, checkmate of the king. As in chess, so in life.

In recent years we have heard much about women's liberation. Many magazine articles and books have been written calling upon women to break the shackles that have held them enslaved in the past.

The movement held to a rather moderate course until October 17, 1968, on which date one of the foremost spokeswomen for the movement gave an address in which she announced, "I want to get women into positions of power." Organizations such as the Seventeenth of October Movement, the National Organization of Women, the Women's Radical Action Project, and others, have been formed to promote the movement. Outspoken leaders have emerged and the tempo of the effort has been stepped up. One spokeswoman, Celestine Ware, in a speech reminiscent of that of Patrick Henry said,

Free our sisters! Free ourselves! . . . Our history has been stolen from us. Our heroes died in childbirth, from peritonitis; . . . Our geniuses were never taught to read and write. We must invent a history adequate to our ambitions. We must create a future adequate to our needs. . . . We are rising with a fury older and potentially greater than any force in history, and this time we will be free or no one will survive. . . .

The movement is designed to take women out of the home. If married, husband and wife would share the duties and the responsibilities of the home on an equal basis. Women would share equal responsibilities and equal positions with men in government, industry, business, education, and all other areas of society. There would be equality of opportunity, responsibility, and pay.

A two-year study by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, made with the support of the Carnegie Foundation, projected that in the

year 2000 we will see (1) the end of democratic government as people lose interest and leave the decisions to an intellectual, technological elite; (2) the destruction of traditional marriage and family ties by birth control and artificial insemination; (3) absolute control of man's personality and behavior by electronic devices and drugs; (4) overemphasis on education with an accompanying loss of human values. To me, the most disturbing of the predictions was the one which had to do with the family. The Academy saw the decline of the family and woman's place in the home, except for certain couples designated to breed children. Of course, these predictions are in no sense certain. Let us hope and pray, as well as work, to see that they do not come about.

Another element to be viewed with alarm is the popular trend to provide comprehensive childrearing centers here in America, sponsored by and funded by the federal government. While some of the announced goals of this far-reaching program sound praiseworthy, in view of the fact that many homes are inadequate in the training and rearing of their children, there are also vast dangers involved. In his testimony before the Select Sub-committee, Dr. Reginald Lourie made this statement,

There is serious thinking among some of the future-oriented child development research people that maybe we cannot trust the family alone to prepare young children for this new kind of world that is emerging. This is one of the directions in which the Soviets, too, are looking which is one of the reasons why they felt it necessary to have access to the babies.

Dr. Bruno Bettelheim observed that "We have for so long relied on the communities and the homes and the churches to provide training in

attitudes. But we have to realize that the communities, homes and churches no longer provide it . . . therefore, I think the schools have to provide it. . . .” When the home fails to train the young in the basic principles of ethics and morality, decent behavior, good citizenship, and the like, a nation is in real trouble. These are functions that cannot be turned over to the school or government agencies without disastrous results.

In facing this whole problem of modern woman’s dissatisfaction with her traditional place as wife and mother, Betty Friedan, in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, spoke quite significantly when she said, “I have suggested that the real cause of both feminism and of woman’s frustration was the emptiness of the housewife’s role.” A century ago, women had children to teach, food to prepare, clothing to make, and husbands to take care of. The pioneer women of America, for example, shared a vital purpose. Each member of the family was a part of the team—husband, wife, and the children were all critically important to the very survival of the family. The center of society was the home and the wife had a vital role in that center.

As time has passed, what we generally call progress has moved the center out of the home into other areas, diminishing the role of the wife and mother. Children are largely taught in schools and in other special agencies. For the most part food is produced and even prepared elsewhere, clothing is made elsewhere, and other necessary duties of former generations can now be provided by outside sources. The wife in the home has been stripped of almost every important responsibility that a wife ought to have. But the solution is not for the woman also to go “where the action is” and leave home and family. For wives to follow husbands into the world of outside work is to destroy even more the irreplaceable functions of an ideal home.

Many of the ills that face us in America today can be traced to the declining importance of the home as the center of our lives and the vitally important role of the wife in the home.

### I. THE UNIQUENESS OF HER ROLE

Catherine Marshall, in her book *A Man Called Peter*, tells how her late husband, Peter Marshall, tended to put women on a pedestal. From one of his sermons she quotes,

Modern girls argue that they have to earn an income in order to establish a home, which would be impossible on their husband’s income. That is sometimes the case, but it must always be viewed as a regrettable necessity, never as the normal or natural thing for a wife to have to do. The average woman, if she gives her full time to her home, her husband, her children . . . if she tries to understand her husband’s work . . . to curb his egotism while, at the same time, building his self-esteem, to kill his masculine conceit while encouraging all his hopes, to establish around the family a circle of true friends . . . if she provides in the home a proper atmosphere of culture, of love of music, of beautiful furniture and of a garden . . . if she can do all this, she will be engaged in a life work that will demand every ounce of her strength, every bit of her patience, every talent God has given her, the utmost sacrifice of her love . . . it will demand everything she has and more. And she will find that for which she was created. She will know that she is carrying out the plan of God. She will be a partner with the Sovereign Ruler of the universe.”

Many people of our time—intelligent, sensible people in other realms—are endeavoring to force marriage to function contrary to its divine nature. A person who would immediately see the folly of trying to channel a person with the artistic talent of a Michaelangelo into some other field such as of business, of trying to change a person with the creative musical genius of Beethoven into being a clerk in a store, of trying to change an inventor, such as Thomas Edison, into an automobile mechanic, somehow fails to recognize that to divert woman from her special sphere in the home—where she is equipped to do that which no man can do—into some other line of work is equally tragic. God has assigned a certain role in marriage to each partner. These respective roles are a part of the basic nature of marriage. To ignore them, or devise our own substitutes, is to invite disaster.

In the words of Larry Christensen,

The emancipation of women has brought many needed reforms, but has had the unfortunate side result of robbing women of securities and protections which are their right. Women today are put upon to shoulder financial problems and worries in the family, to spearhead civic programs, to take the lead in raising the children, to represent the family to the community, to make major family decisions, to be spiritual leaders in the family. All of this is contrary to Divine Order. A woman is not normally equipped by nature to sustain this kind of psychological and emotional pressure and still fulfill her God-appointed role as wife and mother. The fact that women can do some of these things with technical competence only camouflages the

irreparable damage—to woman, to family, to society—of this departure from Divine Order.<sup>1</sup>

Christensen goes on to say,

A wife's primary responsibility is to give of herself, her time, and her energy to her husband, children, and home. This does not mean that women cannot have responsible positions of leadership and still be in God's plan. Indeed, God seems to have peculiar honors for women: They were the last to linger at the cross, the first to come to the tomb. It was to a woman, Mary Magdalene, that Jesus first appeared after his resurrection. The Old Testament tells of Miriam, who was instrumental in saving Moses' life while he was a baby; Deborah, who gave leadership to the Israelites as prophetess and judge; Esther, the courageous queen who saved the people from death. The New Testament, too, speaks of prophetesses, such as Anna (a widow) and the (unmarried) daughters of Phillip. Lydia, one of the early converts under Paul's ministry, was a businesswoman. But she who is blessed among women, the most honored woman of all times . . . the mother of our Lord . . . was just a humble woman who found fulfillment as a wife and mother in the home where God had set her.<sup>2</sup>

## II. THE GREATNESS OF HER ROLE

Many great tributes have been written about Christian mothers.

My mother's influence in molding my character was conspicuous. She forced me to learn daily long chapters of the Bible by heart. To that discipline and patient, accurate resolve I owe not only much of my general power of taking pains, but the best part of my taste for literature.

John Ruskin

Here is a child. What is the power which can bring that child to the fullness of its possibilities? The strength of the mason and the carpenter can build a house for it to live in. The huge forces moving in a locomotive may bring to the city the food by which that child is fed. The club of the policeman may keep the house he lives in from violence without. But all these things together, though they may safeguard existence, cannot give that child his highest life. In order for the house he lives in to be a home, there must be the wonder of a woman's love. For the child's full growth and happiness, in confidence, and in serenity of soul, the gentle spirit of his mother is more powerful than all the world beside.

Walter Russell Bowie

I don't remember much about her views of voting nor her social prestige; and what her ideas on child-training, diet, and eugenics were I cannot recall. The main thing that sifts back to me now through the thick undergrowth of years is that *she loved me*. . . . Thinking of this, I wonder if the woman of today, with all her tremendous notions and plans, realizes what an almighty factor she is in the

shaping of her child for weal and woe? I wonder if she realizes how much sheer love and attention count for in a child's life? I wonder if she knows what it means to create memories that are going to stay green when life's hotter impressions are gone?

Dr. Frank Crain

When Eve was brought unto Adam, he became filled with the Holy Spirit, and gave her the most sanctified, the most glorious of appreciations. He called her Eve, that is to say, the Mother of All. He did not style her wife, but simply mother—mother of all living creatures. In this consists the glory and the most precious ornament of woman.

Martin Luther

Even He that died for us upon the cross, in the last hour, in the unutterable agony of death, was mindful of his mother, as if to teach us that this holy love should be our last worldly thought—the last point of earth from which the soul should take its flight for heaven.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The Scriptures often speak of the exalted role of woman. Notice these sentences,

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mothers' teaching; indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head, and ornaments about your neck (Proverbs 1:8, 9).

Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her rejoice who gave birth to you (Proverbs 23:22-25).

One of the young men who followed in Paul's steps was Timothy, whom he called, "My child in the gospel." Concerning Timothy, Paul wrote,

I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, . . . For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well (2 Timothy 1:3, 5).

Later in the same epistle, Paul admonished Timothy,

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14, 15).

Here, certainly, is a fitting tribute to Lois and Eunice who taught this young Jewish boy the Scriptures during his childhood.

These women had taken seriously the Old Testament command, concerning the Scriptures,

“And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

This example from the Bible highlights one of the precious opportunities available to mothers. No one else, not even the father, has as good an opportunity to direct the eternal spirit of a child in the right direction as his mother.

Children are not the only ones who are blessed spiritually by faithful Christian mothers and wives. Once, while studying the Bible together, a group of men came to a passage dealing with the marriage relationship. Each one was asked to write down the thoughts which came to him during a time of silent meditation. They then shared with one another what they had written. One man’s thought was in the form of a prayer:

Lord, I do thank you for my wife.  
I praise your Divine plan and providence which led me to her.  
I thank you, Lord, for her patience and perseverance and prayers through twelve Christless years of marriage.  
I praise you, Lord, for your salvation which finally came even to me—through her patience, and perseverance, and prayers.

Lord, set your guardian angels over her and protect her.  
Thank you, Lord.

This is indeed a beautiful tribute to a patient wife, but it is more. It is also a testimony to the power of God acting through one of His servants, a devoted Christian wife.

## CONCLUSION

Are you a husband of such a wife? Has her tender, patient example as a Christian led you to the point that you are now ready to confess your faith in Christ as the Son of God, repent of your past sins, and be buried with your Lord in baptism? These commands of the Lord are so simple, yet so vitally important. This is the way that you become a Christian. I wonder if perhaps you are a son or a daughter whose Christian mother has led you to the point that you are now ready to follow in her steps as a child of God? Let me appeal to you not to delay your acceptance of Christ’s invitation. Nothing is so important in life; nothing so important in eternity.

The role of a Christian wife and mother is without parallel. Let me put it, finally, in a simple but thoughtful analogy. In the game of chess the queen is the most powerful of all the pieces, capable of moving any unobstructed distance and in any direction. Capture of the queen means, ordinarily, checkmate of the king. As in chess, so in life.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Larry Christensen, *The Christian Family* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 1970), 45.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.