

A Dream About a Complete Bride

by David L. Hatton

I had just finished reading a very interesting little book by Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Carta of Women*. It was basically a synopsis of a larger book by Dr. Katharine Bushnell, *God's Word to Women*, a scholarly exposition on several Pauline Scripture passages that have often fortified the practice of relegating to women a minor, even subservient, role in church ministry.

Then I slept and had a peculiar dream. Troubled by the details of this dream, and that the dream was not complete, I tried to sleep again. In doing so, in a half-asleep-half-awake level of consciousness, I began to see what seemed to be an interpretation. I'm writing this while it's all still fresh in my mind, before the details of the dream fade. First, I'll put down briefly what I dreamed, before giving the subsequent understanding that came to me about its meaning.

I was on a private tour with a small group of Christians with whom I was in some way connected officially. We were visiting a locale somewhere in Africa, probably South Africa, because there were many whites among blacks, and they spoke Dutch and English. I somehow knew that I was on this tour to learn about the church in that culture. But I immediately remember missing my wife, Rosemary, who in the dream was still my fiancée. I wanted to mail a letter I'd written to her. I needed postage, and even though it was Sunday, a store was open. When I entered, I found it had many church-related items. I was surprised to find a large altar off to the side, and nearby, shelves of articles for sale that were used for worship services -- even freshly baked bread to be used in Holy Communion.

When I noticed the bread, I remembered that it was Sunday, and our group was to be at a church service somewhere. Then a priest appeared dressed in a white robe with a red liturgical stole. He held up a long trumpet and blew it in four directions into four open horns that curved upward into the ceiling and outside the building. People, blacks and whites, were starting to come into the building, which made me realize that the store doubled for a Catholic church. Some of my companions nudged me to exit with them, and I did, but there was an intense longing to stay for the service.

Suddenly, a jump to a new location occurred, as often do in dreams, and I was in a crowd of blacks and whites meandering around the outside of a large, several-storied building. There was nothing I could understand about what was going on. Actually, nothing purposeful seemed to be happening; just a lazy, movement to and fro around the building. The one exception was at one corner where people seemed to be gathering. I gravitated there and found a few of my colleagues talking to people, some of whom were sick. Some of them were poor and homeless. Others were just ordinary people standing around talking. In looking again at the building, I thought it was a hospital or hotel. For some reason I knew I lived there. All this time I was feeling lonely, missing my fiancée, wishing she could be with me. Then my colleagues hurried me along.

I found myself, again very suddenly, entering and sitting down in a very pleasant church. It was an extremely warm group, with many friendly faces, and they were all female. I wondered, at first, if I would look strange being a male among all these happy women. And again I felt my loneliness for Rosemary. I wanted her with me to enjoy this place. Yet, some of these women looked so familiar, as if they were some of the nurses I worked with in my job as a

labor and delivery nurse. The spirit in this assembly was exceptionally caring and inviting.

Then, a crippled woman entered, coming from the crowd of people outside the big building I had just left. She was welcomed in and helped over to a seat where a woman lifted her lame legs lengthwise comfortably on the pew. Next, a slightly obese lady, who seemed to be very ill, arrived from the same crowd. When she sat down in the pew in front of me, she had a sudden, messy accident with diarrhea. She appeared helpless and embarrassed. Being a nurse, and sitting so close, I felt responsible to assist her. Strangely, I found at hand what I needed for the task of cleaning her up. Immediately I started working in much the same way I would in my nursing job. Then, I wondered if I had overstepped my bounds, for I was just a visitor. But others around me at once joined in to help, so I persisted. After she was thoroughly clean, the floor beneath her was a mess. But I noticed that the minister of this congregation, a lady dressed in a white robe and green liturgical stole, was down on her knees with me, wiping up the dirty water that had dripped from the wooden pew onto the floor. When the job was finished, everyone was still in the same joyous spirit of sweet fellowship and worship, as if nothing uncommon or extraordinary had just occurred.

How I wanted to stay for this church service! But I was removed and joined with my companions in the church that we were scheduled to attend. It was a traditional Communion service in a Plymouth Brethren church. I remembered once thinking that this model was the closest to that of the early church service described in 1 Corinthians 14. Distribution of the elements had not yet started. There was still time open for public sharing by men within the assembly. A man would stand and speak when he felt he had something the Holy Spirit wanted him to share with the congregation. When another man felt the same spiritual prompting, he would stand, and the other one speaking would recognize the need to conclude his words. In the midst of watching this process occur in my dream, I noticed that a woman in the congregation stood up. It sent a murmur throughout the assembly and confusion to the man who was speaking. Everyone looked to the leading elder of the assembly, to see what he would say. And suddenly I realized they were looking at me. I believed, in my own thinking, that the woman should be allowed to speak, but I was hesitant to state my ideas against the traditional viewpoint in the midst of that male-dominated assembly. The woman was still standing, waiting to be recognized as having a message from the Holy Spirit.

The young man who had been speaking was also still standing, and he quoted the familiar words from 1 Corinthians 14, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says."

I addressed the woman, "Do you really have a message for us from the Holy Spirit?"

She nodded.

"What's the message?" I asked.

She smiled, "There is only one way for you to find out."

And that was where my dream ended. I awoke.

What a dream! Yet I was still so tired, and the dream seemed unfinished. So, I tried to sleep again. But, while unable to really sleep, and in a kind of half-doing state, I began to get insights into the meaning of the dream. I believe that some of the following thoughts, which seemed to press upon me during this half-sleep, point to an interpretation.

What about this African tour to learn the state of the church? Without any personal knowledge about South Africa, this unfamiliar environment of the dream seemed a platform of objective learning. Although all the other symbols in the dream were familiar and personal, I was consciously in the role of an observer, a reporter, a learner. A foreign land made it so.

Back in the store, in my dozing review, I remember my great attraction to the element of the bread. I knew intuitively that this was where everyone of the other churches were buying their supply of this element for their Communion services. The focus in Catholic worship is built around the ministry of the Eucharist. I had learned, when attending weekly "High Church" services in a Canadian Anglican church, that such an emphasis was "in the *catholic* tradition," as compared to the "Low Church" or *reformed* tradition, where the worship centers around the pulpit ministry. My desire to linger at this Catholic altar was a longing that is mirrored today, I believe, in many Protestant denominations where an absence of meaningful art and ritual fail to adorn doctrine, even failing to appropriately embellish those doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement and the Indwelling Christ, buried within the Eucharistic meal.

I was attracted to the meaning of the white robe and red stole of the priest, and to his trumpet blowing. The three seasons of the Christian calendar using white are Christmastide, Epiphany and Eastertide. All these could be construed to point toward the celebration of the body and blood of Christ. The abiding presence of Christ in the meal of the Lord's Table, however it's theologically understood by each church tradition, is broadcast in the watchword phrases earmarking those three seasons of the Church -- *Christmas*, "they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, 'God with us;' *Epiphany*, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" and *Easter*, which includes the Ascension, "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The red stole symbolized the Holy Spirit, giving the priest a special anointing to blow the trumpet, announcing and recalling the faithful to this feeding of our souls upon the "living bread" which came from Heaven, the very life of Christ (John 6:32ff). I remembered that this feeding occurs in the gathering of believers, where it is manifested that we, as Paul describes in 1 Cor 10:17, "are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (NKJV).

The sharp contrast of the world and the church was in the second location. I remember the feeling of aimlessness that saturated the atmosphere of the crowd outside that multi-storied building, which was obviously the Church. Even the gathering of people at the corner of the building was a very loose association, not genuine unity. A general sense of apathy, even hopelessness, reigned. Looking back on it, I remember not seeing any obvious openings or entrances to the building that were visible from the perspective of this crowd. In fact, although I knew that the building was not hostile to me, I remember wishing that it were more friendly-looking from the outside. It's sad to think that this is likely the true situation, that the church is not reaching the needy world because it's focus has been more on what's happening inside itself than on the needs outside. Great things may be happening inside the building, but no one outside knows about it, or has any motivation to look for a way in, when the church has not been working on building good entrances. And I remember how the aura of loneliness outside the building matched a certain feeling of loneliness that I felt because my fiancée was not with me. Reflecting right now on this feeling of missing my wife, it seemed to be a thread running through the whole dream, perhaps the repeated symbol that unlocks the significance, or emphatically

underlines the meaning, of the whole dream.

My most enjoyable experience was in the congregation of women. The loving and caring spirit there was so attractive. I reflected on the openness of the meeting, that there were more than one entrance, and that the entrances were so large that the moving crowd outside could look in and see what was happening. There was a naturalness to the practical service shown in accommodating the crippled woman and in the intimate, unpleasant, but necessary cleansing that we gave to the sick woman with diarrhea. Their needy presence and our combined ministry to their needs as they arose, did not upset the flow of this church service or disturb its joyous atmosphere. I knew that this was where I wanted to be. I was one of them, even though a male. Or was I male? This servant church was the true church, the Bride of Christ. All of us in it are female, in relation to our Head, the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this female, servant church, the lady minister had a white robe, which again spoke to me of Christ's living presence in the three seasons mentioned above, but the stole she wore was green, which we use for Kingdome, symbolic of the spread of the Gospel and growth of God's Kingdom. The *Christmas* church of virgin-servants of the King, echoes Mary's words, at the truth of Christ's incarnational presence, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." The *Epiphany* church of wedding-servants of the King, echoes the experience of Christ's transforming glory revealed at Cana, where the common servants, not the banquet leader, "fill the water jars to the brim" and pour out wine to the guests. The *Easter* church of follower-servants of the King, believed Christ's words, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also," and now she claims as her own His description that "he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." This Kingdome church ministers both the Word and the works of love: "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness." (Prov 31:26-27, NKJV). She willingly rises to enter the white harvest fields that Her Lord prayed over, for the "heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain." (Prov 31:11, NRSV). This is the church that will reach the lost and hopeless crowd outside its walls.

But, I did not get to stay in that church. In my dream, it was at the Plymouth Brethren Communion service that the whole picture came together. You see, the quotation broadcast from the mouth of the young man, who had been speaking when the woman stood up, was from a *representative man*, and literally a man, a male. He represented an interpretation of the 1 Corinthian 14 passage that has kept women silent in the church services of that denomination for years. But it is also an interpretation that has kept women banned from teaching and preaching roles in many denominations that are less rigid than the PB churches. In my dream, when that woman stood, she was stepping into and claiming the liberty of all Spirit-filled believers contained in Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 14:29-33 (NKJV):

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

She was standing on New Testament ground, on Gospel ground, on the ground of "the liberty by

which Christ" had made her "free," and she was not about to be "entangled again with a yoke of bondage." (Gal 5:1).

Immediately pipes up another irrate voice, not that of Paul, but of the Judaizing legalist element in the Corinthian church, whose voice Paul quotes back to them from their letter of questions to him: "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church." (1 Cor 14:34-35, NKJV).

Yes, indeed, so many do translate these words as if they were Paul's. But how could they be, when only a few pages back in his letter he speaks of men and women prophesying together as if it were a common, natural occurrence (1 Cor 11:4-5)? Only a Bible scholar who forgot, or failed to connect with, or just simply didn't understand what Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians could think this is Paul's own language. Paul knew the law of Moses extremely well, probably by heart, word for word, and if he said that phrase, "as the law also says," it was a bold-faced lie, because it's nowhere in the law. Something almost identical is in the Jewish Talmud, which the Judaizers did consider authoritative, but if Paul really did appeal to the authority of the Talmud to keep women from prophesying in church, it would mean that he was acting as schizophrenic as he accused Peter of acting in Antioch (Gal 2:11-14), and even more guilty than Peter of double-mindedness and vacillation, since the doctrinal issues concerning the law are so clearly and laboriously laid down by Him in his Galatian epistle.

No, no! Far from fostering women's silence, he was answering this phrase (vs.34-35) of the Jewish legalists! How does Paul address these quoted words of the Judaizers? In the King James Version, he's translated to say, "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?" Paul confronted at Corinth this legalistic silencing of women with apostolic authority:

Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. (1 Cor 14:36-39, NIV).

And no case can be made that in this one special place Paul stopped using "brothers" to mean both male and female believers, so that in the context of this church discussion he meant only the males, for it would leave out the other half of the brothers who are called "sisters" when they are in a group by themselves. Paul couldn't do this, especially when, before God, he knew that "sister" brothers were by Jesus redeemed from "under law," that they "might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal 4:5, NIV), the same as "brother" brothers were.

For the first time, in my dream, I heard this phrase, and what it really sounded like, in the mouth, not of Paul, but of a disgruntled male legalist who felt his heritage being threatened. It was as clear as crystal that this was not Paul's terminology, but rather the target he was trying to terminate. And I began to wonder if one deceased commentator after another, on their enlightenment in Heaven, didn't say, "It was so obvious, I could kick myself! Why in the world didn't I see it?" And how hypocritically ironic it has been that Plymouth Brethren scholars, who argued emphatically against any validity for Jewish law-keeping to retain ground in the Gospel

dispensation, have been the loudest landscapers of the largest garden to nurture the enforcement of this Jewish legalist quotation!

When I meditated on this in that assembly in my dreamy recollection, and was there again being looked to as an elder to make some statement to this woman, I remembered my longing for my fiancée, my wife Rosemary, and how incomplete I felt without her. And then I felt the sterility of the environment of that assembly, how no one from the crowd of needy were there, because the feminine servanthood that flavored the previous church I had visited was so silenced, so still, that it was essentially absent. The church where the Spirit could speak only through a male mind-set and never through a feminine thought-pattern, was only half a Bride, not a very feminine half at all, and because half, not really whole, not healthy, and not her true self before her Husband. Yet here before me was a woman, standing as tall as Deborah, standing like a priest of the royal priesthood of believers, an ambassador of Christ, standing in His stead, our Husband's stead, about to bear on her lips His message by His Spirit. She would be representing the King, our Husband, if allowed to speak. She would be addressing us in His place. And if we allowed her to speak, to prophesy, to preach to the assembly, then we as a corporate group, men and women, elders and deacons, would have to sit back and be the feminine Bride of Christ before a priest of Christ speaking from her office as priest in His stead.

"Shall a woman be allowed to preach?" said the young, irate male legalist.

This was not the real question. The real question was, "Will we continue to limp along in our mission with half a brain and half a heart and half an ear and half a tongue, and be a half-grown, half-developed Bride for our wedding day?"

"Do you really have a message for us from the Holy Spirit?"

She nodded.

"What's the message?" I asked.

She smiled, "There is only one way for you to find out."

And when I got to this part again, that is where I got up and out of bed to write this.