



Was the woman a bishop? CBE member Dorothy Irvin observes that her red robe may bespeak this. Like other bishops in the San Gennaro Catacomb, she is shown with the Bible. Dorothy also notes that this is not the only picture in which women are engaged in the utilization of Scripture. A painting in the Domitilla Catacomb in Rome shows Veneranda and Petronella with a round box of scrolls and one book bound in the codex form which we use today. One need only remember Paula, Marcella and many other Roman women who were well versed in the Word! Psalm 68:11 says "The Lord gives the Word. Great is the host of women who proclaim it." Bitalla's testimony shows one more woman who responded to God's call. Blessedly, she was sent to a believing community who received her ministry as a gift from God.

The woman had upraised hands, in the gesture of a priest or bishop giving the benediction. This is also a gesture that is sometimes used in proclamation of the Word. Often it is argued that such a pose in early Christian art bespeaks an allegorical portrait of Mother Church or of salvation. In this case, however, the woman is specifically named and cannot be construed as some sort of abstraction. Behind her are two opened books, each revealing two pages. On the first page was written

"John" and on the second "Mark." Next came "Matthew" and finally "Luke." The dead woman seems to have been particularly remembered for her ministry of the four Gospels. From her Bible hang down bookmarks placed in special readings. Like many a woman since, she was concerned to minister the Word of God to the people of God. She acted in obedience to Christ's command, "Feed my sheep."

---

## MISTRESS MARY BUNYAN: FIRST WIFE OF JOHN BUNYAN

Linda Marion Montgomery

In seventeenth-century England, a young girl came to the village of Elstow to be the wife of a tinker. History does not tell us where she came from. Possibly she was working as a servant girl near the town of Newport Pagnell, when she met her husband who was stationed there as a member of the Parliamentary army. When his service was over, they married and moved back to his home village of Elstow.

It would never have occurred to Mary that her good man, John Bunyan, would be held in everlasting remembrance. She lived and died with no dreams of worldly fame. She was a poor girl who had married a poor man. John once wrote that they did not have "so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon betwixt us both."

They moved into a humble thatched cottage by the roadside, which still stands today. There is a notice over the doorway: "John Bunyan ... lived in this cottage after his marriage in 1649."

Mary set up housekeeping. She probably tended a small garden, preserved and cooked their food, made their clothes,

soap, candles, and other necessities. She might have sold vegetables or hand work to people passing by her home on their way to Bedford, a town a mile away.

Their cottage had a lean-to forge at the south end where John worked as a tinker repairing the tools and utensils of neighbors. Often his trade took him wandering about the countryside, working at lonely farms or setting up shop at a fair ground, or on the outskirts of a nearby town.

Four children were born to this marriage: Mary, who was blind, Elizabeth, John, and Thomas.

Mary had been strictly brought up. She often told John what a godly man her father was. He would reprove and correct vice both in his house and amongst his neighbors. She knew her letters, being educated above the average of her station. When her father died, he left her two pious books: *The Pathway to Heaven* by Arthur Dent and *The Practice of Piety* by Lewis Bailey.

John Bunyan loved this woman whom it had been "his mercy to marry." He said, "My mercy was to light upon a wife whose father was counted godly."

Mary brought to her new home all of the memories of that godly home in which she was raised, and brightened the home with knowledge of the presence of the love of Christ. Her spiritual influence upon her husband was tremendous. Per-

haps, in a sense, John Bunyan's fame rests upon the devotion and unrecorded sacrifices of this village girl, because she was his partner through several years of supreme crisis and conflict of soul.

The beginning of John Bunyan's personal reformation dates back to his marriage in 1647, when he read the two books that Mary had brought into his life concerning the Christian's walk or pilgrimage through this life. "In these two books, I should sometimes read with her. I also found some things that were somewhat pleasing to me," said John. John was on his own pilgrimage at this time, and Mary was his travelling companion.

What did they encounter on this journey? After their marriage, John's outward conduct improved. He became "respectable." He went to the established Anglican church twice on Sunday. He gave up swearing, dancing, Sunday sports, and even bell-ringing, which for some reason seemed to him to be sin.

Mary watched as inwardly he went through fitful moods of ecstasy or great depression. He would sit by the fire, musing on his wretchedness. He was overwhelmed with a sense of his own evil. He was full of sorrow and guilt. He tried to follow the commandments, but failed.

Midway in this conflict of soul, John was admitted into membership in John Gifford's Baptist church in Bedford. "They would pity me and would tell me of the Promises." He was introduced to that church by three or four poor women, whom John had overheard one day as they sat at a door in the sunshine "holding godly talk together." They moved in a world of which he knew nothing. They spoke of a holy discontent with themselves, of a new birth from above. They told how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus. They spoke of being refreshed with words and promises from the Bible.

Interestingly, Mary did not join the new church with John. She stayed in the Anglican church. Their children were baptized as infants at her church; John was immersed after his conversion at the separatist church.

But even after his conversion, John was tormented by doubt. He and Mary would probably have talked often about the Scriptures, as she prayed for him and listened to his struggles. She loved this man. She encouraged him. She suffered for him and with him.

However, they only had eight years together. In 1655, they moved to a cottage in Bedford town, and Mary died that year.

One historian, writing on the life of John Bunyan, ended a short paragraph about John's first wife, Mary by saying, "Mistress Bunyan having moved thus dimly in the shadowy background, fades out of the picture altogether."

Today, Mistress Mary is still an invisible woman. Her story was never recorded. Her husband, John, is known as the famous author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but what of the woman that travelled the early road with him?

If we dream a little, if we fill in the few details that we do have of her life with the probable things that a woman of that time did, we can almost see her. She might be sewing, making bread, dancing, making love, hugging a child, nursing a baby, or reading a book. Can you hear her singing at her chores, talking with her women friends, playing with her children, screaming during childbirth, praying to her God, talking with John by the fireside, and finally moaning as she breathed her last breath?

Most important, Mary had the answer to her husband's question, "What shall I do to be saved?" Her life of faith in Christ significantly touched and shaped the early spiritual pilgrimage of her famous husband, John Bunyan.

## FROM MY POINT OF VIEW: ONE CHRISTIAN'S COMMENTARY ON TWO CONTEMPORARY SECULAR BEST SELLERS

Joanne Callahan

Just when the secular press declared the funeral of the contemporary women's movement, two secular feminist books appeared: Susan Faludi's *BACKLASH: THE UNDECLARED WAR AGAINST AMERICAN WOMEN* and Gloria Steinem's *REVOLUTION FROM WITHIN: A BOOK OF SELF-ESTEEM*. Both books were on best-seller lists for many weeks. In particular, Faludi's provocative, award-winning work generated such press coverage during that time that she had to quit her staff-reporter position at *The Wall Street Journal* in order to handle a surprising multitude of speaking engagements. Faludi is currently working on a book about men and masculinity which, because of the success of *BACKLASH*, will undoubtedly generate even more waves of publicity for the controversial author.

In contrast, Steinem's *REVOLUTION FROM WITHIN* received only lukewarm reviews but intensified her celebrity status. Even in conservative Dallas, Steinem was besieged by crowds of admirers.

Undeniably, these two best-sellers helped turn many apolitical women into activists, and contributed to recent impressive female gains in both the United States Senate and the House of Representatives.

My question is: How should biblical egalitarians respond to these two works? Answers may not be as obvious as some think.

Because feminism has gotten such an undeservedly bad "rap" from both the evangelical and secular press, even some CBE types will defensively say, "I'm not a feminist," or "I don't like the women's movement" or "I'm not a women's libber, but..." However, it is irresponsible for Christians to judge all of feminism by biased reports of the news media (especially when that same media often shows a similar bias against the church) or to condemn all feminist aspirations on account of some radical tactics of the National Organization of Women. After all, we don't judge Christianity by the shenanigans of a discredited televangelist, or deny sympathy to civil rights movements because of the Los Angeles riots.

As Elaine Storkey demonstrated in *WHAT'S RIGHT WITH FEMINISM*, the women's movement is very complex. We can forget that it was the secular feminists who fought so selflessly for the vote, for the civil rights acts, the equal pay act, laws against sexual harassment, for equal credit rights and for equality in higher education, and who continuously add to our reservoir of knowledge about gender relations.

And while it is perfectly acceptable for Christians to read "radical" secular books on economics, politics, and even sex (most Christian sex manuals acquired their information from secular sexologists such as Masters and Johnson!), the evangelical egalitarian who reads works by secular feminists can be viewed as a defector from the faith. Indeed, the conservative Christian who reads Marx' *DAS KAPITAL* is considered a broad-minded scholar, while one who reads Betty Friedan's *THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE* is dismissed as a heretic.

---

*Joanne Callahan is a software engineer at Alcatel Network Systems in Richardson, Texas, and is the founder and coordinator of the CBE North Texas Chapter.*