

So from personal experience, I know that there is more than one way to view things. And the illustrations the author on family life "secrets" used seemed to point this out. The woman he cited had no comprehension that equal partnership couldn't work. In her experience it seems to have been working OK (and her husband too must have believed it could work). But the two men in the ministry illustration had no idea it *could* work!! They operated on the belief it couldn't and acted accordingly. But the difference between their case and marriage was that one of the men voluntarily stepped down from equality; there was no compulsion that he do it. In the teaching about marriage the woman must *always* be the one to shift, forcing the conclusion that she is not quite an equal partner.

As I puzzled about why these things might be happening, I wondered if either of these men had ever really been in a true peer situation before? Or had every situation been so hierarchically structured, that when they found themselves in an equal situation it was something entirely foreign to them? Having been told forever that equal partnership wouldn't work, they didn't know how to make it work without one making the final decision. How sad!

I know a number of husbands and wives who have dared to challenge this myth that is more cultural than scriptural, and who would testify that their marriage is strong for having made the change. For one thing, shared responsibility reduces finger-pointing after failure and increases the sense of ownership when things work out well. Decision-making becomes less power related and more us/team/in this together related. It also reduces the necessity for the man to play God. We seem to forget the family is first and foremost a set of relationships, not a government or corporation.

Another of the author's statements that I would question is: "It simply means (1 Tim. 3:4) that as manager, a husband is the one who will answer to the Lord for the home he and his wife have created." Will all the rewards (as well as punishments) be his alone? T'would be nice, but I don't find that in Scripture! I believe each will answer fully and equally to the Lord for her or his part. Furthermore, "my husband decided" may not hold much water before the eternal judge! I wouldn't stake *my* crown on it!

Whenever we base our life on assumptions that can be found to be in error, we are putting ourselves in a dangerous situation. If we can see only one model or possibility, we cut ourselves off from creative involvement and intimacy with the people we say we love the most. All suffer for it. What happened in the lives of that couple who questioned the author? I don't know and I tremble to ask.

¹ All quotes are taken from "The Best Kept Secrets of Family Life: How You and Your Family Can Build a Healthy and Enjoyable Home Life" Part 2, by Scott Morton in *Discipleship Journal*, Sept/Oct 1993, Issue 77, p. 103. He has some excellent suggestions in both parts of the article. My contention is with his view of the husband-wife relationship.

² The context of 1 Tim. 3:4 is of choosing overseers who would "manage" the church of God, not as individuals but as a group. No note is made of the cultural aspects of family life in the first century. The nuclear family (which was an anomaly in the ancient world) is simply assumed by the author. Thus our situation is projected back onto the text and the ancient situation is imposed on our own, without due process in between.

³ The context is about choosing church overseers — not about judgment!

JESUS CALLS US

Julia Ann Flora

This is the centenary year marking the death on October 12 of Cecil Frances Alexander, one of the greatest women hymn writers. Her funeral in Londonderry attracted a great crowd from all of Great Britain to pay tribute to this noble woman.

Cecil Frances Humphreys was born and raised in Ireland. As a little girl of only nine years she liked to write poems which were published in a small periodical circulating within her close-knit family.

Her writing talent was noticeable at an early age, but her father — a noted landowner and major in the Royal Marines — was stern and critical of her work, so she hid her poems under the rug. But one time he discovered them and, to her surprise, thought them quite good. As time passed he continued to encourage her.

In her early twenties, she was an active member of the Anglican Church, devoting her time to the religious education of children. She believed that teaching children the substance of Christian creeds and special Christian days was best accomplished through poetry. Thus she wrote many hymns for her Sunday school students, reading the verses to them.

In 1846, when she was twenty-one, she published her first book, *Verses for Holy Seasons*, which contained a hymn for every Sunday and other special days. The hymn

*Julia Ann Flora is a student of hymnology who has done research at Ashland Seminary specializing in women hymn writers. She is author of *Suffering and Song* (Fairway Press, October 1995) which presents biographies of popular hymn writers. With her husband, she also co-authored the book *Faith and Fortitude*.*

"Jesus Calls Us" was designated for St. Andrew's Day (November 30). Two years later another book called Hymns For Little Children appeared. This small seventy-two page book sold a quarter of a million copies in twenty years. By 1896 it reached its sixty-ninth edition.

In 1850 she married the Reverend William Alexander, and for the first few years of their marriage they lived on a farm. Often her husband would come home in late afternoon and question her: "Have you sold the cow? Have you shown the gardener how to prune the roses? Have you finished writing that poem?" Once he read her a pamphlet written by an English minister which told of a great change in the heart and life of a man when he heard one of her hymns sung. Looking directly at her husband, the usually humble poet said, "Thank God! I do like to hear that."

In nineteenth-century Ireland there were large numbers of poor farm workers. For several years following 1845 a serious famine spread over the country after potatoes (their main crop) rotted soon after they were harvested; many Irish people starved or fled the country. Mrs. Alexander, the young minister's wife, made time to travel over miles of wet moorlands, mountains and bogs in all kinds of weather carrying food, warm clothing and medical supplies to the impoverished and sick of her husband's parish.

In one cottage she found a woman with a serious wound but with no one to care for her and no medical aid. Every day for six weeks Mrs. Alexander visited with the woman, washing and dressing the wound until it was healed.

Even though she had no children of her own, many of her hymns won their way into the hearts of the young. Two popular ones are "All Things Bright and Beautiful" and "Once in Royal David's City." "There Is a Green Hill Far Away" was also written for children, but was so well liked by adults that it has since been included in many hymnals.

Her poetry writing continued until she had published ten books containing about four hundred hymns. Someone wrote that her hymns "are charmingly simple and tender, clear in dogma, and of poetic beauty." The great French composer Charles Gounod believed "Jesus Calls Us" to be near-perfect because of its simplicity. This was the only hymn she wrote specifically for adults, and it first appeared in a volume called Hymns for Public Worship (1852). This woman's beautiful hymn was adopted as the official hymn of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States and the Church of England in Canada.

The Gospel in Hymns by Albert Edward Bailey has a good description of the writer's life. "She was admirably fitted to be a pastor's wife. She was as far as possible from the dreamy ineffectual type of poet. She never posed, detested gush and sentimentality, [she] had a direct tongue and incisive speech, and she turned a vigilant eye upon her husband's house, garden, and farm. She kept her devotional life largely hidden in her heart, but was a strict 'Prayer Book Christian,' going to church every day and to communion every week. Beyond that her days were largely given over to errands of charity and helpfulness, from one poor Irish home to another, from one sick-bed to another, from one house of sorrow to another, no matter how remote. She knew all her neighbors and loved them."

When her husband became Bishop in 1867 and later Archbishop of Ireland, she was brought into contact with a more cosmopolitan society and with large Christian institutions. Yet although she was hostess for many distinguished dignitaries and shared the publicity of her husband's prominent life, she was as much at home in the impoverished areas as she was in the Archbishop's Palace.

"Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea." In Ireland, they say, you are never more than sixty miles from sea. Cecil Humphreys Alexander would know how wild that sea could be but also how peaceful and calm the sea becomes. She believed that, with Christ, we can experience calm even in the midst of tumult around us. As we sing her timeless words we voice our own prayer to "Give our hearts to Thine obedience, Serve and love Thee best of all."

Bibliography

- Claghorn, Gene. Women Composers and Hymnists: A Concise Biographical Dictionary. The Scarecrow Press, 1994.
- Johnson, Guye. Treasure of Great Hymns and Their Stories. Bob Jones University Press, 1986.
- Julian, John. A Dictionary of Hymnology. Dover Publications, 1957.
- Marks Harvey B. The Rise and Growth of English Hymnody. Fleming H. Revell, 1938.
- Osbeck, Kenneth W. 101 Hymn Stories. Kregel Publications, 1982.
- Reynolds, William J. Songs of Glory. Zondervan, 1990.
- Smith H. Augustine. Lyric Religion: The Romance of Immortal Hymns. D. Appleton-Century Company, 1931.
- Smith, Jane Stuart and Carlson, Betty. Favorite Women Hymn Writers. Crossway Books, 1990.