BROKENNESS AS THE CENTER OF A WOMAN'S MINISTRY

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As I read the articles on Women and Pentecostalism in the Spring 1995 issue of *PNEUMA*, two common themes in the lives of these women ministers emerged. First, all had ministries that were to a greater or lesser extent marginalized by the institutions they sought to serve. Second, and even more interesting, was the importance of experiences of brokenness in their lives and the lives of those to whom they ministered. Edith Blumhofer quite rightly points out that Aimee Semple McPherson ministered to those who had been broken by life's experiences; she also had profound experiences of brokenness and healing in her own life and these experiences gave her a powerful testimony that encouraged other broken people. Although this pattern of brokenness is not specifically mentioned in the other articles on women ministers, it can be seen in the ministries of Alice Garrigus and Kathryn Kuhlman as well. When Alice Garrigus started her ministry as an evangelist, she worked with single mothers and she was supportive of her friend Margie Bowen's ministry when her marriage was in trouble. Kathryn Kuhlman had a ministry that brought physical healing to many and resulted in the healing of doctrinal and denominational divisions between Christians. Any one who knows the story of Kuhlman also knows that her own difficult life experiences contributed to the power of her ministry. In every article the story of how women's ministries were marginalized by the organizations they served comes through clearly. It is not surprising that McPherson, Garrigus and Kuhlman all established independent ministries that flourished under their leadership.

I found myself responding to these articles less as a scholar than as a woman who is an ordained minister. I identified with these women in their struggles and brokenness as well as their triumphs and I found myself thinking that things really have not changed that much for women ministers. From this perspective, I saw that Blumhofer fails to make the crucial connection between McPherson's experiences of brokenness and the power of her ministry as a woman. Instead she

suggests that the categories of broken and whole, not the categories of gender, are central to an understanding of McPherson's ministry. But I would argue that it is precisely because McPherson is a woman that the experience of brokenness is so central for an understanding of her ministry. Being marginalized is an experience of being broken and the specific ways that women in ministry are marginalized often shape their ministries. When women are marginalized and treated as inferior to men, they can develop compassion for those who are marginalized and treated as inferior by those around them: the physically and mentally ill, the victims of abuse, the destitute and the disadvantaged. This shaping power of the marginalized experience is as true for woman ministers today as it was for the Pentecostal pioneers in the early days of this century. I cannot think of any woman minister I know who has not had an experience of being marginalized as a minister because she is a woman. And for many of these ministers, experiences of brokenness are central to their understanding of ministry. Those who come to women ministers often sense this brokenness and seek them out because of it.

The best example I have of a person sensing this center of brokenness and seeking out a woman minister because of it comes from my first year at Hope College. A student came to me because he had found out that the youth pastor with whom he worked was having an affair with one of the women in the high school youth group. He told me that he had debated whether to talk to me or to the man who was then chair of the Religion Department. He had decided to come to me because he thought that I would know more about operating from a position of powerlessness and he felt powerless in the face of this situation. I told him that he was right and that, since I had faced severe sexual harassment in graduate school, I knew a great deal about the power dynamics when a male in an authority position uses his power to sexualize a relationship with someone under his authority. He was relieved that I understood the situation he was in and I realized how important my own experiences of brokenness were going to be for my ministry to students at Hope College. As I have examined my own experience and talked to other women ministers, I have discovered that there are three main ways that women ministers are marginalized in the institutional church: They are emotionalized, maternalized and sexualized.

**Women Emotionalized**

We live in a society that tends to see women as more emotional and less rational than men. So many in the church assume that women ministers are going to be more emotional than men. Sometimes this perception is helpful, because many people are more comfortable

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