The movement by which women seek to secure access to privileges equal with those enjoyed by men carries various labels. It is called The Women's Liberation Movement, The Feminist Movement, the Movement for Equal Rights for Women, and by less complimentary names as well. Discussion of the question of the proper definition of the rules, respectively, of men and women too frequently follows emotional lines, with excessive (immoderate) statements on both sides of the question. Underlying much of today's discussion are several issues, many of which involve questions of real substance.

Involved are, among others, these problems: first the question of Biblical authority, in reply to which there is given not only the general thrust of Scripture, but more specifically of relevant passages. These passages occur in the Gospels, and especially in the Pauline Epistles. There is, second, the "role approach" in which role relationships are analyzed in terms of 'natural law,' of social usage, and (by Christians) in terms of the structures of creation. A third approach is that made in terms of social studies, in which the insights of anthropology, history, and forms of culture are brought to bear upon the question. A fourth consideration is that raised by reference to the logic of developing insights within today's sociology, with special concern for equal pay for equal work, equal access to the means and avenues of social and economic mobility, and an understanding of roles arranged, not hierarchically, but in terms of parallelism.

It is not within the province of this editorial to attempt a detailed discussion of the forms within which today's controversy occurs. Debate will, it seems clear, continue for a very long time, and the outcome

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will scarcely be decisive at either the theoretical or the practical levels. Rather, it is probable that insights will emerge which will find embodiment, slowly but surely, in socio-economic structures which accord to women increasingly equitable treatment. Many will be outraged by the very slowness of the process; others will recognize that in a sinful society, change toward all forms of justice occurs with what seems an intolerable gradualism. These latter will move into every opening which appears to be creative, seeking to conserve the gains which have been achieved and meanwhile pointing the way to new areas within which old inequities will be recognized and corrected.

In this area of controversy, as in most others, the issues are frequently neither unambiguously nor decisive. And if the rational evidence seems to be transparently clear, the issues at stake are so involved with both human sentiments and social institutions that any 'settlement' would leave many persons unconvinced and many social structures untouched. How, then, should women of Christian persuasion and commitment respond to the challenge of movements for the securing of across-the-board equality for women with men?

A counsel of Christian prudence would be to concentrate efforts upon those areas or at those points in which the issues are most evidently clear. Equal pay for equal work, equal access to all forms of education, equal opportunity for upward mobility in occupations and professions including managerial positions, and equal treatment before the law. In this connection, it needs to be noted that movements for equality operate most convincingly within given geographical and cultural areas, that is, within a context in which standards of remuneration and of living-levels are fairly uniform, and where usages with respect to employment are homogeneous.

This last was pointed up vividly at the recent conference dealing with the subject at Mexico City. Women from families whose total income would be below $275.00 per year, and whose days were spent largely in carrying water from the village well and in trying to scrape up enough food to feed their families do have, by any standards, a desperately impoverished existence. These women find it difficult to understand the demand for equality of remuneration by women whose monthly income, after taxes, was twice that figure. On all hands, it is well to recognize the problems posed by the gross inequities of income and opportunities within societies in the developing world when seen alongside the problems posed in a generally affluent society.

Again, it seems advisable for the Christian woman to recognize that a
difference of role does not of necessity imply a set of rigidly hierarchical structures, with necessary implications of inferiority and subservience. It can scarcely be denied that at some times in life women are in greater need for care and protection (even in our form of society) than are men. It is possible that such gestures or courtesy as the man holding the door open for his companion, or seating his wife at the table, are symbols of something which is needed by the psyches of both parties.

There looms also the question of women’s right to have control over their own bodies. Certainly no person with Christian sensitivities would deny that the right to privacy over one’s person belongs to a right understanding of personhood. At the same time, the relationship of marriage modifies this right in the case of both partners. The question, so far as women are concerned, seems to resolve itself to this: at what point does a woman yield this right to the exercise of marital intimacy? Those who place this yielding at the point of pregnancy may be forgetting that there is a strongly provisional giving up as she consents to conjugal intimacy. The implications of this for the question of abortion are clear.

Perhaps enough has been said to suggest that the question of Women’s Liberation is a deeply involved one. Its issues do not yield to surface, off-the-cuff solutions. Here, as elsewhere, the Christian solution demands fearless and searching application of Biblical insight, plus the best and most disciplined use of the wisdom which belongs to us as persons.