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Mark, a meeting chaired by His Holiness Pope Shanouda and at which she answered to her work in Arabic.

Dr Ascott is married and has three children, all of whom are Coptic Orthodox, speak Arabic and are already learning to paint icons. She is [p. 370](#) a teacher, and both monks and nuns from the desert monasteries attend her studio for lessons on the early art form of Coptic icons. Dr Ascott's work at present is the restoration of the Church of the Virgin Mary at Maadi, on the outskirts of Cairo.

During preceding centuries European influence in Egypt has affected the style of icon painting, and the unique Coptic art form of the early church has slowly deteriorated. Many smaller Coptic Orthodox Churches use European catholic paintings and prints for their icons, neglecting their own icon heritage. The true Coptic icon is often viewed as belonging to the past and relegated to the old museums, churches and monasteries. The art of Coptic iconography is not as severely restricted in style as the Greek and Russian traditions. Coptic icons are recognized by the eyes through which it is said 'one sees heaven'. Coptic icons distinguish themselves by their 'sweetness, piety and humility', and iconographers avoid representing scenes of torture of saints and martyrs as well as representations of the fear of the Day of Judgement. There is a very strong and popular tradition of icons depicting Joseph and Mary and the Christ child in their flight into Egypt. Joseph is always walking beside Mary, and in one unique style of icon Joseph holds the Child over his shoulder by the foot, a typical action still among the people of today.

In her restoration work for the Church of the Virgin Mary, Dr Ascott has concentrated on icons depicting events throughout the life of Christ with special emphasis on the events during Lent. The icons will be placed all around the walls of the restored church and on the iconostasis. Dr Ascott is a fine role model for women in the Orthodox church. And in a land and a faith which is strongly patriarchal and often discriminatory on the role and position of women, her work is especially valued, not only for its fine art and religious importance, but also the fact that she is a new believer in the Coptic Orthodox Church and also a woman.

Leonie Liveris is Editor of *MaryMarha*. She lives in Perth, Australia. [p. 371](#)

The Christian Single Woman in Singapore

Florence Ng

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In 1985 a Graduate Christian Fellowship of Singapore working committee presented a paper titled, *The Phenomenon of Sex Imbalance in the Churches*. This paper was based on a survey conducted in 1985¹ which demonstrated that females who are single outnumber

¹ A questionnaire, designed to investigate the sex ratio and to gauge the causes for any imbalance, was given to every church-goer in 13 churches on a particular Sunday. The churches were selected on the basis of

male singles in the ratio of 3:2. 'This phenomenon is already acute among those below 29 years of age, without mentioning those of 30–39 years of age.'² As a single woman I felt for those who have had to grapple with the issues of singleness, and I am glad to share some matters which are close to my heart.

Over the years I have discovered that being single does not necessarily equate with being lonely. I have come across married women who are lonely. The fact is that, in marriage, sexual intimacy or even the lack of it may heighten a sense of separateness from others, especially if there are strains in the relationship.

For singles, however, the problems of loneliness are different. In the first place there is no one to relate to at the physical level available to the married person. Yet there are times when we feel that we have been created to relate to another at that level, and we have to remind ourselves that hunger for physical intimacy will pass. Our hormones go up and down, and what goes up must come down! That is what I tell myself, for God is well able to sustain us.

We must also remind ourselves that lack of such a physical relationship does not mean that there is no intimacy. There is still access to emotional intimacy with loved ones. If we delve into our memory banks perhaps we can recall those occasions when, as we have poured out our hearts to the Lord and studied his Word, we have experienced a wonderful sense of belonging with him. Many will also [p. 372](#) be able to bring to mind intimate moments of sharing with trusted friends, which have given much joy and meaning to life.

If such times are outside our experience, perhaps it is because we have not learned to think aloud with others, including the Lord, at close quarters. Maybe past negative encounters have taught us that vulnerability is too great a price to pay for that depth of intimacy. However, the fault could lie with ourselves and our lack of wisdom in the choice of confidantes. We need to ask God to give us close and reliable friends with whom we can share ourselves—our dreams, hopes, and anxieties, without feeling ashamed or embarrassed.

It is hardly likely that we shall meet such people if we are obsessed with our own needs, for the self-centred are always the most uncomfortable of company. However, let us consider further practical means to cope with singleness.

When the single woman enters the crisis of 'mid-life' she comes to realise that the probability of remaining single outweighs that of getting married. The timing of this awareness varies with different people. A physically attractive woman may reach this stage later than a less attractive one. A sense of ageing is sometimes triggered off when she meets her married peers and sees their grown children. It is further reinforced when she finds herself attending the wedding receptions of her juniors in terms of age, e.g. her ex-Sunday school pupils.

At this stage, she is likely to slide into depression or resignation. Depression can prove to be of much value in her life, if she allows the Lord to lead her through it. Such depression may open up avenues for her to prepare herself emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and even physically to face the future whatever it may hold. This preparation must not be disdained (it is comparable to that mentioned in [James 4:13–16](#)). One of the great assets of any human being is the possession of a compass to chart and direct one's life. Without that, we become like pieces of driftwood.

Such questions as the following need to be asked and thought through rigorously at this stage of life.

denomination, language group, and age and type of congregation. 5,809 church-goers and 773 Sunday School students responded.

² GCF paper, *The Phenomenon of Sex Imbalance in the Churches*, p. 14.

- (1) 'Am I so desperate for marriage that I would even consider forming a relationship with someone who does not meet my basic criteria, e.g. a Christian of similar or greater spiritual maturity?' Thinking and praying through such a question may present us from slipping into self-deception and compromise when a non-Christian suitor turns up unexpectedly. It is so easy to glide into an affair 'unknowingly', for 'the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?' ([Jer. 17:9](#)).
- (2) 'Can I accept singlehood as a 'gift' from the Lord?'. Or, 'What am I [p.373](#) to do about my state?' The single woman may need to think of definite ways to fulfil her need, e.g. ask the Lord for a husband; join the Singapore Social Development Unit (a government matchmaking project). She could ask friends to introduce her to eligible men. Finally she might set a time frame before God to 'head-hunt', so that, if by the end of that time there is nobody suitable, it will be easier for her to accept her continuing singleness as a confirmation from the Lord.
- (3) The third question revolves around living with her parents. 'Do I have to live with my parents if I am going to remain single?' Often, married siblings expect the single woman to live with the parents and take care of them. This may cause guilt feelings to develop. We cannot all harmoniously 'coexist' with our parents, because increasing age brings with it entrenched convictions and habits. If there is a clash between the single woman and her parents, living together can be very miserable. It is far better to live away from them, and go home during weekends with joyful anticipation than to live together in a cold war. If the single woman has a house of her own, the parents can be shuttled around the family members so that the responsibility of caring for them is shared among all the siblings.

Even after a period of depression is over and life returns to 'normal', she needs to watch her own development as a single person. It is so easy to develop the symptoms of a frustrated spinster. It may do her good to remember the following suggestions.

Consciously make the effort to contact and meet up with friends and relatives, whether married or single. If she does not do this, she will find herself with plenty of reasons and excuses to work late hours on weekdays and even weekends. A good pay-package does not take away the aching feeling of loneliness, and even the sense of futility at the end of the day. It is especially important for a single woman to look for a job where she is happy with the work and especially with her colleagues, so that there is a sense of good teamwork or even companionship in the workplace. It is important to realise that ambitious people have a tendency to work themselves up to a high but lonely position.

If your home is available, reciprocate treats by inviting your friends and their families to your place for meals. Keep the group small and personal. Large crowds often heighten a sense of loneliness for all concerned. Avoid restaurants because they impinge on the pocket unnecessarily. Besides there is nowhere like your own home to make you feel at home in other people's company. [p. 374](#)

Count your blessings! The single person has more time and freedom than her married friends to take up 'hobbies', e.g. travelling, reading, voluntary social/community work, church ministries, academic and other courses, etc. Try to go for those hobbies which involve meaningful teamwork. The single person needs to make a conscious effort not to withdraw into her own shell. Once 'hibernating' becomes a habit, it is very difficult to break out of it. Some time ago I gave tuition to three children in a Salvation Army Home. It gave me a lot of maternal satisfaction, but unfortunately it did not give me a sense of teamwork, and therefore 'relatedness' to adults.

Count another blessing. The single woman should be thankful for the freedom and the opportunities to enter into 'full-time' Christian work, should the Lord call her. With this

possibility in mind she must be careful not to tie herself down to exorbitant house loans. The single person is blessed to be in that position where she can switch from secular paid work to voluntary Christian/humanitarian work, or overseas studies for longer or shorter periods of time without imposing a burden on loved ones.

The single woman needs to see the span of her singleness against the yardstick of eternity, so that she does not get discouraged by her marital status. Since our days are numbered, let those of us who are single use the best of our active years to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, instead of hoping and striving for 'Mr. Right' to appear. If you must strive for something, strive to make your life count for eternity, so that your arrival in heaven will be one of joyful encounter with your Master.

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Pioneers in Mission: Women in India in the 19th Century

Kathleen D. Nicholls

From the beginning of the 19th century, the Amy Carmichaels, Mary Slessors, Gladys Aylwards and Mildred Cables of this world demonstrated independence and fulfillment. They have been pioneers in Christ's mission throughout the world. With courage, faith and enterprise they pioneered education, medical and social welfare programmes, fighting for justice for the oppressed of all classes. They preached and taught the Gospel, established churches and opened Bible schools for the training of women.

OPENING THE DOORS TO THE ZENANAS

In 1821 Miss Cooke astonished the men and women of Calcutta by her eagerness to teach 'useless' girls. Her school for girls was perhaps the first of its kind and continued under this loving but determined woman in spite of many difficulties. This was a break-through. Getting into the closed zenanas (women's quarters) to teach young wives and their female companions was much more difficult and openings came very slowly. In an effort to provide teachers for more girls' schools and for the women living in the zenanas, another far-sighted and determined woman, Mrs Mackenzie, wife of an English merchant, wanted to establish a 'Normal School for Christian Female Teachers, English and Native'. In 1852 under the charge of Miss Suter the Calcutta Normal School was born and so was the mission under the title of 'The Indian Female Normal School and Instruction Society or Zenana Bible Mission'. It is not difficult to understand why this became modified over the years to Zenana Bible and Medical Mission and in 1957 to Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship. It is now known as Interserve International.

The women who sought to enter the zenanas of the Hindu sacred city of Benares were not only brave and enterprising but, like their sisters in other towns and cities, very aware of the will of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the essential guiding and