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“Women Pioneering the Future”

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"Women Pioneering the Future" is this year's theme for National Women's History Month. In his proclamation, President Bush quoted Abigail Adams: "In the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors."

This desire is relevant today. We can pioneer the future by building on the accomplishments and victories won in the past. Women struggled for the right to earn money honorably, to own property legally, to be educated equally. They fought for the right to speak publicly, vote nationally, and run for public office. Every scrap of personal and societal freedom women enjoy today was earned and won through the dogged determination of our foremothers.

Yet the concept of women pioneering the future goes beyond career and politics. Women are pioneering the future of the family. Women in every country and layer of society are formulating the moral fabric of the rising generation. This is truly pioneering the future. Mary Baker Eddy - author, editor, lecturer, minister, and Founder of the Church of Christ, Scientist - was familiar with pioneering the future.

In 1875 she wrote "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," which has sold over 10 million copies. She was one of the first women to pastor a church. She founded a theological college, the Massachusetts Metaphysical College, and taught. She established this newspaper in 1908. She pioneered the future of women in theology and the church as well as advanced the scope of spirituality.

But I think her most lasting contribution might have been pioneering a spiritual concept of family. Widowed at 22, her child taken away when he was scarcely 8 years old, she leaned heavily on God. As Mrs. Eddy wrote

later, "God is our Father and our Mother, our Minister and the great Physician: He is man's only real relative on earth and in heaven" ("Miscellaneous Writings 1883-1896," pg. 151). Her early experiences forged her view that every individual is the beloved son or daughter of the heavenly Father-Mother.

This view of God and universal family went beyond the traditional "body of Christ" concept taught by the Christian churches of her day. Mrs. Eddy understood God to be the Father-Mother of all, whether they knew it or accepted it. This was a radical departure from orthodoxy and the generally accepted doctrine of predestination.

Mrs. Eddy saw in Scripture that the spiritual nature of each of us is God-given and inherent. The role of Christ's salvation is to awaken each one to his or her original and permanent identity.

This view of identity and family helped me when I was in fourth grade and my parents separated. It was an emotionally challenging time. My grades slipped. We moved frequently. I had few friends. I yearned for stability in my life. And I knew that the only place I was going to find it was in God.

Taking my Bible and Science and Health, I would climb a tree or find a quiet spot to read and ponder. I looked for passages about God as Father and Mother. The Lord's Prayer was a favorite. It begins, "Our Father which art in heaven." And Mrs. Eddy explained this verse, "*Our Father-Mother God, all-harmonious.*" Then the verse, "Thy kingdom come" she explained, "*Thy kingdom is come; Thou art ever-present*" (pg. 16). I'd read this prayer over and over until I felt assured that God was my Father and Mother and that God was right there with me.

Another favorite passage from Science and Health was: "Father-Mother is the name for Deity, which indicates His tender relationship to His spiritual creation" (pg. 332). God never divorced or separated from Himself. God was One, undivided. And my relation to Father-Mother was direct. No one was in between God and me. God loved me and cared for me directly, and I didn't need to look to a person to transmit this love from God. This didn't lessen my love for my parents. In fact, it helped me think of God as their Father-Mother. Whatever emotional, personal, or financial needs there were, I knew they would be met by God. And they always were. We were all being parented directly by our Father-Mother.

As we appreciate the contributions of women to our society and the world, I'm expressing gratitude for a bright future for the family. Women's pioneering vision of family as universal and fundamentally spiritual has the potential for transforming society.