

CHOSEN WOMEN

BY SUSAN RALPHE

HOLY DISCIPLES! Twenty-five thousand of them. Women. Packed into Pasadena's Rose Bowl Stadium for two days earlier this summer.

"Chosen Women" gathered together females who love Jesus Christ from around the country and the world for a first-ever, interdenominational women's stadium event.

It felt so right in the muddled 1990s, when what's politically correct and even theologically sound to some seems questionable in the light of God's Word, to attend an event dedicated to individual spiritual renewal to the exclusion of a social agenda.

"There is no sin that is beyond the forgiveness of the cross," said Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of Billy Graham, reminding us that at Pentecost some of the men who had crucified Jesus heard Peter speak and were forgiven.

"Have you ever poured out your life for someone, and they didn't notice? When Jesus was on the cross, he was thinking of other people. Would you stop the pity party and think of someone else?" she asked.

With gestures and pronunciations that brought her father's presence into the stadium, she concluded the first evening with a call to come forward to people who had not accepted Christ into their lives.

Again, shades of her famous evangelist father but to a slow, passionate new tune by the Maranatha Praise Band, "I Come to the Cross"—contemporary Christian, not an old-time hymn or gospel music, yet equally and achingly beautiful to my 51-year-old sensibilities.

Speaker Jill Briscoe said, "Everyone in the church wants to be advisory. That's

what's wrong with us in the church—we don't do windows anymore. What would have happened if Jesus had said, 'I don't do feet'?"

Lecturer, teacher, and author Elisabeth Elliot asked, "You want to become a true disciple without the acceptance of suffering? Taking up the cross is not done once. It's continuing daily duties of actions that are unacceptable to us."

"Chosen Women" originator Susan Kimes, executive director of the Network of Evangelical Women in Ministry, asked for surrender to God.

Taking its cue from her, the predominantly young audience stood, waving flags on the play, except this wasn't football. The collage of paper, sweaters, Kleenex—anything white—clutched tightly, waving hands held high, was a statement of intent.

And a sumptuous visual feast.

"Chosen Women's" basis in Isaiah 42:1 had called me to the conference, and I had come expecting meaning and inspiration.

I got power that shook me, setting me down in a new direction!

Bunny Wilson was the main impetus.

Perfectly dressed in a pencil-thin black suit, hair pulled back sleekly in dark sophistication, she instantly commanded my attention.

Once, Wilson was one of only a few women sales representatives for a national company, she told no-nonsense, nobody-better-mess-with-me stories about herself in a fast-paced, humor-laced format.

Slowly and skillfully, she moved verbally down the field to her main topic—submission.



Women of all generations accepted the challenge to surrender their lives to God



(above) Women hoist white flags from the stands, symbolizing surrender to God. (left) A mom lifts her daughter during one of the worship times.



What? In 1997? That's what we women have been fighting against for almost as long as I can remember.

I didn't want to listen, but I did. At first I was with her, because she

talked about submitting to God and making him the center of our lives.

Okay, too, the idea of submission to people and institutions in authority, for instance government, employers, and pastors.

I knew it was coming. Husbands. Hers. Mine.

Mine? Choke!

Explaining that if a wife communicates freely and fairly with her husband but leaves final decision-making to him, Wilson said that God will step in, even if a husband is going in the wrong direction, and bring the man and the outcome under his control.

It's biblical, she said, noting exclusions for unhealthy, abusive situations.

Wilson was wrapping up her message when she switched to an invitation to anyone who felt that she hadn't been appropriately submissive.

God had seated me next to a woman from another state, who had prayed earlier as she held my hand, confessing that she, a type-A personality, berated her more slow-moving husband for lack of achievement.

My new friend grabbed me. "We're going down," she said. I let her pull me along.

As we stood, praying for power to put submission into our lives, I noticed that hundreds had poured down the aisles in response to this call, while thousands stood in the bleachers, also marking commitment.

Home again, I plowed ahead, characteristically, with my new commitment, before I lost my nerve.

"I've got something to tell you," I said to my husband. He stiffened appropriately.

"You know the political race I've been thinking about. Well, I know you are against my running, so I've decided not to," I said.

His response was a decided departure from his infamous immovability. "Wait a minute, Susan," he said. "Let's not make any decisions about that just yet."

Wow!

I thought I had heard everything, but God was just revving up.

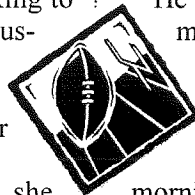
At 4:30 the next morning, my husband woke me to detail a half-hour-long list of things he felt he had done wrong during our marriage, including some that had gotten by me until that moment. He told about wrong attitudes he had had during a critical period of weakness in me when he wished he had supported me but didn't.

He quipped halfway through, "I'm doing 12 steps in 15 minutes."

Maybe.

Or maybe a confession to God that I just happened to hear.

Either way, I know who woke my husband that morning.



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