

An Exegetical Study of Scripture

related to Gender and the Office of Pastor and Elder

2014

A Resource Paper by the Theological Council

for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren



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Preface

In 1988 the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB) adopted and published a position paper: “Role of Women in the Church: Implications of Suffrage.” In 2012 the Theological Council provided a draft paper “in process” entitled, “The Role of Women in the Ministry of the Local Church.” The Theological Council requested and received feedback on this draft paper from congregations, leaders, and pastors. With this feedback the Theological Council prepared a resource paper which is the document that follows this preface. This paper was presented and received in 2014 as a teaching resource for the congregations and their leaders in congregational ministry.

Recognizing that the CLB Statement of Faith limits the ordained office of elder and Minister of the Gospel to called male members, the resource paper functions as a guide for congregations and their leaders, for use in determining roles and responsibilities of male and female lay members in congregational ministry.

The Theological Council presents this paper that gives scriptural basis for the CLB Doctrinal Statement of Faith’s teaching that “the office of pastor and elder is to be filled by men only.” The study gives attention to key passages that speak to the office of pastor and elder. The Theological Council understands this is a teaching resource for the congregations.

Presented to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for his glory and the faithful ministry of the gospel entrusted to us.

Chapter 1

A Brief History of the Role of Women in the Church

INTRODUCTION

One of the perils of being human is that we have a tendency to look at any issue with a perspective focused on ourselves. Our own way of thinking is front and center and way out of proportion to the rest of human thought on an issue. Our theology tells us that sin has, among other things, darkened our minds. The concept of “*simul iustus et peccator*” (at the same time righteous and sinner), which we hold to as Lutherans, includes our minds. We are locked into a constant struggle against this human tendency to elevate our way of thinking to absolute truth. So as we begin to explore the issue of women in ministry in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, we must consider the history of the Christian church’s dealing with this issue. We believe that church history can be a corrective lens for our myopic old nature. We believe also that, in an examination of church history, we can discover the wisdom the Spirit has granted to Christ’s church.

A complete history of women in the church’s ministry is beyond the scope of this paper. Here we briefly show the flow of history. We draw extensively from the essay “Women in the History of the Church,” by William Weinrich in *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*, edited by Matthew Harrison and John Pless.

NEW TESTAMENT

It is obvious that women were very active in the New Testament church. Mary, Mary Magdalene, Tabitha (Dorcas), Priscilla, Lydia, and others are very visible among the followers of Jesus. They were noted, not just as being present, but for their significant role in relation to the ministry of Jesus and his church. The church was clearly enriched by their service. No theology of women that is biblical can ignore the significance Scripture places on women’s lives and their contributions to the propagation of the gospel.

EARLY CHURCH

As we look at early church history we see how the role of women in the church took shape. The church recognized and continued the New Testament model of women’s ministry involvement. Weinrich takes note of three areas of service in which the early church incorporated women in its ministry.

Service Of Prayer And Charity

The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (c. 210 A.D.) speaks of widows as “appointed for prayer”¹ (chapter 11) and the *Didaskalia Apostolorum* (Syria, c. 230 A.D.) similarly identifies

prayer as the widow's primary duty: "for a widow should have no other care save to be praying for those who give and for the whole church."²

Origen, in *Hom. in Luc.* 17, lists widows along with the bishop, elders and deacons. Tertullian, in *On Modesty* 13.4, calls them an order and gives them a place of honor in the congregation. *Didaskalia* shows third-century widows deeply involved in charitable work.³

The *Apostolic Church Order* of fourth-century Egypt calls for three widows to be appointed: "Two of them are to dedicate themselves to prayer for all those in trial and to be ready for revelations... one is to be ready to serve, attending upon those women who are ill."⁴

Apostolic Constitutions from fourth-century Syria show deaconesses serving as intermediaries between male clergy and the women of the congregation. The *Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ* from fifth-century Syria gives deaconesses the duty of bringing communion to pregnant women unable to attend Easter mass (*Test.* II 20.7).⁵

Palladius speaks of one woman from fourth-century Constantinople, Olympias, who "catechized many women."⁶

Service of Mind and Pen

Women also contributed intellectually to the early church. A young woman named Charito was part of Justin Martyr's school in Rome and was martyred with him. Mammaea, the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus, dispatched a military escort to bring Origen to Antioch so she could test his understanding of divine things.⁷

In the fourth century, women of Rome became prominent in the study of Scripture. Two of them, Marcella and Paula led intensive studies of the Bible in their homes. Jerome was their mentor and spoke of their expertise in dealing with the Hebrew of the Old Testament. He called Marcella his "task mistress" because she demanded of him such thorough explanation of Hebrew words and phrases.⁸

Palladius speaks highly of one Melania the Elder:

Being very learned and loving literature, she turned night into day perusing every writing of the ancient commentators, including the three million (lines) of Origen and the two hundred and fifty thousand of Gregory, Stephen, Pierius, Basil and other standard writers. Nor did she read them once only and casually, but she laboriously went through each book seven or eight times.⁹

In the eighth century, Lioba, sister of St. Boniface, was trained in the study of grammar and the other liberal arts. Even princes and bishops often discussed spiritual matters and ecclesiastical discipline with her because of her reputation for wise counsel based on a thorough understanding of Scripture.¹⁰

Educated women in the church have contributed to the volume of Christian literature, both devotional and scholarly. They have advanced the study of Scripture and the Church Fathers; and they also had a part in the production of manuscripts of Scripture.

Service of Spiritual Power and Administration

Women, by virtue of their dedicated service to the church and their attention to the study of Scripture, have also become leaders in the church, people of influence and power. Female martyrs like Blandina, who died in 177 A.D., and Potamiaena, who died about 210 A.D., influenced their world in life and in death, leading many to faith. Female prophetesses, like the daughters of Philip the evangelist in Hierapolis, and Ammia in Philadelphia, were influential.¹¹

In the Middle Ages women like Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, and Caterina Fieschi Adorno of Genoa influenced even popes and princes.¹² Walter Nigg writes of Catherine of Siena, “No man has yet dared to speak to a wearer of the tiara as radically and openly as she spoke to Pope Gregory XI in Avignon.”¹³

Medieval abbesses had power and influence that rivaled that of a bishop as they built churches, ruled monasteries, and demonstrated administrative wisdom.¹⁴ These abbesses had no episcopal power and no power to excommunicate or administer the sacraments, but they “ruled the whole organization in the spirit of one accustomed to command.”¹⁵

Summarizing his look at women in the early church, Weinrich writes,

By selected example we have illustrated the broad and respected contributions that Christian women have made to the church throughout its history. These contributions have been intellectual, diaconal, and evangelical and have carried with them spiritual power and recognized authority....

In fact, women have done almost everything men have, and have done it just as well. The significant exception to that generalization is that until the very recent past, the “office” of teaching and of the sacramental ministry, with the jurisdictional powers this implies, has been reserved for men. Of course, there have been historical anomalies, and there have been sects and peripheral groups that accepted women preachers who may also have offered the eucharist.¹⁶

Tertullian supports this summation. “It is not permitted to a woman to speak in church. Neither may she teach, baptize, offer, nor claim for herself any function proper to a man, least of all the sacerdotal office.”¹⁷

Louis Brighton suggests that the ordination of women has its earliest roots in the Gnostic heresy. This supports Weinrich’s contention that, where women’s ordination was practiced, it was an anomaly characteristic of a sect outside of the main stream of church history. Brighton concludes that “the early church rejected the ordination of women on theological grounds, specifically its theology of God.” He draws a correlation between the Gnostic practice of the ordination of women and its notion of a divine feminine aspect of the nature of God.¹⁸

LUTHER AND HISTORIC LUTHERANISM

Perhaps the most developed theology concerning the calling of women to the pastoral office is found in historic Lutheranism. This theology is rooted in the thinking of Martin Luther. Peter Brunner summarizes Luther's thinking on the subject:

- 1) All Christians have the spiritual power to proclaim the word of God, and that includes women.
- 2) In the assembled congregation, only he may preach the word who has been called to do so by the church.
- 3) Only he may be called who has the ability.
- 4) In determining whether one possesses the ability, spiritual and natural factors must be considered.
- 5) The subordination of the woman to the man, as has been established in the Old Testament, has not been revoked in the New Testament; rather it has been substantiated by the Holy Spirit through the pronouncements of the apostles.
- 6) The Holy Spirit would contradict himself if he allowed women to preach in the services of the congregation as long as there were men present whom he has inspired thereto.
- 7) The *ordo* ["order of creation," as noted in point 5 above], which must be maintained, has a spiritual character; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The moral attitude that corresponds to this *ordo* is propriety. Neither the *ordo* nor its corresponding sense of propriety dare be violated.
- 8) As long as the presupposition holds true that there are men present whom the Holy Spirit has inspired to preach, it is not proper for the woman to be called to exercise publicly the pastoral office.
- 9) One can safely assume that the Holy Spirit, in keeping with his directives in the Holy Scriptures, will see to it that capable men are not lacking. Should this unusual circumstance nevertheless prevail, then—but only then—must women also preach in the services of the congregation.¹⁹

In regard to the ordination of women as pastors, John Kleinig, in *Ministry and Ordination*, takes note of the distinctive Lutheran use of the term *office*, as in *office of pastor*. He writes:

Thus the office of the public ministry is the position of leadership in the church under Christ as head of the church. Those who serve in that office receive their position with its responsibilities and their authority from Christ through the church to lead the church. The power does not derive from themselves and their abilities but from Christ and his word.²⁰

The concept that “the power does not derive from themselves and their abilities” is crucial to the historic Lutheran stance against women as pastors. Kleinig writes further in *Scripture and the Exclusion of Women from the Pastorate*:

1) Christ did not just give his word and sacraments to the church through the apostles, but he also simultaneously instituted the ministry for their administration. The public ministry of word and sacrament is apostolic in origin and character. It has not been invented by the church nor arranged by it to suit its particular social and cultural context. If that were so, the question of its occupancy would be determined purely by sociological factors.

2) When Christ instituted the ministry of word and sacrament, he entrusted it to his apostles as his representatives and leaders in his church. They, in turn, conferred that ministry on those whom they had instructed, and appointed them as leaders in the congregations which they established (Acts 14:23; 20:17-21, 27; 2 Tim 2:1-2; Titus 1:5). Through the apostles and their successors in the apostolic ministry, God the Father (1 Cor 12:28), the Son (Eph 4:11), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28) gave the church its pastor-teachers. *The public ministry of the church is therefore not derived from the priesthood of believers in the congregation. If that were so, all of the baptized would be eligible for it.* [Italics ours]

3) Christ calls people into the apostolic ministry of the word through the church and its leaders. He does not confer that ministry on them by endowing them with special spiritual gifts through his Holy Spirit. *In fact, when the leaders of the church consider whether or not to ordain someone, they are urged to assess the character of the candidate and his faithfulness to the apostolic tradition rather than his giftedness (1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 2:1-2; Titus 1:5-9). If spiritual giftedness were the basic qualification for the ministry, women could not possibly be excluded from the pastorate.*²¹ [Italics ours]

Note how the office of pastor is very carefully separated from both the priesthood of all believers and spiritual giftedness. Historic Lutheranism holds to a view of the office of the pastorate that is very distinct not only from women, but also male laity.

HANS NIELSEN HAUGE AND SCANDINAVIAN PIETISM

In reviewing the streams of history that have shaped us and that give us a broader perspective than our own, we must acknowledge the influence of Hans Nielsen Hauge and Scandinavian Pietism. It is easy to support the exclusion of women from ministry with the very sharp distinction between laity and clergy espoused by Kleinig. While we in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren resonate with the absolute respect for the authority of Scripture that we see in the position of Kleinig and other writers in *Women Pastors?*, we are inheritors of another stream of thought that blurs the absolute distinction between clergy and laity seen in Kleinig and others writing from the perspective of historic Lutheranism.

The Conventicle Act of 1741 in Norway decreed that religious gatherings, conventicles, could be held only under the supervision of the pastor and preferably in his actual presence. According to the prevailing view the pastor was the only person who could correctly interpret the teachings of the Lutheran State Church. He was the mediator between God and man who had the sole right to administer the sacraments, and as a public official, he was accountable to the state for leading his people to a correct understanding of church doctrine.

Hauge, as a lay preacher, openly violated this law, which ultimately led to its repeal. However, he insisted that his followers remain in the state church. This led to a widespread tradition of lay ministry in the “bedehus” (prayer house) alongside the ordained ministry in the church. Further, Hauge led not just in theological but also social reform, teaching that women as well as men should be allowed a voice in assemblies and that men should not frown upon or scorn housework, for example. Hauge never advocated for the ordination of women as pastors, but both his theological and social thinking blurred that absolute separation between clergy and laity that was found in both church and state in his day. Politically and culturally, the religious liberty spawned by Hauge came to include lay participation in the functions of the Office of the Ministry. Again, Haugean Pietism did not advocate for women’s ordination, but its practices and teachings weakened the hard and fast case against it developed by some within historic Lutheranism. So for us, some of the most strident claims of the historic Lutheran position have been toned down by Haugean pietism.

THE MODERN CHURCH

The church’s all but unanimous rejection of women’s ordination did not begin to fracture significantly until the social upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Gregory Lockwood, in “The Women’s Ordination Debate in the Lutheran Church of Australia,” makes the argument that even then, “the desire to ordain women does not really have its starting point in the Scriptures but in sociology and the spirit of the age.”²²

Modern societies all around the world experienced vast social upheaval in that period of time. Gender roles were being questioned. The debate over the Equal Rights Amendment was on the front page, reshaping the way we think about the roles of men and women. The church began listening to these voices and for the first time began developing a theology that gave a place for the ordination of women.

SUMMARY

Our brief review of church history reveals principles we dare not ignore or cast aside:

- 1) The church was very nearly unanimous in its rejection of women’s ordination until the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s. Changes that then began filtering into the church very broadly were socially rather than biblically informed and motivated.

2) While the church historically rejected the ordination of women, it most certainly did not relegate their ministry to “the nursery, the kitchen, and ladies aid.” Weinrich emphasizes, in the headings we have borrowed from him, that their contribution has been a service of prayer and charity, a service of mind and pen, and a service of spiritual power and administration. It seems that when we extend the prohibition against women’s ordination to much broader ministry we create tension centered on this issue.

3) Historic Lutheranism’s distinction between the office of pastor, on the one hand, and spiritual giftedness and the priesthood of all believers, on the other, is a critical point in our rejection of women’s ordination.

4) Our pietistic heritage has subtly softened that distinction for us.

5) All this shows that we need to listen carefully to the voice of sound exegesis of Scripture on this issue.

Chapter 2

Genesis 1-3

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen 1:26-28)

¹⁸ The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” ¹⁹ Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” (Gen 2:18-23)

¹⁶ To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” ¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” ²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. (Gen 3:16-20)

INTRODUCTION

Questions about the relationship between man and woman in Genesis 1-3 have been seized upon by numerous interpreters, scholarly and otherwise. The resulting dissimilar interpretations, as one would expect, have contributed to a divergence of perspectives on the issue of women’s ordination. Genesis 1-3 therefore has been used both *for* and *against* the practice of women’s ordination. As noted by Richard M. Davidson,

One of the basic issues in the discussion of the role of women in Scripture concerns the questions of headship, submission, and equality in male/female relationships. The answers to these questions are foundational to determining whether or not women should be ordained as elders and pastors in the church.¹

Historically, it has been understood that God instituted male headship at creation (Gen 1-2) and reaffirmed it after the Fall (Gen 3). Subsequently, God-ordained male headship, as revealed in creation, has been sanctioned as binding both within the family and the church. This is the formal position of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. Hence, the task at hand is to further examine Genesis 1-3 in order to determine whether the traditional role of male headship is exegetically tenable.

ONTOLOGICAL EQUALITY

The creation account shows that man and woman are created equal in essence. God created “man” (*‘ādām*) in his own image, and in Genesis 1 *‘ādām* refers, generically and corporately, to both male and female:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
(Genesis 1:26-27)

In verse 26, for the first time in Genesis we see that, unlike the other acts of creation, God expresses his desire to create human beings with the plural verb form “let *us* make.” Bruce Waltke states:

The impersonal “let there be” (or its equivalents) of the seven preceding creative acts is replaced by “let us.” Only in the creation of humanity is the divine intent announced beforehand... In these ways, the narrator places humankind closer to God than the rest of creation.²

The parallel statements “*our* likeness” and “*our* image” reveal a profound connection between the plural nature of the godhead and the plural nature of humankind. God creates men and women in such a way that their relationship to one another mirrors the interrelationship of the persons of the Trinity. Accordingly, there is true ontological equality between male and female human beings which is thus a reflection of the ontological equality of the godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, human persons are created equal in essence.

This means, of course, that women are in no way inferior to men; they enjoy full and complete equality. There is no basis here in Genesis for suggesting a superiority-inferiority relationship between men and women. For example, men and women are both given the mandate to rule the earth (Gen 1:28). And as such, any devaluation of women runs contrary to the word of God. As Wayne Grudem writes:

Every time we talk to each other as men and women, we should remember that the person we are talking to is a creature of God who is *more like God than anything else in the universe*, and men and women share that status equally. Therefore we should treat men and women with equal dignity and we should think of men and women as having equal value. We are *both* in the image of God, and we have been so since the very first day God created us... Nowhere does the Bible say that men are more in God's image than women. Men and women share equally in the tremendous privilege of being in the image of God.³

ROLE DIFFERENTIATION

Ontological equality between women and men does not mean however that God did not create women and men without distinctions. God has in fact revealed that women and men are created to fulfill different roles and functions. Perhaps foremost, God created humankind with gender distinction: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Man and woman are created with the intention to remain distinct; they are not identical in terms of their created roles. Ontological equality does not demand uniformity in roles, nor does it mean sameness. Gender distinction comes with role differentiation.

A balanced reading of Genesis 1-3 in the context of male-female relationships reveals at least one paramount role differentiation—the created roles of male "headship" and female "submission." Our text virtually insists that these distinct male/female roles are a part of God's original design and intent at creation.⁴

In fact, the ideas of headship and submission preexist the creation event itself. As Grudem notes:

[T]he idea of headship and submission existed *before Creation*. It began in the relationship between the Father and Son in the Trinity. The Father has eternally had a leadership role, an authority to initiate and direct, that the Son does not have. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is subject to both the Father and the Son and plays yet a different role in Creation and the work of salvation.

When did the idea of headship and submission begin, then? *The idea of headship and submission never began!* It has *always* existed in the eternal nature of God himself.⁵

There are however several factors in the creation account (Gen 1-3) which provide evidence of role differentiation and male headship. First, God created man, the male human being, first, before woman: "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). He is the "firstborn" and is thus regarded with special preeminence. Elsewhere in Genesis, the firstborn is regarded as "my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power" (Gen 49:3). This preeminent status of the firstborn was also accorded to Israel (Ex 4:22), the Davidic line (Ps 89:27) and ultimately to Jesus Christ (Col 1:15-17). Even though we do not usually regard the firstborn in the same manner today, the original readers of Genesis did; it was vitally important to them. Moreover, the apostle Paul regards it as deeply significant. He bases his argument for

role differentiation within the New Testament church on the fact that Adam was created before Eve (1 Tim 2:12-13).

Second, the man is personally named Adam: “So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found” (Genesis 2:20). Here we see the multi-faceted usage of the term “man” (*‘ādām*), a term used in both a general as well as a specific sense. The use of the term “man” (*‘ādām*) in this way should not be viewed as a mere accident of the English translation. God uses the one word “man” (*‘ādām*) to specifically refer to the first man Adam (e.g., Gen 3:17) and to the human race in general (e.g., Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2).⁶

This strongly suggests that “man” (*‘ādām*) has been given the role as head of the relationship. In fact, according to Raymond Ortlund, Jr., Genesis 1-3 reveals

...a series of more or less obvious hints as to [the] doctrine of manhood and womanhood....God’s naming of the race “man” whispers male headship.... God did not name the human race “woman.” If “woman” had been the more appropriate and illuminating designation, no doubt God would have used it. He does not even devise a neutral term like “persons.” He called us “man,” which anticipates the male headship brought out clearly in chapter two, just as “male and female” in verse 27 foreshadows marriage in chapter two. Male headship... does have the virtue of explaining the sacred text.⁷

Third, Adam exhibits headship by naming the animals (Gen 2:19-20), by naming his wife “woman” (Gen 2:23), and later naming her “Eve” (Gen 3:20). There is little doubt that the original readers of these texts would have understood that because Adam was the one doing the naming, he would have been the person in authority. Moreover, Adam’s “naming” mimics the pattern of “naming” performed by God in his creative work. Again, Grudem:

In each of these verses [Gen 1:5; 1:8; 1:10; and 2:19], the same verb, the Hebrew verb *qārā’*, had been used. Just as God demonstrated his sovereignty over the day and night, heavens, earth, and seas by assigning them names, so Adam demonstrated his authority over the animal kingdom by assigning every living creature its name. The original readers would have easily recognized the pattern and they would have seen a continuation of the pattern when Adam said, “She shall be *called* [*qārā’*] Woman.”...[I]n each case the person who gives the name has authority over the person who receives the name. Therefore when Adam gives to his wife the name “Woman,” this indicates a kind of authority that God gave to Adam, a leadership function that Eve did not have with respect to her husband.⁸

Fourth, woman was created to be a helper for the man, not man as a helper for the woman: “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper [*‘ēzer*] suitable for him’” (Gen 2:18). Yet “God emphasizes that she is not to help him as one who is inferior to him. Rather she is to be a helper ‘fit for him’... So Eve was created as a helper, but as a helper who was Adam’s equal. She was created as one who differed from him, but who differed from him in ways that exactly complements who Adam was.”⁹ Furthermore, even though the words

“submission/subordination” or “headship” are not actually used in Genesis 2, this creation account is precisely what the apostle Paul uses as the foundation for his understanding of male headship and female submission in 1 Corinthians 11.

We must however be aware, as Stephen Clark writes, that Eve’s subordination

is a very specific kind of subordination—the kind that makes one person out of two. According to Genesis 2, woman was created to be a help to man, not to be a servant or a slave. She was created to be a complement to him, making a household and children possible. He in turn protected her, provided for her, and considered her a part of himself, a partner in life. He was the head of the relationship, head of a relationship that was “one flesh.”¹⁰

Finally, the idea of male headship and female submission is not a consequence, nor a product, of humanity’s fall into sin (Gen 3). In fact, these distinct male and female roles are existent prior to the creation as well as embedded within the creation. Indeed, every instance in which the New Testament discusses the origin of woman’s subordination to man, it does so on the basis of Genesis 2 and not on the basis of Genesis 3. According to David Kuske:

Genesis 3 describes the disruption and distortion of the order of creation brought about by the fall into sin. The “curse” pronounced in Genesis 3:16 does not institute subordination as such, but it does make this relationship irksome for both parties. Man was woman’s head from the first moment of her creation, but after the fall the will to self-assertion distorts this relationship into dominion and/or independence.¹¹

SUMMARY

On the basis of Genesis 1-3, we conclude that true ontological equality exists between men and women. Both women and men bear the image of God, and are fully equal in essence and worth. This passage also reveals that along with true ontological equality between sexes, men and women are at the same time created as distinct genders with marked role differentiation. Men and women are created by God to fulfill distinct roles, functions and identities. They are indeed not identical in terms of their respective roles.

A fundamental example of such role differentiation is witnessed in male “headship” and female “submission.” This is evidenced by (1) the man’s being created first, (2) the man’s personal name also representing the entire human race, (3) the man’s authority to name the animals as well as the woman, and lastly (4) the woman’s intended role as the man’s “helper.” Therefore, on the basis of Genesis 1-3, male headship and female submission is not only exegetically tenable, it provides a judicious basis for the formal position of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren which maintains that God-ordained male headship is binding both within the family and the church.

Chapter 3

Galatians 3:28

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26-29)

INTRODUCTION

The struggle over human sexual identity and roles has been at the forefront in the church at large for quite some time. We in the CLB, like most North Americans, have been influenced by our cultural history, with its emphases on individual rights and equal opportunity for all. But more than that, as Christians, our understanding of sexuality so crucially informs what it means to be human and, as males and females, to be bearers of the image of God, objects of God's redemptive love, and recipients of God's good gifts. Over the past several decades, this struggle has manifested itself in the church in the debate over the role of women, particularly with regard to questions of leadership and ordination.

"What does the Bible teach regarding the equality of men and women and the roles of women within the church?" Answers to that question generally fall into the *egalitarian* position or the *complementarian* position. Generally speaking, egalitarians believe that men and women are equal in both value and role, so that women may occupy any position of ministry leadership open to men. Complementarians, on the other hand, advocate that God made human beings equal in worth but distinct in role, with leadership roles assigned to women that preclude them from teaching or leading men from positions of authority. Broadly speaking, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren holds the complementarian view, although the specific application of this position may vary somewhat from congregation to congregation.

Egalitarians attach great weight to Galatians 3:28 in setting forth their position. Rebecca Groothuis, in *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality*, writes, "Of all the texts that support biblical equality, Galatians 3:26-28 is probably the most important."¹ According to S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., this passage has been variously referred to as "the feminist Credo of equality," "the locus classicus' for those who believe Scripture does not discriminate between male and female," "The Magna Carta of Humanity," and "The Sexual Liberation of the Apostle Paul."²

Furthermore, the following statement on Galatians 3:28, made by the late F.F. Bruce, English biblical scholar and one of the founders of modern evangelicalism, has been often quoted by egalitarians: "... if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, as in 1 Corinthians 14:34ff ... or 1 Timothy 2:11ff, they are to be understood in relation to Galatians 3:28, and not vice versa."³ Thus, for Bruce and others, according to the hermeneutical rule by which we are to interpret the more obscure passages in light of the clearer, Galatians 3:28 is

regarded as the clearest, and is therefore given priority over other scriptural passages speaking to the issue of equality and the role of women in the church.

Complementarians, on the other hand, contest the notion that Galatians 3:28 is *ipso facto* the clearest biblical passage in this debate. They point to its meaning in the context of Galatians as a whole, its meaning in chapters 3-4, its meaning in the immediate context of 3:26-29, and of course the meaning of verse 28 itself—which they claim egalitarians “lift from its exegetical underpinnings, and set it as a lonely text, a kind of proof text.”⁴ This concern for understanding Galatians 3:28 in its proper context follows Rule #1 in Affirmation 2 of the CLB’s position paper, “Role of Women in the Church—Implications of Suffrage,” published in 1988:

The Bible must be interpreted in its original languages and in its historical and cultural contexts. These contexts include... the immediate passage, the surrounding passages, the entire book in which the passage is found, the other writing of the author, the entire Bible, the culture of the time and the previous history.⁵

An exhaustive examination of Galatians 3:28 according to every aspect of Rule #1 above is beyond the scope of this position paper. What follows, therefore, is an overview of this verse in its own situational context. The purpose is to properly interpret its meaning and its implications for the CLB position on the role of women in the church.

THE CONTEXT OF GALATIANS AS A WHOLE

In order to interpret Galatians as a whole, one must identify Paul’s opponents in Galatia and examine the chief problem caused by their influence in the life of the Galatian Church. It is clear that Paul wrote this letter in response to false teaching, accusing a group of “agitators” (Gal 5:12) of preaching “a different gospel” (Gal 1:6). Richard Hove, based on information gleaned from the text itself, succinctly summarizes the Galatian problem as follows:

Jewish “Christians” personally unknown to Paul, were subverting the true gospel by teaching that Gentiles must submit to the Old Testament law, specifically the identity markers of circumcision (Gal 6:12), calendar observance (Gal 4:10), and rules of table fellowship (Gal 2:11-16), in order to be justified and continue on in their Christian life. In other words, the opponents taught that Jewish works of the law were necessary for the Gentiles to “get in” and to “remain in.”⁶

Overwhelmingly, the primary thrust of Galatians as a whole is to set forth new identity markers for initial and sustained membership in the body of Christ. In short, Paul wrote Galatians to protect and preserve the gospel so that having been justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works of the law, the believer, regardless of ethnic, social or gender distinctions, may also live by the Spirit as a full participant in the salvation set forth in the New Covenant.

THE CONTEXT OF GALATIANS 3 - 4

Again following the comprehensive contextual analysis of Richard Hove, Paul's argument in Galatians 3–4 is founded on the progression of “salvation history,” in which Scripture points to and successively builds on real events and people to reveal how God accomplishes redemption. According to Hove, “one event builds on another, and past events are further clarified and illumined by more recent events.”⁷ For example, in Galatians 3:6 Paul writes, “So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’” In 3:8, Paul argues that the covenant that God had established with Abraham was an early announcement of the gospel to the Gentiles, by quoting Genesis 12:3, “All nations will be blessed through you.” In 3:17, Paul references the law, introduced 430 years after Abraham, noting that it did not “set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.”

Paul progressively builds on salvation history until he powerfully asserts that with the coming of Christ, the fullness of time had arrived. In Galatians 4:4-5 Paul writes, “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.” Thus with the arrival of Christ, the new broke decisively in upon the old. Although this new age was in one sense continuous with the old, it was an obvious and overwhelming upgrade, requiring, according to Hove, that “the old must be reassessed, including issues such as circumcision, the law, Jewish relationships with Gentiles, and how Gentiles relate to the promise made to Abraham.”⁸

Hove concludes his contextual analysis of Galatians 3-4, saying:

It is crucial... to note that Galatians 3:28, far from being an isolated saying regarding oneness or male/female relationships, occurs at a climactic point in Paul's extended description of salvation-history. Galatians 3:28, then, must be interpreted in such a manner as to fit within Paul's larger salvation-historical argument as developed in Galatians 3-4.⁹

How then, does the contextual flow of Galatians 3-4 relate to the gender debate referring to the role of women in the church? Hove, much later in his analysis of 3:28, makes the astute observation:

When the flow of Galatians 3-4 is considered, it is evident that Paul's concern was not with how the many relate to one another or behave in the church or home. His main emphasis was that the many, because of their tie to the One (to Christ), are now heirs of the blessings promised to Abraham.¹⁰

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT—GALATIANS 3:26-29

The immediate context surrounding verse 28, Galatians 3:26-29, serves as a literary *pivot* or *hinge* between the promises made to Abraham (Gal 3:15-25) and those who are now in Christ (Gal 4:1-7). Notice how this section of verses is framed by two clauses, 3:26a, “You are all children of God...” and 3:29, “...then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the

promise.” *Children* and *heirs* are both status terms that result from “faith in Christ Jesus” (verse 26), and “belong[ing] to Christ” (verse 29). Clearly the focus is on one’s relationship to God through faith in Christ. In addition, the phrases in verse 27, being “baptized into Christ” resulting in being “clothed... with Christ,” further establish this emphasis on faith in Christ as the basis of one’s status with God. Finally, the shift in personal pronouns from the first person plural *we* and *us* in 3:23-25, to the second person plural *you* in 3:26-29, and then to the third person singular *he* in 4:1-7, indicates that 3:26-29 is a self-contained argument or unit of thought. It is aimed directly at the *bewitched* Galatians to emphasize that relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ and not works of the law.¹¹

Therefore, it seems convincingly clear that the primary purpose of the immediate context surrounding 3:28 is to shed light on the theological basis for inclusion of people into the body of Christ, rather than to set forth a foundational principle intended to guide the relational behavior of believers already in the body of Christ. That said, Paul’s inclusion of 3:28 in this unit of thought seems more likely to support its overall soteriological emphasis (that this salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus and is available to all without distinction) than it does the suddenly introduced contextual shift toward ecclesiological and sociological emphases on interchangeable roles of men and women in the church (the view universally espoused by egalitarians) and in the home (a view held by some egalitarians).

THE INTERPRETATION OF GALATIANS 3:28

Paul states in Galatians 3:28 (NIV, 1984), “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In order to interpret this verse accurately, it is important first to analyze its structure. Paul employs the negation (“neither/nor”) of three parallel couplets, Jew/Greek, slave/free, and male/female, to make his point. It must be noted that Paul does not tie these couplets together because they are somehow exactly the same. In fact, Ronald Fung, quoted by Richard Hove, says:

Whereas slavery, as a social institution created by sinful men, can and should be abolished, and the Jew/Gentile distinction, which retains its validity as a purely ethnic reality, has been transcended through the reconciliation accomplished by Christ (Eph 2:14-16), the male/female distinction, unlike the other two, has its roots in creation itself and continues to have significance in the realm of redemption.¹²

Yet, as Paul tied them together structurally, it does seem evident that he also intended these couplets to be treated in some way as similar. This similarity becomes apparent in light of the reason that Paul gives for the negation of these couplets—“for [because] you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In other words, all three couplets are intended to accent the fact that all people, regardless of their classification on the spectrum of humanity, are eligible recipients for redemption through a common faith in Jesus Christ, which makes them one.

It is true that both egalitarians and complementarians regard this oneness as a result of the radical shift in moving from an old covenant understanding to the perspective of the new covenant. However, the difference between the two views lies in their answer to this question: “What

difference does moving from the old covenant to the new make in our human relationships?” In view of this shift from old to new, egalitarians interpret verse 28 as *socially explosive*, with an over-arching emphasis on gender equality in one’s worth before God and in roles in ministry. With the shift from old to new also in mind, complementarians interpret verse 28 in line with the surrounding context as *theologically earthshaking*, with an over-arching unity among all believers on the basis of a common faith in Christ, in spite of man-made distinctions, with only implicit and less extensive application to the life and ministry of the church.

The two views differ in their understanding of the extent to which 3:28 addresses the social implications of the unity shared by all believers within the body of Christ. Thus one further question requires attention in this analysis. What is meant by the phrase “you are all one in Christ Jesus” in verse 28? Or more specifically, “In what sense is unity the same as equality?”

The research of Richard Hove is again compelling in this discussion. After a thorough lexical analysis (45 searches) of the phrase “you [plural] are one,” using both biblical sources and all other known Greek literature written from the second century B.C. through the first century A.D.,¹³ Hove found 16 similar expressions, some of which were helpful in understanding Paul’s use of this phrase in Galatians 3:28.¹⁴ For example, the expression “you are all one” is found in biblical passages such as the planter and waterer (1 Cor 3:8); Father and Son (John 10:30; 17:11, 21, 22, 23); and different believers with different gifts (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17).¹⁵ All these passages cite individuals or groups in pairs with differences in roles, yet with at least implied commonalities.¹⁶

In summary, Hove found that the “expression ‘you are all one’ does not provide specifics regarding the relationship between the parts. Rather, the expression simply states that diverse parts share something in common; they are united in some respect, in contrast to their diversity.”¹⁷ Hove writes, “Lexically, the word ‘one’ can be used many ways, but not to denote unqualified equality.”¹⁸ “In Galatians 3:28 the word *one* is used to express unity in distinction to a plurality.”¹⁹ The couplets—Jews/Greeks, slaves/free, males/females—set forth distinctions with each other, but all share one entity in common, Jesus Christ, who serves as the common thread in their oneness.²⁰

To illustrate his findings, Hove poses the question:

What does it mean for two entities to be equal? If a seven-year-old asks his father, “Does a cup of sugar equal a cup of flour?” the father faces a dilemma. If the son’s question means, “Is a cup of one granular material the same volume as a cup of another granular material?” the answer is yes. If, on the other hand, he is asking, “Can I put a cup of sugar in this recipe for a cup of flour, since they are equal?” the answer is no. A cup of sugar and a cup of flour are equal in one respect, but not in all respects. The statement, “A cup of sugar and a cup of flour are equal,” is valid and true, provided one understands the manner in which the two entities are equal.²¹

Thus, on the basis of 3:28 and supported by the entire Galatian context, while Paul assumes ethnic differences between Jew and Gentile, their oneness (or positional equality) was unequivocally established in Christ. The same was true between slave and free in Paul’s cultural

context—diverse in social position, but one (equal) in status and worth through Christ. Finally, even though men and women possess certain nuanced distinctions based on creation, their essential oneness (equality in status and worth) are self-evident in Christ. Paul wishes to leave no doubt as to his point. Oneness (equality) is based on their common status in Christ. However, to suggest that equality in role is a *fait accompli* based on equality of status in Christ is not incontrovertibly substantiated by the context of Galatians, nor is it logically required. Differences among people remain even where equality exists.

Why then does Paul employ the third couplet in 3:28 with its emphasis on gender distinction, which is unique to Galatians in the Pauline corpus? Could it be that Paul had in mind his opponents in Galatia, the Jewish agitators who preached a false gospel? Johnson suggests the possibility that Paul's use of the three specific couplets in 3:28 was in response to the morning prayer of Jewish men, which can be traced back as far as 150 A.D., but may have been in use in its incipient form in Paul's day. In this prayer, Jewish men thanked God that they were "not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman," suggesting their belief that certain spiritual privileges were theirs based on external considerations stemming from their law-based religio-cultural context.²²

Regardless, the central thrust of 3:28 seems consistent with the overall context of Galatians: the ground is level at the foot of the cross and all are eligible for adoption as children of God in Christ.

SUMMARY

Regarding the issue before us as to the role of women in the Church, complementarians affirm that men and women equally share in Christ, and that, as a result, both inherit the promised blessings of the new covenant and enjoy full status as children of God. This implies a gracious, respectful, and self-sacrificial stance toward one another in the body of Christ, with full awareness of equal status and worth, in addition to a comprehensive and appreciative recognition of spiritual gifting and capacity for ministry among both men and women.

However, oneness or equality in Christ, based on an in-depth study of the Galatian context does not categorically establish the conclusion that equality in the sight of God implies role interchangeability among all Christians. Additional study of relevant biblical passages must be undertaken to further clarify the role of women in the life and ministry of the church.

Chapter 4

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:33b-36

² I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. ³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God. (1 Cor 11:2-16)

³³ ...as in all the congregations of the Lord's people. ³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. ³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? (1 Cor 14:33b-36)

INTRODUCTION

These two passages in 1 Corinthians include details that need to be reconciled. Some people see troubling contradictions in the Apostle Paul's teaching within these few chapters. Because of this, some dismiss the teachings found here as culturally relevant to the time of the early church but not applicable to our faith and practice today. Others argue that these passages are unclear and we should only use clear passages to establish our doctrine and practice, dismissing this section all together.

We would argue that even though some of the details of this passage are difficult to understand, the general thrust of Paul's teaching here is clear and well-supported by other passages of

Scripture. The difficulties can be explained when the cultural applications of the teaching are understood in the context of the Corinthians who originally received this letter. Along with supporting passages of this paper, this instruction from 1 Corinthians adds weight to the complementarian view of the role of women in the church.

In chapters 11-14 of his letter, after a word of affirmation in 11:2, Paul goes on to correct and instruct the Corinthian church on how public worship gatherings were to be regulated. Writing to a very proud but dysfunctional church, one filled with divisions and extremes, Paul teaches the proper protocol on the role of women in worship (11:3-16), the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), spiritual gifts and orderly worship (12:1-14:40).

Women, for example, were encouraged to pray and prophesy in the worship gatherings (11:5), but with certain guidelines that demonstrate the differing roles of men and women. Paul summarizes the issues at hand with, "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (14:40). Here our focus is on the two passages that relate to the role of woman in public worship.

THE MEANING OF *HEAD* IN CHAPTER 11

Paul begins his teaching with a clear universal principle: "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (11:3). The word *head* can mean either *source* or *authority*. While some argue that *head* means *source*, we believe that it is better understood as *authority*. Paul uses the same word in Ephesians 5:22ff when he writes, "The husband is the *head* of the wife as Christ is the *head* of the church." The context is that of *submitting* to their husbands, which makes much more sense if we understand the word to mean *authority*. Paul also uses *head* to describe the authority of Christ in that same passage, as well as in Ephesians 1:22, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be *head* over everything for the church..." and in Colossians 2:10, "...and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the *head* over every power and authority." These passages clearly make most sense if *head* is understood as *authority*.

An even more significant argument comes from the parallels that Paul uses in 11:3, "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." When we look at the Trinitarian relationship, it is obvious that Christ is not inferior to God the Father. Rather, the Son willingly submits to the Father's authority. The issue is one of role or function within the Trinity. This is also seen in 1 Corinthians 15:27-28,

For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Just as the head of Christ is God within the relationship of the Trinity, so also is man the head of the woman. This is not a cultural relic from the first century, but rather a universal teaching that comes from how God ordered the universe. This relationship of authority is not tied to Genesis 3—as a result of sin and the Fall—as those with an egalitarian position argue, but it is rather tied

to Genesis 2 in creation *before* the Fall. (See Chapter 2 on the Genesis passages.) God has ordained authority (headship) in creation, according to his sovereignty. This does not make women inferior to man, but establishes a basic role that is seen even in the Trinity. Paul's teaching here is very consistent with what we see in Genesis 1-3.

HEAD COVERINGS

With the basic thrust of the passage stated, we now move into 11:4-15, where Paul applies his teaching to the particular culture of the Corinthian church. The question of what Paul means when he requires women to cover their heads is less important to us today unless we believe it also applies to our culture. Two suggestions have been put forward as to what Paul is referring to about women in public worship: One, that women should wear shawls as a covering of their heads; or two, that women should not wear their hair long and loosely, falling on their shoulders, but should rather follow the cultural custom of piling their hair up on the top of their heads.

The Greek word that is used (*katakalypto*) almost universally means to cover or to hide, so it is most likely a covering for the hair rather than the hair itself. It may be that the long hair requires a head covering, probably a shawl of some kind. In any case, Paul's main point is that women are to adorn themselves in a respectable way according to the current culture of that time. The reason for the head covering is more important to us than the exact cultural form of that day and age.

REASON FOR THE HEAD COVERING

The practice of requiring women to wear a head covering is related to the issue of headship as discussed above. Paul is arguing for women to follow the culturally dictated form (head coverings) in order to demonstrate the proper relationship between man and woman. By covering her head, she shows proper respect and avoids the shame that is associated in that culture with an uncovered head. It is appropriate that she honors the man in this way. It may also be that the head covering distinguishes a woman and a man. It would be shameful for a woman look like or to be dressed like a man. That would be seen as rebellion and independence, something very counter to the spirit of public worship.

Again, while the cultural particularities are less important than the reasons behind them, the issue is that when women pray and prophesy in public worship, they should reflect an appropriate demeanor of submissiveness to male leadership.

Paul elaborates on the relationship between man and woman in 11:7-10 by going back to the creation story where the woman, Eve, came from man, Adam (Gen 2:21-23). This reinforces Paul's argument that man's role of headship comes from the creation account (Gen 2). As he points out in 11:8, "man did not come from woman, but woman from man." This is why even the angels acknowledge the role of headship and recognize the appropriateness of being under authority (11:10).

GENDER EQUALITY

Lest Paul be misunderstood, he inserts verses 11 and 12 to bring a corrective parenthesis: “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman.” It would be easy to get the idea from Paul’s argument (above) that men are superior to women. Indeed, on the part of some, that has been a misguided application of this teaching. However, just because there are roles of leadership, this does not mean inequality. Paul argues in these two verses that men and women are equal and interdependent. This statement comes from after creation, when man is born of woman. Furthermore, “in the Lord,” there is no difference between genders (see discussions on Genesis 1-3 and Galatians 3).

GENDER DIFFERENCES

In the final paragraph of this section (11:13-16), Paul appeals to the Corinthian Christians’ own judgment regarding gender differences. While his discussion of the culturally appointed distinctions may confuse us, his point is that men and women are unique and it is important for the manifestation of that uniqueness to be evident in culturally appropriate forms. For them it was hair length and head coverings for women.

In our culture today, gender is normally evident in how we dress and behave. Even in the U.S. Congress, a setting where men and women equally share political power and authority, men and women are still distinguished by their clothing. When the male President arrives for his State of the Union address, he greets men with a handshake and women with a kiss on the cheek. It is important that God-ordained distinctions between the genders are demonstrated, and if a woman prays or prophesies while appearing as a man, she is violating the order that God put in place from creation.

Paul ends with “we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God” (11:16b). These were universal practices among all of the churches with which Paul was associated. Those who did not follow these practices were demonstrating contentious attitudes.

“WOMEN SHOULD REMAIN SILENT”

Paul seems to introduce contradictory teaching when in 1 Corinthians 14:34 he writes, “Women should remain silent in the churches.” In chapter 11, Paul gave instructions as to the manner in which women pray and prophesy in public worship (1 Cor 11:4ff). Now he seems to absolutely forbid that they speak at all. How can this be?

Gordon Fee, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, tries to solve this apparent contradiction by suggesting that 14:34-36 was a later gloss, added inappropriately as a non-Pauline redactional insertion. There are a few early manuscripts that place these verses after verse 40. Because of that, Fee hypothesizes that since these verses were placed in two different locations (after verse

33 and after verse 40) that they were a later gloss that sought to harmonize the text with 1 Timothy 2.¹

This is highly unlikely, as D. A. Carson points out. The difficult reading is preferable (*lectio difficilior potior*), unless supported by strong textual support, and should be used in favor of the more “convenient” version. Furthermore, most and the best ancient texts include these verses and there is no good reason to assume that they are a redaction.²

If we are to understand this passage within its larger context, it is Paul’s instruction to the church to weigh carefully any prophecies presented to the church. Women are free to prophesy, as is stated clearly in chapter 11. However, Paul’s point is that women do not hold the role or function within the church to evaluate these prophecies. Women are not allowed to exercise the authority that is held by the male elders. This passage, along with the clear teaching in 1 Timothy 2:11ff, demonstrate that the careful weighing of prophecies falls under the church’s magisterial function, held by the elders of the church.

Kathy Keller, in *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles*, points out that Christian worship followed some forms of authority from the Jewish synagogue where the Jewish elders sat in front when a guest or itinerant speaker was invited to read the Scriptures and comment on them. Their role was to affirm or deny what the speaker said. When Jesus, for example, was invited to read Scripture in his hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30), the Jewish elders were immediately offended that Jesus spoke with self-authenticating authority. It was not customary for the speaker to declare the truth of his own words; it was rather the elders’ role to affirm what was said. When Jesus took their role of authority upon himself by declaring the truth, they were upset. They especially did not agree with his application of Isaiah 61 as referring to himself. In their minds, the words of Jesus were blasphemy and he deserved death!³

Elders have traditionally played a key role in CLB congregations. Tim Ysteboe writes, “The model constitution [in 1900] for Lutheran Brethren congregations required the pastor and teacher to attend to the ministry of Word and sacrament while the elders watched over the spiritual condition of the church and made sure that everything was done in accordance with God’s Word.”⁴ For example, it was not uncommon to hear the occasional “amen” from the elders in the congregation as they affirmed the truth spoken by the preacher.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-36, Paul is encouraging all Christians to be involved in the ministry of prophesying, speaking in tongues, and teaching. But he is regulating all of this under the authority structure set up by God at creation. It is men who are given the role of head or authority in the church.

Taking the broader perspective in verse 36, Paul appeals to God’s sovereign plan and its universal application among all those who are reached by his word.

SUMMARY

These instructions written by Paul to the church in Corinth are an important piece of the larger argument for a complementarian position in the role of women in the church. Even though it may introduce some cultural practices that are confusing to us, the overall meaning is clear and is also supported by other relevant biblical teaching.

Chapter 5

1 Timothy 2:11-15

⁸ I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

⁹ I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰ but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. ¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1 Tim 2:8-15, NIV, 1984)

THE HERMENEUTICAL HISTORY OF THE GENDER DEBATE

Before examining this pivotal passage concerning the role of women in the church as it relates to the question of ordination, an introduction to the hermeneutical stage on which this drama has unfolded over the past half-century seems appropriate.

In 1958, a Swedish biblical scholar named Krister Stendahl, published an influential book, *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*. It was translated into English in 1966. Stendahl wrote in the context of the debate over women's ordination in the Church of Sweden. He acknowledged that the real issue was not over the original meaning of the relevant texts, but on the *application* of Scripture to our day. Stendahl advocated moving beyond the practices of the first-century church and following the trajectory set forth in Galatians 3:28. He regarded this as the “breakthrough” statement of the New Testament that should be applied in all its dimensions and all its fullness in order to capture the “new thing” that “transcends even the order of creation” and points to “a higher ideal.”¹

According to Benjamin Reaoch, Stendahl's work gave rise to what is known today as “the redemptive-movement hermeneutic” that forms the backbone of the modern evangelical egalitarian position. Reaoch summarizes the chief problem of this hermeneutic, for those committed to allowing Scripture to speak for itself, with a quote from complementarian scholar, Robert W. Yarbrough:

The problem with Stendahl's method is not that it recognized tension in the Bible. The Reformation principle that Scripture interprets Scripture implies the presence of obscure or ostensibly conflicting passages. The problem lies in the recourse to a distinctly modern consciousness to adjudicate Scripture's meaning. This is to step outside the horizon of Scripture to determine Scripture's significance. It is to imperil the sola scriptura doctrine of the Reformation and similar affirmations of earlier periods.²

Therefore, as we seek to interpret 1 Timothy 2:11-15, our hermeneutical conviction is that although this passage speaks to a particular historical context, it nevertheless, as the word of God,

reveals unchanging and significant truth for the life of the church in all ages. It does not follow and is dangerous to assume that Scripture is subject to an ever-changing “meaning” in different generations.³

THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF EPHESUS

Although 1 Timothy is addressed to Timothy, Paul’s young protégé, it was also intended to be shared with the church at large. Thus, as we interpret 1 Timothy 2:11-15, we must consider as much as possible the beliefs, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes of Paul’s implied readers—the first century members of the Christian congregations among whom Paul was working, primarily in Asia Minor.⁴

What do we know about the culture of first-century Ephesus, the city in which the church Timothy served was located? Peter Kriewaldt makes the following observations:

Ephesus was the economic, political, and religious center of Asia Minor. In that region the social position of women was well developed. There were numerous female doctors there. In politics, women were thoroughly involved in leadership. Female philosophers were known to teach, probably appearing publicly, in the same way as did Paul, who chose a lecture hall in Ephesus as a place of work.⁵

Kriewaldt goes on to mention that “in Paul’s day the Greek and Roman world was awash with priestesses... In Ephesus, the Phrygian cult of Cybele, in which the mother goddess played the central role, was well established, along with its priestesses and priests... Most characteristic of Ephesus, however, was the cult of Artemis. In it, priestesses had a higher position than priests.”⁶

Kriewaldt concludes his cultural analysis of first-century Ephesus by discussing the lack of influence this culture had on Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Thus the social environment was anything but hostile to women priests; indeed, this question was very much in the air. That Paul took a strong stand against the culture of the day is most significant. He did not tailor his message or his commands to fit with the milieu, though this step may have brought easier passage for the Gospel. Paul was not even guided by the Jewish influence in Ephesus... Judaism banned women from learning; Paul made learning a duty for women. Paul also encouraged women to teach other women and children; men could also be taught outside the worship setting (Acts 18:26; 2 Tim 4:19). Many other fields of service were given to women (1 Tim 4:10; Titus 2:3-5). Paul’s only “no” had to do with official teaching in the liturgical assembly.⁷

THE EPHESIAN CHURCH SETTING

The church in Ephesus was beset by false teaching. Certain people from within the church had departed from the true teaching of the gospel, had become quarrelsome and argumentative and were propagating erroneous doctrine. Paul tells us remarkably little about the specifics of the

false teaching, presumably because he knows Timothy is well acquainted with the problem. This means that we cannot be at all sure about the precise nature of this false teaching or, particularly, about its impact on the women in the church. Many, often contradictory, scholarly reconstructions of this false teaching have been set forth, which have yielded varying exegetical interpretations of this passage. Therefore, one must exercise great care in allowing such speculation too large a role in one's exegesis.⁸

That said, as we seek to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, what do we learn about the false teaching taking place in 1 Timothy, based only on what the text does say, that may shed light on 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and our consideration of the role of women in the church? Douglas Moo offers the following observations:

1) The false teachers sowed dissension and were preoccupied with trivialities (1 Tim 1:4-6; 6:4-5; cf. 2 Tim 2:14, 16-17, 23-24; Titus 1:10; 3:9-11).

2) The false teachers stressed asceticism as a means of spirituality. They taught abstinence from certain foods, from marriage, and probably sex generally (1 Tim 4:1-3). In keeping with these ascetic tendencies, they may have also stressed physical training as a means of spirituality (1 Tim 4:8).

3) The false teachers had persuaded many women to follow them in their doctrines (1 Tim 5:15; 2 Tim 3:6-7).

4) The false teachers were encouraging women to discard what we might call traditional female roles in favor of a more egalitarian approach to the role relationships of men and women. This is not stated explicitly anywhere in the pastoral letters. Nevertheless, it is an inference with a high degree of probability for the following reasons:

a) An encouragement to abstain from marriage, which we know was part of the false teachers' program, is likely to include a more general denigration of traditional female roles.

b) The counsel in 1 Timothy 5:14 to young widows "to marry, to have children, to manage their homes"—i.e., to occupy themselves in traditional female roles—is issued because "some have... turned away to follow Satan" (1 Tim 5:15). Since Paul labels the false teaching as demonic (1 Tim 4:1), it is likely that "turning away to follow Satan" means following the false teachers, and that they were teaching the opposite of what Paul commands in 1 Timothy 5:14.

c) The false teaching at Ephesus sounds very similar to the general problem faced by the church in Corinth, based on 1 Corinthians. In both situations, the problem arose from within the church, involved the denial of a future physical resurrection in favor of a present "spiritual" resurrection (see 2 Tim 2:18; 1 Cor 15, coupled with 1 Tim 4:8), and led to incorrect attitudes toward marriage and sex (1 Cor 7; 1 Tim 4:3), toward food (1 Cor 8:1-13; 1 Tim 4:3, although the specific issues are a bit different), and, most importantly, to a tendency on the part of the women to disregard their

appropriate roles, especially vis-à-vis their husbands (see 1 Cor 11:2-18; 14:33b-36; 1 Tim 2:9-15; 5:13-14; Titus 2:3-5).⁹

While nowhere explicitly stated, it seems highly plausible that the problem in both Ephesus and Corinth was rooted in an unbalanced and extreme view of Paul's own teaching. They wrongly understood that Christians were already living in the full form of God's kingdom (see Eph 2:6; Col 2:12; 3:1) and that they had accordingly been spiritually taken "out of" the world so that aspects of this creation—like sex, food, and male/female distinctions—were no longer relevant to them. All this strongly suggests that Paul's teaching about the roles of men and women in church ministry in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is occasioned by the need to counter the false teachers on this point.¹⁰

INTERPRETATION OF 1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15

How Women Must Learn—1 Timothy 2:11

In 1 Timothy 2:11, Paul commands women to "learn in quietness and full submission." The fact is that Paul wants Christian women to learn. This is a point well worth making, for such a practice was not generally encouraged by the Jews. Egalitarian scholars hold the view that the very fact that women were to learn implies that they should eventually teach. One could easily counter this view and say that women were commanded to learn in order to teach women and children, but not men, according to Paul. Moreover, not all women who learn—or men, for that matter—necessarily have the gift of teaching, nor are women or most men necessarily called to an official teaching position within the body of Christ.

However, this is not the main point of verse 11, for it is not that women are to learn, but the manner in which they are to learn that concerns Paul: "in quietness" and with "full submission." The Greek word used by Paul is (*hesuchia*) which can mean *silence* in an absolute sense. However, since women were not strictly forbidden to pray or prophesy in public worship (see 1 Cor 11:5), the NIV translation of *quietness*, in the sense of *peaceableness*, is preferred. Clearly, Paul is concerned that the women accept the teaching of the church *peaceably*—without criticism and without dispute. It seems unlikely that this encouragement would come in a vacuum, and more than likely that at least some women were not learning "in quietness." These women had probably picked up the "disputatious habits" of the false teachers, and thus, Paul finds it necessary to warn them to accept without criticism the teaching of the church relative to submission to God-ordained authority.

Paul uses *hypotage*, the Greek word for submission, which is the same word used in other contexts to teach the appropriate Christian response to those in authority, such as citizens to government and slaves to masters. It also teaches the submission of women to their husbands and, perhaps, to the male leadership of the church. The facts that this verse is directed only to women and that 2:12-14 (and perhaps also 2:9-10) focus on the relationship of men to women in general incline us to think that the submission in view here also speaks to the submission of women to male leadership in the church. The nature of what we know about the false teaching at Ephesus allows us to "surmise that certain women at Ephesus were expressing their 'liberation'

from their husbands, or from other men in the church, by criticizing or speaking out against male leaders.”¹¹ Paul encourages Timothy to counter this tendency by enforcing the principle of submission of the women to the appropriate male leadership in the church.

The phrase “full submission” is the hinge between the command in verse 11, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission,” and the prohibitions in verse 12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” The word that connects these verses is a particle (*de*) that usually has a mild adversative (“but”) force. But, according to Walter Bauer in his lexicon edited by Arndt and Gingrich, as so often with this word, its mild adversative force arises from the transition from one point to another rather than from a contrast in content. Thus, an appropriate paraphrase of verse 11 is: “Let the women learn... with full submission; but [de] ‘full submission’ means also that I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man.”¹²

Prohibitions on the Ministry of Women—I Timothy 2:12

The Word “Permit”

Regarding the phrase “I do not permit,” the question is raised, “Why doesn’t Paul use the imperative mood instead of the indicative; and why the present tense?” Some see this usage as an indication that Paul’s views regarding women in this passage are limited and temporary. Moo’s rejoinder is simply that regardless of the mood of the verb, Paul’s advice to Timothy comes as the authoritative word of an apostle. In terms of tense, Moo argues that all we can conclude from the use of the present tense is that “Paul was at the time of writing insisting on these prohibitions,” and that whether or not it is a prohibition only for a limited time in that particular situation, or for all time can only be determined by context.¹³

The Meaning of “Teach”

In prohibiting women from teaching, what exactly is Paul prohibiting? Is he restricting them from all teaching or only from teaching men? The word *teach* and its cognate nouns *teaching* (*didaskalia*) and *teacher* (*didaskalos*) are used in the New Testament mainly to denote the careful transmission of the tradition concerning Jesus Christ and the authoritative proclamation of God’s will to believers in light of that tradition (see especially 1 Tim 4:11, “Command and teach these things,” also 2 Tim 2:2; Acts 2:42; Rom 12:7). While the word *teach* can be used more broadly to describe the general ministry of edification that takes place through certain kinds of facilitative Bible discussions, singing, praying, and reading Scripture (Col 3:16), the activity usually designated by the word *teach* is plainly restricted to certain individuals who have the gift of teaching authoritatively (see 1 Cor 12:28-30; Eph 4:11). Although teaching in the general sense was not limited to the elder-overseer, it is clear that teaching in the restricted sense of authoritative doctrinal instruction was reserved for ordained elders, and that those who did so to the congregation at large were not to be women.

Egalitarians argue that the New Testament canon of Scripture replaces the first-century teacher as the locus of authority, thus rendering the gender issue a moot point. Complementarians, on the

other hand, respond by saying that Scripture actually replaces the apostles who wrote Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not the teachers who expounded and applied it. In light of these considerations, Moo argues that the teaching Paul prohibits includes what we would call preaching (note 2 Tim 4:2, “Preach the word... with careful instruction”), and the teaching of Bible and doctrine in the church, in colleges, and in seminaries. He adds that evangelistic witnessing, counseling, and teaching subjects other than Bible or doctrine are not prohibited in Paul’s injunction forbidding women to teach. Furthermore, based on Titus 2:3-4, Paul allows women to teach other women, but prohibits them from teaching men as per 1 Timothy 2:12.¹⁴

The Meaning of “Have Authority”

The Greek word *authentēin* is translated “have authority” in the NIV and refers to that which women are not permitted by Paul to exercise over men in the church. In interpreting the meaning of *authentēin*, Moo understands the best translation as “have authority over” but adds the caveat “in the neutral sense of ‘have dominion over,’ not in the negative sense of ‘lord it over.’” Thus, Paul’s prohibition is not simply to say that women should not “lord it over” men in the congregational context—men should not lord it over women either, but that even in a more neutral or benign manner women should not have authority over men. Egalitarians argue that if Paul had intended to say that women shouldn’t “exercise authority,” he would have used the Greek word *exousiazō*. Moo points out, however, that *exousiazō* is only used in three other places by Paul, which hardly puts it in the category of standard vocabulary.¹⁵

Moo then hastens to point out that this prohibition is not given by Paul out of any fear that a woman would ever exercise ultimate authority over a man—only God and Scripture assume that role over any Christian. However, within the God-ordained functional spheres of ruling or governing authority within the church, this activity is scripturally ascribed to the elders or some equivalent governing body (see 1 Tim 3:5 and 5:17) and Paul’s prohibition here excludes women from that role. Moo does not think that Paul’s prohibition excludes women from voting with other men and women in a congregational context since the authority of the congregation, although regarded as the final authority in the polity of many church bodies, is not the same as that which Scripture ascribes to elders. For example, the elders are entrusted with the authority to initiate church discipline and not the congregation as a whole. Furthermore, according to Moo, Paul’s prohibition is not negated by a husband granting his wife permission to have authority over a man, since Paul’s concern is not with a woman acting independently of her husband or usurping *his* authority, but with the woman’s exercising authority in the church over *any* man.¹⁶

Are Teaching and Having Authority Two Activities or One?

Moo understands the most natural reading of the text to include Paul’s prohibiting two specific activities: “teaching” men and “having authority over” men. Some have argued, however, that the two verbs should be taken together, in a grammatical relationship called *hendiadys*, or “one through two,” such that only one activity is prohibited: teaching in an authoritative (*authentēin*) way. Moo agrees that the Greek word *oude* used here in verse 12 does, in general usage, usually join “two closely related items,” but it does not usually join together words that restate the same thing or that are mutually interpreting. Moreover, he contends that sometimes *oude* even joins opposites (see Gal 3:28). He further argues that elsewhere in 1 Timothy, when discussing the

work of elders in the church (3:2, 4-5; 5:17), Paul treats the two tasks, teaching and exercising authority, as closely related but distinct. Moo thus concludes that "...in 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul prohibits women from conducting either activity... in relation to men."¹⁷

Are Only Husbands and Wives in View?

A final exegetical consideration in verse 12 involves the usage of forms of the Greek words *gyne* and *aner*. The difficulty lies in the fact that these words can describe both the marital relationship (wife/husband) and the broader gender relationship (woman/man). If Paul is using these words in the former sense, then he is only prohibiting women from teaching and having authority over their own husbands, not the teaching or exercising of women in general over men in general.

Moo argues that the wording and context both favor the broader reference of Paul prohibiting women in general from teaching or having authority over men in general. If Paul's prohibition was intended for wives not to teach or have authority over their husbands, we would have expected him to use a definite article or possessive pronoun with man: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over *her* man." In Ephesians 5:22, Paul makes a similar distinction: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own [*idiois*] husbands..." Moo cites the context of 1 Timothy 2 to bolster his point, stating "it is not only husbands who are to lift holy hands in prayer, but all the men (1 Tim 2:8), and not only wives who are to dress modestly, but all women (1 Tim 2:9-10). Therefore, the prohibitions of verse 12 are applicable to all women in the church in their relationships with all men in the church."¹⁸

The Basis of the Prohibitions: Creation and the Fall—1 Timothy 2:13-14

Herein lies the crucial question: Do Paul's prohibitions in 2:12 apply to the Christian church today? Moo says we can't simply assume that they do, any more than greeting other Christians with a "holy kiss" (see 1 Cor 16:20) is required in modern times. A warm handshake, or in certain situations, an appropriate hug, seem more acceptable in our culture. That said, neither can we assume that the prohibitions in verse 12 don't apply today just because they were specific and localized circumstances taking place then. As a matter of fact, most of the New Testament letters emerged out of specific and localized situations where instruction or correction was needed. For example, the threat to the doctrine of justification was specific and localized in Galatia, prompting the writing of Paul's letter to the congregations there. Yet the church believes and teaches justification today. Moo's position regarding 1 Timothy 2 is that the circumstances give rise to Paul's teaching but do not by necessity limit it.¹⁹

There have been many attempts to reconstruct circumstances in order to limit Paul's prohibitions to the first-century church in Ephesus, but two are most popular:

- 1) Paul is addressing only women who have succumbed to the false teaching at Ephesus and were in fact spreading this false teaching to others. Much like Eve falsely taught Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit (see 1 Tim 2:14), these women spread false teaching mainly because they were under-educated and ill-trained.

2) Paul is requiring only conformity to cultural conceptions of the woman's role current in that time and place, which due to modern advances in the status of women in our culture, renders Paul's prohibitions passé at best, and unjust at worst.

Moo's response to the first reconstruction is that the false teaching taking place in Ephesus certainly does give rise to Paul's prohibitions, but his refutation of the false teaching regarding the place of women vis-à-vis men would be the same in any church context, not just to the church in Ephesus where an actual situation prompted him to write about it. Moo also contends that there are sufficient grounds, based on a thorough study of 1 Timothy (and other Pauline passages) to warrant this conclusion without the need to "import ideas that are not plainly present."²⁰ Furthermore, there is no evidence in the pastoral letters that women were teaching the false doctrines prevalent in the Ephesian church, and thus incurring Paul's censure.²¹

Regarding the second reconstruction—that Paul's prohibitions in verse 12 only addressed the current issue of women succumbing to false teaching in Ephesus—there is a more serious problem to contend with. That problem is 2:13, which speaks to the universality and timelessness of Paul's prohibitions through an appeal to the order of creation. In verse 13, Paul emphasizes that Adam was created "first" (*protos*), "then" (*eita*) Eve. Paul takes pains to spell out this order of creation based on Genesis 2, to demonstrate that his position regarding the roles of men and women in the church was not based first and foremost on current circumstances in Ephesus, but on a timeless and foundational theological principle, i.e., the headship that man is to have over woman. Furthermore, by rooting the prohibitions of verse 12 in creation (verse 13), it shows that Paul does not consider these restrictions to be the product of Adam and Eve's fall into sin (verse 14) and presumably, therefore, to be phased out by redemption, but rather that they are God's plan for church leadership universally and in perpetuity. As Moo explains, "The woman's being created after man, as his helper, shows the position of submission that God intended as inherent in the woman's relation to the man, a submission that is violated if a woman teaches doctrine or exercises authority over a man."²²

In Paul's teaching, 1 Timothy 2:14, properly understood, follows nicely on the heels of 2:13 without denigrating women, which a cursory reading could seem to suggest. Verse 14 says, "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." Is Paul seeking to imply that all women, like Eve, are more susceptible to being deceived than are men, and that is why they should not be teaching or having authority over men? Although it's not an impossible interpretation, Moo thinks it is unlikely and not in keeping with the context. Would Paul the apostle, who highly valued women on his ministry team, at this juncture deviate from his central point to take an unloving pot-shot at women in general? We think not! Benjamin Reaoch astutely points out regarding verse 14 that we cannot take Paul's statement that "Adam was not deceived" in an absolute sense. He notes that in Romans 5:12, responsibility for the fall is placed squarely on Adam (also 1 Cor 15:21-22). This, along with the "first, then" order of verse 13 makes it likely that the same order is implied in verse 14. In other words, according to Reaoch, "It is not that Adam was not deceived, but that he was not deceived first."²³ The serpent, cunning as he is, approached the helpmate rather than the God-ordained leader in the relationship.

But suppose, as some do, that Paul's reference to Eve's deception in verse 14 was intended specifically for the women that were being led astray by false teaching and in some cases teaching falsely themselves. If that were the case, one must then ask whether Paul would care only that these women not teach false doctrine to men (cf. verse 12). The answer is obvious. Paul would not only have restricted these women from teaching men, he would have restricted them from teaching anybody! Moo concludes:

More than likely, verse 14, in conjunction with verse 13, is intended to remind the women at Ephesus that Eve was deceived by the serpent in the Garden (Gen 3:13) precisely in taking the initiative over the man whom God had given to be with her and to care for her. In the same way, if the women at the church in Ephesus proclaim their independence from the men of the church, refusing to learn "in quietness and full submission" (verse 11), seeking roles that have been given to men in the church (verse 12), they will make the same mistake Eve made and bring similar disaster on themselves and the church.²⁴

The Role of Women Encouraged—1 Timothy 2:15

Verse 15 is notoriously difficult to interpret and isn't decisively important in the interpretation of 2:11-14. However, it likely sheds some light on the passage as a whole. It says, "But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

One interpretation is simply that Paul is promising women physical safety in childbirth. However, this would be an unusual meaning for the Greek word *sozo* which elsewhere always refers to salvation in a theological sense, and does not fit well with the qualifiers in the rest of the verse about continuing in "faith, love and holiness with propriety." A second interpretation links more closely the material in verses 14-15, if we consider Eve's deception, and the consequent curse in verse 14, as forgiven through the promise of future salvation through her "offspring" (Christ) as mentioned in Genesis 3:15. This suggests that the "women" in 1 Timothy 2:15 would be saved not through their own childbearing, but through the most significant birth of all, the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Although this view does more justice to the context, we are left questioning whether a reference to the birth of Christ is naturally denoted by the word "childbearing" in verse 15.

Moo suggests a preferable view of verse 15 "as designating the circumstances in which Christian women will experience their salvation—in maintaining as priorities those key roles that Paul, in keeping with Scripture elsewhere, highlights: being faithful, helpful wives, raising children to love and reverence God, managing the household" (cf. 1 Tim 5:14; Titus 2:3-5).²⁵ Obviously, bearing children is not every woman's privilege, or in some cases even her choice, nor is it a prerequisite for salvation. But Paul here apparently mentions one central role of women specifically as an example—bearing and raising children—as a way of urging women to adopt appropriate female roles in general. This is in contrast to the advice of the false teachers who were recommending wholesale abandonment of more traditional family roles in favor of teaching and leadership roles within the church.

SUMMARY

The issue boils down to this: Has the Christian church's historical prohibition of the ordination of women simply been the product of cultural conditioning and a misinterpretation of Scripture for the first two millenia of her history? And have we finally, in the past century, been set free? Or has Scripture set forth timeless general restrictions on the ministry of women in the church that still apply today?

This paper has sought to demonstrate that Scripture imposes only two such restrictions: Women are not to teach Christian doctrine to men; and they are not to exercise authority directly over men in the church. The implications of these two restrictions for the ordination of women, as we now understand the meaning of ordination in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, are clear for all times, places, and circumstances.

Appendix

RESOURCES ON THE ORDINATION QUESTION

Ordination

People argue that the New Testament does not speak of ordination. That is true if we turn to the modern translations of the New Testament, because none of them uses the verb *ordain* or the noun *ordination* as a technical ritual term. Instead, they speak about “the laying on of hands” (1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6). But it is not true if we turn to the King James Version where it is used quite deliberately and technically in Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. The English verb *ordain* comes from a rather nondescript Latin word which means “to appoint” a person to do a task. This Latin word was used in the early church to translate the Greek verb *cheirotonein*, “to stretch out a hand.” This word was used in the Greek city states for the election of a person communally in a public assembly by the raising of hands or by ballot. That may be the sense of the word in 2 Corinthians 8:19. But in Acts 14:23 it refers to the choice of presbyters by Paul and Barnabas, rather than by the congregations that they served. From its use in Acts 14:23 this rather general word became a technical ritual term in the early church, as is shown by the textual addition to Titus 1:9, the subscriptions to 2 Timothy and Titus, and its use in Didache 15:1 for the choice of bishops and deacons. It seems that the early church deliberately chose this secular term because it had no pagan religious connotations.

Even though the term ordination had by the time of Reformation acquired hierarchical connotations of order, rank, and status, it was not rejected by the Reformers, but was used in two ways. On the one hand, it was used rather generally for the whole process of making a person a pastor, from the initial self-presentation for service to the installation in a congregation. On the other hand, it was also used more narrowly for the liturgical act by which candidates were received, appointed, and commissioned as pastors.¹

History of Leadership in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren

History, both secular and scriptural, is full of examples of “elder” leadership. Both the Old and New Testaments give many examples—elders in the Old, and disciples, apostles, and elders in the New.²

Haugeanism and the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Free Church both influenced the CLB giving it much of its tradition and form. Lay ministry and a sense of mission were the emphasis of the former, and freedom from state control and living faith the emphasis of the latter. The Free church believed that *teaching* and *ruling* elders were two types of ministries within the eldership and that the form of government should be one in which the pastor does not have absolute authority.³ Tim Ystebøe connects this with the fledgling CLB, “In 1900, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren was formed and it adopted a constitution consistent with the ideals of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Free Church.”⁴

Episcopalian, Presbyterian or Congregational styles of leadership were possible choices for leadership models.⁵ In the CLB, “synodical government is Congregational and congregational government is modified Presbyterian.”⁶

“There is an elder board or church council, but there is no higher authority. Pastors and elders together constitute the church council, and the congregation ‘commits its spiritual direction’ to this group of men.”⁷

K. O. Lundeberg, E. M. Broen, M. E. Sletta, and D. A. Erickson all wrote of a lack of distinction historically in the roles of pastor and elder (teaching and ruling elders) and the importance of the gifting of the Holy Spirit for offices in the church.⁸ Lay preaching was a common practice in the first 35 years of Lutheran Brethren history.⁹ According to Erickson, elders and pastors were to have “mutual love and respect for each other” and at the same time elders would “oversee the life and work of the pastor.”¹⁰ Ysteboe concludes, “At mid-century [1950], there was still a sense in CLB congregations that the elders were the leaders of the congregation. Pastors came and went, but elders remained.”¹¹

Among the distinctives of the Lutheran Brethren is the belief that the church’s spiritual oversight is the responsibility of elders who are not just elected, but also ordained to the office of elder. This is reflected in the Constitution and By-Laws of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America:

Christ is the Head of the Church. Through His Spirit he guides the Church by His Word. According to His Word, He bestows upon the Church gifts of grace necessary for the effectual performance of its various ministrations. Among these ministrations we especially emphasize the office of the pastor, the teaching and governing elders, evangelists, teachers, and deacons...¹²

The pastor shall particularly attend to the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. He shall also perform such other services within the church as are required by the Word of God.¹³

The elders shall support the pastor, watch over the spiritual condition of the congregation, and insure that the work is done in accordance with the Word of God.¹⁴

Pastors and elders shall be dedicated and installed according to the ritual of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America.¹⁵

Together, these officials constitute the church council, and to this body the congregation as a whole commits its spiritual direction.¹⁶

Leadership in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren Today

Dr. Eugene Boe believes that agreement with the CLB Statement of Faith and awareness of spiritual giftedness is especially helpful in discerning who is best suited to lead a congregation in its planning. Regardless of who leads or facilitates the process, it will be the church council that will eventually discern together the will of God for the congregation. Rev. Joel Egge believes that the role of elders is influenced by one’s understanding of the congregation, which can be considered an institution and/or a community. He feels that the New Testament churches functioned more like communities, whereas now most churches function more like institutions.

In Egge's view, in the Lutheran Brethren a team leads a congregation, the team consisting of pastor(s) and elders. Like Boe, Egge believes that the team is best led by the pastor or by the elder best endowed with the spiritual gift of leadership.¹⁷

We live in a time of unprecedented change. Changing values, relationships, and technology are all having an effect on the way we interact. Attitudes toward education, work and faith are changing our priorities. For the CLB, there is an additional change making itself quite apparent. Most congregations are morphing from the typical historical Lutheran Brethren congregation made up primarily of Norwegian immigrants of a shared heritage and mindset to congregations made up of a diverse group in every respect. After decades of "safety" within their common expectations and dreams, the doors are beginning to open and traditions are being challenged. "Will we be able to revise our vision and modify our strategies when necessary to address this changing future?"

We encourage leadership to release women to lead to the highest extent our theology allows. We need to re-release lay persons to lead at all levels to use the gifts that God has dispersed throughout his church.

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Endnotes

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