

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH



Scriptural Principles and
Ecclesial Practice



A Report of the Commission
on Theology and Church Relations of
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
September 1985

Abbreviations

AC—Augsburg Confession

FC—Formula of Concord

Ep—Epitome of the Formula of Concord

SD—Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

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Citations from The Luthern Confessions are taken from *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by T. G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

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Introduction

The twentieth century has witnessed a veritable revolution in the roles of women and men. To some degree this revolution is attributable to rapid societal and cultural change. For example, the continued process of urbanization has shifted the population from the farms with their relatively clear and traditional roles for women and men, into the increasingly bureaucratized cities, where traditional identities have become blurred. This transition and its concomitant upheavals have had some positive results. More opportunities are becoming available to women now than ever before. Their unique contributions to society are increasingly recognized. At the same time, dramatic changes in male-female roles have also produced confusion and uncertainty.

Perhaps this confusion and uncertainty has affected the church as much as any other institution. In the wake of the feminist movement, the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment, and related sociological and political developments, various Christian denominations have become involved in discussions of the role of women in the life of the church. Should churches ordain women into the pastoral office? Should church polity be rewritten so that women may serve as elders or deacons? Is there any ecclesiastical position from which women should be excluded in principle? These and other similar questions have been prominent on the theological agenda of numerous church bodies.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has not been immune from these developments. Overtures to past conventions of the Synod, inquiries received by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, and discussions in various forums reveal the need for careful study of this matter. In response to a specific request from the Synod that it study “the role of women in the church,” the CTCR has therefore prepared this document in the hope that it will assist members of the Synod in their consideration of this important topic.¹

¹ A call for increased participation of women in the corporate life of the church led to the appointment in 1973 of the Task Force on Women (1973 Res. 2-49 and 4-47). This Task Force continued its work through 1977 and submitted to the Synod detailed reports on ways in which women may more fully participate in the life of the church. The 1977 convention adopted three recommendations of the Task Force. One of the recommendations was that the responsibility for studying the issues relating to women in the church be assigned to the CTCR (Res. 3-06). In

As it prepared this study, the Commission was acutely aware of the difficulties attending an examination of this subject in a report of limited scope. A vast body of literature on the many aspects of women's involvement in the mission of the church exists, which continues to expand in the light of contemporary discussion. Moreover, fundamental issues relating to principles of Biblical interpretation are involved in the study of this question. The extent to which the Bible reflects the culture and customs of its own time and the relationship between Scriptural principles and their contemporary application are important examples of issues about which there is disagreement. Thus, the Commission acknowledges at the outset that not all issues ultimately pertaining to this subject can be addressed.

This study is comprised of three basic parts: first, a survey of the Biblical witness to the involvement of women in Israelite culture and worship, in the ministry of Jesus, and in the life of the apostolic church; second, a distillation of the primary principles which the Scriptures present concerning women in the church; and third, a discussion of the application of these principles in concrete matters of practice today. This report is not designed to be exclusively a study of the question of ordaining women to the pastoral office. While much of the content will impinge on that issue and while such a specific study may be desirable at some point in the future, the issue of women's ordination is not the focal question here. Similarly, the Commission does not intend this document to be a reworking of its 1968 report on "Woman Suffrage in the Church." Nor is the present document a study of male-female relationships in general

1981 and again in 1983 the Synod asked the CTCR to give priority to this study. In 1984 the President of the Synod appointed the Commission on Women and asked it to devote itself to six tasks: 1) review material prepared by the previous task force and evaluate the extent to which the recommendations have been implemented in the Synod; 2) gather additional data on the current involvement of women in various aspects of synodical and congregational life; 3) review current emphases and dimensions of the women's movement in society as these affect the church; 4) consult with the CTCR and advise it as it prepares a theological study on the service of women in the church; 5) recommend appropriate service and ministry opportunities for women at all levels of church life; and 6) explore the possibility of creating a network of forums on women's activity in the church through the districts of the Synod. Although work of the Commission on Women, including a Synodwide survey of the service of women, has not yet been completed, the CTCR has benefited from several consultations with the members of the Commission on Women. In the interest of sensitizing itself to the concerns of women in the Synod, the CTCR has also shared preliminary drafts of this report with other groups and individuals of the Synod (Council of Presidents, seminary faculties, college presidents, the CTCR's Social Concerns Committee, and staff at the International Center).

societal or marital contexts, however important these may be.² Rather, the Commission seeks in this report to outline and integrate two themes clearly present in the Word of God: 1) the positive and glad affirmation of woman as a person completely equal to man in the enjoyment of God's unmerited grace in Jesus Christ and as a member of His Body, the church; and 2) the inclusion of woman (as well as man) in a divinely mandated order which is to be reflected in the work and worship life of the church. The proper correlation of these two Biblical teachings is crucial if the church's thinking on this topic is to be determined by Holy Scripture and not by the dictates of cultural demands. (John 8:31)

² The Commission included a discussion of male-female relationships within the context of marriage as a major part of its 1981 study on "Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective." Material from that study especially pertinent to the present report includes "The Relational Purpose of Marriage" (pp. 13-17) and "Headship Within Marriage" (pp. 29-32).

I. Women in the Scriptures: An Overview

The formulation and interpretation of principles regarding women in the church today must be carried out against the backdrop of the picture of women presented in the Scriptures. In both the Old and the New Testaments women are spoken of with deep respect for their personhood and for their vital work in the Kingdom of God. The commonplace contention that the Bible demeans women simply cannot be sustained if one takes seriously the Scriptures' recurrent affirmations of the service of women, who stand before God side by side with men as recipients of His gifts of grace.

A. The Old Testament

While Israelite culture was patriarchal in its structuring of family and clan, the Old Testament gives a prominent place to the character, leadership, and service of many women (indeed, two of its books—Ruth and Esther—are named for women). This truth is especially evident in the giving of the titles “prophetess” and “judge” to women and in the participation of women in individual and family worship of God.

1. The Old Testament prophet possesses a number of unique characteristics, but technically a prophet is one through whom God speaks. The Hebrew word for prophet is *nabi*, and its feminine form is *nebiah*. This term is used to refer to three specific women.³

- a. Miriam, the sister of Moses, was called a woman prophet when she sang a victory praise of God at the time of the Israelites' escape from Pharaoh's army (Ex. 15:20-21). That she was one through whom God spoke is also clearly implied in Num. 12:1-2. Although there is little indication of her work beyond these passages, she is referred to as a leader on a par with Moses and Aaron in Mic. 6:3-4.
- b. Deborah, in Judges 4:4, is called a prophetess and also a judge in Israel. In the latter role Deborah exercised decisive leadership. When Israel was severely oppressed she called forth the will in

³ The term for “prophetess” is used for the false prophetess Noadiah in Neh. 6:14, and for Isaiah's wife in Isaiah 8:3. In the case of Isaiah's wife, the word likely means “the wife of a prophet.” *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., s.v. “Prophetess.” Cf. George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Book of Isaiah*, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1949), p.144.

the men of Israel to fight for freedom. The Israelite general said he would fight only if she led the way. Deborah gave the command to attack, and victory was secured (Judges 5). However unusual it may or may not have been for women to serve in major civil roles, the example of Deborah shows a woman raised up by God to govern and to deliver His people.

- c. The third woman given the title of prophetess was Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). When the high priest at the Jerusalem temple told Josiah he had discovered the book of the law of the Lord, the king sent his emissaries to find out what further message God had for him. They sought out Huldah who was well-known for her commitment to God and for her ability to speak for God. She told Josiah very clearly and specifically God's message.

2. In private and public worship in the Old Testament the participation of women went beyond the hearing and obeying of the law. They were free to approach God in prayer just as the men (Hannah, 1 Sam. 1:10; Rebekah, Gen. 25:22; Rachel, Gen. 30:6, 22). God responded to their prayers (Gen. 25:23; 30:6, 22) and appeared to them (Gen. 16:7-14; Judges 13:3). They were also expected to take an independent part in bringing sacrifices and gifts before God. (Lev. 12:6; 15:29)

Women appear to have had certain circumscribed roles in the public worship, too. For instance, Hannah approached the sanctuary (1 Samuel 1). Women ministered at the door to the tent of meeting (Ex. 38:8), and while it is not clear what form this service took, it did play some part in the worship.⁴ Women also participated in the great choirs and processions of the temple (Ps. 68:25; 1 Chron. 25:5-7; Neh. 7:67). Although they were not permitted to serve as priests, this is never interpreted to mean that they were less than full members of the worshipping community.

In sum, although the Old Testament reflects the patriarchal nature of the society in which it was written and with which it is concerned, the relationship of women to their fathers and husbands did not stand in the way of their joyful participation in the worship life of God's people. In the words of Biblical scholar Mary J. Evans, "They had a significant role to play . . . not only in their role as mothers and in the home, but also as individuals, and they were not barred from leadership when the circumstances required it."⁵

⁴ Clarence Vos, *Woman in Old Testament Worship* (Delft: Judels and Brinkman, 1968), pp. 164-67.

⁵ Mary J. Evans, *Woman in the Bible* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), p. 32.

B. The Ministry of Jesus

The New Testament manifests the same genuine appreciation and respect for women. Jesus' ready acceptance and inclusion of women in His life and work stands in sharp contrast to the disdainful and condescending attitudes toward women of so many of His contemporaries. He saw them as persons to whom and for whom He had come into the world. This can be seen in the interactions of the Lord with individual women, in the prominence of women in His parables, and in the actual participation of women in His ministry.

1. The encounters of Jesus with women illustrate both His willingness to associate with them and also His respect for their intelligence and faith. His conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-30) shows His willingness to dismiss conventions of men which stand in opposition to His purposes. Normally a Jew would not address a Samaritan and normally a man would not speak to a woman in public. However, the Lord's conversation with this woman shows how He disregards these conventions of society in order to communicate about Himself and the Kingdom. The Samaritan woman emerges in this conversation as a perceptive and articulate individual, fully capable of engaging in theologically profound discourse. Certainly, if Jesus had considered this woman to be an inferior being and unable to speak of spiritual matters, He would not have spoken to her in concepts presupposing prior knowledge (e.g, the concept of "living water," John 4:10). Nor would He have responded to her question about the place of worship (4:21). Her sex did not affect the manner of His approach to her. It is instructive to note that this woman is the first individual to whom Jesus, in the Johannine account, clearly reveals that He is the Messiah. She is also the first messenger of that revelation outside the circle of disciples (v. 29). The witness role of the Samaritan woman is emphasized by John. He says that the villagers "believed . . . because of the woman's word." (John 4:39)

The conversation between Jesus and the Canaanite woman provides another example of the Lord's respect for women (Matt. 15:21-28). In this exchange it was the woman's faith in Him as the Messiah that Jesus perceived and that moved Him. She therefore receives a place in sacred history as the first Gentile convert.

Many other encounters of Jesus with women demonstrate His striking concern for their faith and His brotherly love for them. Women were seldom pictured in Rabbinic literature as exemplifying

trust in God or as possessing theological acumen. But Jesus sees women as exercising such virtues (the encounter with the repentant woman at the home of Simon, Luke 7:36-50; the woman who suffered with an issue of blood, Mark 5:25-34). Further, although the title “son of Abraham” was a standard phrase used throughout Hebrew and Jewish literature to refer to a member (male) of the chosen people, Jesus calls the woman he heals on the Sabbath “daughter of Abraham” (Luke 13:10-17). For Jesus, women were to be valued highly; He was interested in them as persons and received them as full-fledged participants in the blessings of the people and covenant of God. Their sex was an integral part but not the totality of their personhood.

2. The parables which Jesus tells presuppose, and thereby reveal, His acceptance of women as treasured members of the human family. They present women in ordinary activities which dramatically illustrate various points which Jesus wished to make. A woman mixing leaven in flour provides insights into the nature of God’s Kingdom (Matt. 13:33). A woman looking for a lost coin illustrates the concern of God for lost sinners (Luke 15:8-10). The wise and foolish bridesmaids are examples of the need for everyone to be prepared for the unexpected moment of Christ’s return (Matt. 25:1-13). A woman appears in a parable of Jesus to illustrate an aspect of the Kingdom of God such as perseverance in prayer (Luke 18:1-8). Thus, in dramatic contrast to His contemporaries, who frequently avoided mentioning women at all, Jesus often refers to women in His parables and sayings, always in a positive way.

3. Women were not only recipients of the Lord’s ministry. St. Luke reveals that Jesus on numerous occasions gladly received the help and ministry of women (Luke 8:1-3). St. Mark attests that some women followed Jesus and ministered to Him when He was preaching in Galilee (Mark 15:40-41). Women were a part of His close circle of friends and companions. The verb *diakoneo* (to minister or serve), from which the English word “deacon” is derived, is used to describe what these women did in addition to “following” Jesus.⁶

The inclusion of women among His close companions in a significant way witnesses to Jesus’ positive attitude toward them. While it was not out of the ordinary for rabbis, for example, to receive support from women of means, it was most unusual that their followers should include women. But Jesus’ attitude towards women encouraged them to take the extraordinary step of following Him, a

⁶ See discussion on pages 10 , 11 .

striking breach of the custom of the day.

When all the disciples except one had abandoned Jesus, women accompanied Him to the place of His crucifixion. They were present at His burial. These same women found the empty tomb, met the resurrected Christ and angels, and reported the news of His resurrection to His unbelieving disciples (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-11; John 20:1-2, 11-18). None of them, however, is included among the number of the apostles; they were parallel to the disciples as traveling companions, but they were not included among the twelve.⁷

Significantly, Jesus does not say anything about women having a specific role in life. He issues no commands that apply to women only. Rather, the value Jesus gives to women is displayed in His relationship with them. In these relationships He affirms their personhood and manifests a noticeable concern that they hear His message and understand it. He relates to them with love and respect. He speaks to them, teaches them, heals them. He never speaks of them in a contemptuous way and never treats them as if they were unimportant. Jesus never gives the impression that only men were “full Israelites.” He regards women as One whose message and concern is for the whole people of Israel. Women stand alongside men as recipients of the universal invitation to the Kingdom through Christ. (Matt. 12:50)⁸

C. The Apostolic Church

Women were present in the upper room praying prior to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples (Acts 1:14; cf.

⁷ This is clear not only from the negative fact that no call or commission is reported to have been given them, but from the sentence structure itself of Luke 8:1-3. Three groups are distinguished, “Jesus,” “the twelve with him,” and “some women.” These women do not relate to Jesus and to His ministry in exactly the same way as do the Twelve. The women “served” them from “their own resources.” The service of the women is explicitly that of material support. Also the plural “them” indicates that the Twelve were, with Jesus, recipients of the women’s administrations. This, too, shows that they stood as a distinct group, apart from the Twelve, and not in possession of the selfsame service.

⁸ Jesus’ practice and teaching regarding women certainly differs from Rabbinic Judaism. He was not of the opinion that “there is no wisdom in women except with the distaff” (*The Talmud*, London: Soncino Press, 1938, Vol. 11, p. 311) or that a man should praise God “who hast not made me a heathen . . . a woman. . . a brutish man” (*Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 264). However, the tendency in contemporary feminist literature to see Jesus’ dealings with women as completely revolutionary is overdrawn. He went beyond the norms of Pharisaic or scribal interpretation of God’s teaching that were wrong. His revolution had to do with the nature of true righteousness and of the spiritual relationship of men and women alike before God, not with the obliteration of the differentiation between man and woman.

2:17-18). From that moment they, like men, were added to the Christian community, endured persecution and suffering, brought others to faith in Christ, and were involved in the building up of the body of Christians. The activities in which women participated varied, but they included prophesying, performing charitable services, and serving as missionary workers.⁹

1. Acts 21:9 and 1 Cor. 11:5 specifically indicate that women functioned as prophets in the early church. Commentators differ on exactly what kind of prophesying was done by women in the apostolic church—some take the association of prayer and prophecy as a description of officiating at public worship; others equate prophecy with preaching. While not much is said about the type of prophecy given, these interpretations are deficient. Prophesying is distinguished from preaching in Eph. 4:11. Preaching is a form of teaching, but the distinctive characteristic of prophecy is that it results from God having put His very words into the mouth of the one speaking (2 Pet. 1:21-22). In other words, the prophet depends on special inspiration to speak a message which is more than a product of human thought. While a prophetic inspiration could form the basis for an exhortation, prophecy was a message delivered as words from the Lord. It is evident that there were women in the apostolic church who were moved by the Spirit to prophesy. Certain women exercised a particular verbal gift.¹⁰

2. Charitable service—caring for the needy, the sick, the visitors—was a major activity among the early Christians, and the New Testament pictures women serving faithfully and actively in this way. Tabitha is described as being full of good works and charity (Acts 9:36). Widows, recognized as a group in the church (1 Tim. 5:3-16), dedicated themselves to prayer and intercession.

This service role of women in the church is highlighted particularly by Paul's reference to Phoebe as a *diakonos* (Rom. 16:1-2). Many scholars connect this text with sources from the third century in which the office of deaconess appears clearly defined for the first

⁹ Our discussion follows Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ* (Servant Books: Ann Arbor, 1980), pp. 103-23; James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), pp. 115-24; and Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1976), pp. 3-5.

¹⁰ John refers to a woman of the church at Thyatira, Jezebel, as a prophetess (Rev. 2:20-24). Although he warns against her teachings, he does not say that a woman could not prophesy.

time.¹¹ However, in the vast majority of its occurrences in the New Testament, the term *diakonos* means simply “servant” or “one who ministers” to another.¹² The apostle introduces himself, together with his co-workers, as a *diakonos* (servant, minister) of Christ, of the gospel, of the new covenant (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 3:7; 1 Thess. 3:2), and speaks of his apostolic work as a *diakonia* (Rom. 11:13). He also writes of Stephanas and his household who “have devoted themselves to the service of the saints”. (1 Cor. 16:15)

What Paul means, therefore, is that Phoebe, a representative of the Cenchreaean church, had been a helper of many, even of himself. The term “helper” (*prostatis*) most probably refers to a patron who by virtue of greater wealth is able to provide one with material assistance or moral support.¹³ Phoebe’s service is the basis for Paul’s request to the Romans that they “take care of her in whatever manner she may have need of you” (v. 2). They want to do for Phoebe what she has done for the apostle and others—assist them in their material requirements. Phoebe’s ministry, then, like that of Stephanas and his household, was to assist the saints. This servanthood function was assumed by many men and women in the apostolic church.

3. The early church was very active in missionary endeavors. Christian communities sent many missionary workers from their home communities to plant new ones where there was no Christian church. While much of this missionary activity is mentioned, the New Testament focuses on St. Paul and his co-workers, many of whom were women.

In Romans 16 the apostle greets some of these women by name and acknowledges their important contributions to the life and growth of the church. Priscilla is a woman who receives particular mention. She is greeted not only in Rom. 16:3, but allusions to her also appear in Acts 18, 1 Cor. 16:19, and 2 Tim. 4:19. In Acts she is engaged with her husband, Aquila, in teaching the great orator Apollos. Priscilla must have been, therefore, well-educated in the

¹¹ The *Didascalia Apostolorum*, written in the first half of the third century, is the earliest full source for the role of deaconess. Deaconesses performed a great variety of services in the care of women, including burial and baptism of the women, the catechizing of women, and the caring for sick women at home. However, like the deacons, they were not heads of the community but served in a role auxiliary to that of the bishop and elders.

¹² The term *diakonos* can be used to refer to both men and women. The Greek definite article that occurs with the word determines the gender.

¹³ F. F. Bruce, *The Pauline Circle* (Flemington Markets, New South Wales, Australia: The Paternoster Press, 1985), p. 88.

teachings of the Christian faith and a most capable instructor.¹⁴ Paul's reference to the couple as "fellow-workers" is to be noted. The term was used by the apostle for a number of persons who worked with him. (Rom. 16:9, 21; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 1:24; 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2; Philemon 1, 24)

After Priscilla and Aquila, Paul greets still other women: Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, all of whom "worked hard" in the Lord (v. 12). Here Paul uses a term that commonly refers to the toil of proclaiming the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12; 15:10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:10). In Rom. 16:13, 15 he greets the mother of Rufus and the sister of Nereus. In Phil. 4:2-3 he mentions two other women—Euodia and Syntyche—who have labored beside him in the gospel. Although it is impossible to determine from Paul's words what specific missionary tasks these women assumed, there is no doubt but that he often benefited from the cooperation of women in his apostolic labors and that women were no less fervent than men in spreading the gospel message.¹⁵

The early Christian churches followed the pattern established by Jesus of including women as integral members. They attended worship, participated vocally, were instructed, learned of the faith, and shared it with others. They also played a significant role in the life of the community, teaching men and women and caring for those in need.

Excursus on the Service of Women in the Early Church¹⁶

Within the "official" ordering of the early church's life

¹⁴ It is noteworthy that in Acts and Romans Priscilla is mentioned before her husband, a possible indication that she was more prominent than her husband in the missionary work. F. F. Bruce, however, notes: "But in the secular society of the time, when one finds a wife being named before her husband, the reason usually is that her social status was higher than his" (p. 45).

¹⁵ The characterization of St. Paul as an enemy of women is an unfounded prejudice. Actually, there is more evidence for his friendships with women than for Jesus'. The basis for the view that Paul was "anti-feminist" is the fact that most of the Scriptural passages which speak of a differentiation between men and women are in the Pauline epistles. However, Paul's love and admiration for women is not less than that of Jesus. See Clark's discussion of the New Testament approach to women in his *Man and Woman in Christ*, pp. 235-54.

¹⁶ The most pertinent passages of the New Testament concerning the positive roles women could and did perform in the primitive church have been summarized in the previous discussion. The purpose of this brief excursus is to present representative evidence that reflects early Christian and patristic attitudes towards the participation of women in the church's worship and life, and to do this within the context of developments in heterodox and heretical Christian groups.

there were two primary orders of women: widows and deaconesses. From the beginning widows were recipients of the church's charity in return for which they were "appointed for prayer" (**Apostolic Tradition** 11; cf. 1 Tim. 5:3ff.). According to Tertullian (c. 160-220 A.D.), the widows were an **ordo** (**Ad uxorem** 1.7.4) and were assigned a place of honor within the assembled congregation parallel to that of the presbyters. In the third century, however, the widows received additional responsibilities. They exercised charity, especially to women, and they taught. Their teaching seems to have been restricted to inquiring unbelievers, for while widows could speak concerning idols and the unity of God, they could not speak about Christ and His work. Lest the pagans mock, inquirers about such matters were sent to the elders for instruction (for the widow, see **Didaskalia, Apostolic Constitutions**). In the **Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ** (c. 450) widows were a part of clerical orders and had a broad range of responsibilities, primarily to women: teaching women catechumens, rebuking those who strayed, visiting the sick, anointing women being baptized and veiling them so that their nudity would not show, seeing to it that women attended church and that they did not dress in a provocative way. Obviously, many of the duties of the widows were dictated by concerns of modesty and social acceptance.

The female diaconate was a very significant feature of the church within Greek and Syriac Christianity. The West did not have deaconesses until around the fifth century and then only reluctantly. From numerous sources (especially **Didaskalia, Apostolic Constitutions**) an outline of the activities of the deaconess can be discerned. They

1. assisted the bishop in the baptism of women, especially in the anointing of the body. Here concern for modesty was uppermost.
2. assisted women who were in need or who were ill.
3. served as an intermediary between women and the male clergy.
4. guarded the door by which women entered and left the assembly and ensured that the younger women gave way to older women in the place reserved for them.
5. verified the corporal integrity of the virgins.

6. bore messages and traveled about on congregational business.
7. gave private instructions to catechumens when necessary.
8. within Syrian Christianity gave the Eucharist to women who were ill, to nuns, to young children and to their sisters (apparently other deaconesses), when a priest was not available.

Indicative of the high status of deaconesses in the East was the fact that they were ordained as clergy. The **Apostolic Constitutions** make this especially clear (8, 19, 20), but it is also confirmed by the wording of Canon 15 of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). On the other hand, Western, Latin sources are punctuated by prohibitions against the ordination of the deaconess.

Yet, ordination did not give one access to all the functions of clergy. Ordination placed one into a specific **ordo** with its own prescribed functions. Hence, a bishop could ordain, but a presbyter could not; a presbyter could baptize, but a deacon could not. Concerning the role of women, there is a general exclusion of them from priestly duties and from the public teaching. The patristic argument against women performing sacerdotal functions, while making use of Biblical passages such as Gen. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:3ff; 1 Tim 2:12, 14, is often based on Scriptural history and Jesus' own ministry. Against the Collyridians, Epiphanius writes: "Never from the beginning of the world has a woman served God as priest" (**Panarion** 79). He, then, in litany fashion, reviews all those in the Old and New Testaments who served as priests. "But never," Epiphanius again concludes, "did a woman serve as priest." Similarly, the practice of Jesus is determinative: although Mary and other women were present with Jesus, he chose to be baptized by John and he sent the twelve apostles for preaching. Such an appeal to Biblical history and the practice of Jesus was not just an appeal to tradition. It was predicated upon the belief that Jesus was the incarnated Word of God by whom all things were made and through whom all things were redeemed. The **Apostolic Constitutions** make the point: Jesus did what He did, and He has delivered to His church no indication of women priests because He

“knows the order of creation.” What He did, being the Creator of nature, He did in agreement with the creative action. Similarly, since Jesus is the incarnate Word in whom the creation is being made new, He, as Head of the church, the new people of God, typified in His ministry the new life of the church not only in its “spiritual” but also in its fleshly contours.

*Corresponding to Priscilla, who taught Apollos, early Christian tradition was not devoid of women known for their missionary teaching and preaching. The **Acts of Paul** (c. 170) tells of Thecla, who was commissioned by Paul to “go and teach” and who is depicted as teaching both men and women. The **Acts of Peter** mentions Candida, who instructed her husband in the faith. The **Acts of Philip** reports that Jesus sent out Mariamne with Philip and Bartholomew. One tradition makes Mary and Martha, together with Lazarus, missionaries to the Province (southeastern France). St. Nina is honored as the missionary who converted Georgia. The early church, therefore, did not apply the prohibition of 1 Tim. 2:12 to the mission context. John Chrysostom expressed the consensus: “But, when the man is not a believer and the plaything of error, Paul does not exclude a woman’s superiority, even when it involves teaching.”*

Nascent Christianity was located within a religious environment in which female deities and significant female religious leadership were not uncommon. The polytheism of Greece and Rome had both male and female deities (e.g., Juno, Minerva, Diana), and the mystery religions, oriented toward the natural cycle of birth-death-rebirth, not infrequently had primary female deities (e.g., Isis, Cybele). Not surprisingly, therefore, early Christian groups which evidenced syncretism often had women in prominent positions and assigned to them real theological significance.

In gnostic Christianity women frequently were regarded as the bearers of secret tradition and divine revelation. Sometimes they were conceived of as the very expression of divine thought (in direct analogy to the view of Jesus as “Word of God”). Simon Magus had a female companion, Helen, whom he declared to be the “first thought of his mind.” The gnostic Apelles was accompanied by Philoumene, a prophetess whose revelations he wrote down and who

performed miracles and illusions. Elsewhere, Mary Magdalene was regarded as the bearer of secret knowledge (**Pistis Sophia, Gospel of Mary**), as was also Salome (**Egyptian Gospel**).

Irenaeus (c. 180) tells of a certain Marcus whose religious rites included the consecration of cups of wine by women (**Adversus omnes Haereses** 1.134f). It is clear that "Marcosian gnosticism" was highly attractive to women of higher social rank. In addition, Marcosian tendencies were very resilient in Gaul (France), for at the beginning of the sixth century there were priests in Brittany who were assisted at the Eucharist by women.

Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 380) reports on two groups in which women were preeminent and possessed priestly status. The "Quintillians" honored Eve as the prototype of their female clergy, for she first ate of the tree of knowledge. They had women bishops and women presbyters, arguing that "in Christ there is neither male nor female" (**Pan.** 49). (Interestingly, the "Quintillians" used Gal. 3:28 in the same way that contemporary "feminists" treat that passage.) The second group, the Collyridians, apparently consisted predominantly of women who venerated the Virgin Mary as a goddess and once a year on a special day offered up to her a loaf of bread from which all members partook (**Pan.** 79). Firmilian of Caesarea (c. 260) tells of a prophetess in Cappadocia who celebrated the Eucharist and who baptized many.

Yet, within the church's own communal life the general prohibition of Tertullian seems to have been commonplace: "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" (**De virg. vel.** 9.1). This did not mean, however, that women were simply quiescent. They were not. Especially in the areas of Christian piety and spirituality women often exercised leadership and authority. Much of the early impetus toward monasticism was supplied by women of wealth and social rank such as Melania and Paula, whose monastic foundations were every bit the equal of parallel male foundations. The Eastern tradition knows of "spiritual mothers" as well as "spiritual fathers," and the sayings of three

of them even occur in the "Sayings of the Desert Fathers." In contexts of martyrdom women by precept and example exercised real religious leadership (e.g., Blandina, Perpetua). Within Celtic Christianity dual monasteries of both monks and nuns not infrequently were governed by abbesses (e.g., Hilda of Whitby, who even participated in the "Council" of Whitby). But women were not permitted to hold the sacerdotal office in the early Christian church.

II. Scriptural Principles

The foregoing overview of women in the Bible has shown that the New Testament is replete with affirmations of the personhood of women and of their valuable contributions to the work of the church. Women and men are equally members of the priesthood of all believers by faith in Jesus Christ. They are both called to “declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

Mindful of these positive declarations, we must now take into account specific directives in the Scriptures concerning the status of women in the church, as well as their theological foundation. That theological foundation—which dare not be distorted or ignored in attitude or action—is that both men and women have been created in the image of God (Genesis 1-2). The specific Scriptural directives regarding the service of women issue from the three texts most prominent in the contemporary discussions of women in the church: 1 Cor. 11:2-16, which speaks of the covering of the head; 1 Cor. 14:34-35, where silence on the part of women in the church is enjoined; and 1 Tim. 2:8-15, which restricts teaching and the exercise of authority by women in the church. These passages, in turn, entail four broader principles fundamental for providing counsel regarding what women may and may not do in the church today: 1) the proper appreciation of humankind as male and female equally created in the image of God; 2) the proper relationship between man and woman which God established at creation and how that relationship is to be specifically maintained in the church; 3) the proper understanding of “headship” and “submitting oneself” for defining male-female relationships in the church; and 4) the proper relationship between the distinctive functions of the pastoral office and the exercise of authority in the church.

A. Male and Female

The book of Genesis teaches that woman is a special creation of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18-24). Like Adam, so Eve, “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20), was created in the image and likeness of the Creator. Although in Genesis 1 and 2 there are two accounts of the creation of humankind, they both express this truth.

1. *Genesis 1*. The emphasis of Genesis 1 is somewhat different from that of Genesis 2. A chronological schema is utilized to report

the creative events which occur (day one, day two, etc.). Mankind is first mentioned in the account of the sixth day: “So God created man (*Adam*) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). This passage refers to man in the generic sense, in two sexes. *Adam* is here used corporately and generically of the human pair or species.

According to the Genesis 1 account of creation, male and female were both made in the image and likeness of God. That is, mankind’s unique status among all other creatures derives from the relationship to the Creator. Mankind is not a physical replica of God nor an emanation of God; the image has to do with spiritual qualities—features that correspond and relate to the Creator. The Lutheran theological tradition has identified the *imago Dei* in the narrow sense with the original righteousness that mankind—male and female—enjoyed.¹⁷ Luther writes, “. . . the image of God is this: that Adam had it in his being and that he not only knew God and believed that He was good, but that he also lived in a life that was wholly godly; that is, he was without the fear of death or of any other danger, and was content with God’s favor.”¹⁸

Gen. 1:26-27 clearly shows that the woman, like the man, has been created in the image of God. Some scholars have argued that man was created in God’s image and woman in man’s image so that the image of God in woman is a reflected image. Others have suggested that since God reveals Himself as male (the Father and the Son), woman must be excluded from participation in the image. However; Genesis makes no such distinctions. There is no basis here for suggesting a superiority-inferiority relationship.¹⁹ The New Testament continues to uphold this teaching of the equality of the image of God in both sexes (1 Cor. 11:7; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). This equality is a spiritual equality of man and woman before God (*coram Deo*). The apostle Peter indicates that a woman must be granted honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life. (1 Peter 3:7)²⁰

¹⁷ Mankind is also spoken of as created in the image of God in the broad sense; that is, man and woman reflect from God a variety of attributes such as self-consciousness, the capacity for self-transcendence, and rationality.

¹⁸ Martin Luther; *Luther’s Works*, American Edition 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), pp. 62-63.

¹⁹ See Susan T. Foh, *Woman and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 51-52.

²⁰ 1 Peter 3:7 speaks of the woman as “the weaker sex” (vessel). It is perhaps best to

It is also clear from Genesis 1 that male and female are *equally* distinct from all other creatures made by God. God gave to both the command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion” over the earth (Gen. 1:28). Male and female are given the same dominion. Both the blessing and commission of verse 28 assume that the man and the woman are equal before God in their relationships to the rest of creation.

2. *Genesis 2*. While Genesis 1 speaks in summary fashion of the creation of male and female, Genesis 2 gives a more detailed description of the creation of humankind. Gen. 2:7 describes the creation of a man as male. God created him from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life. He is commanded not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then God says that it is not good for man (male) to be alone and that a fitting helper (*ezer kenegdo*) must be found for him. The “helper” is the woman God creates. She is suitable for him as a “helper.” She is not under his domination, but she stands alongside him in exercising that dominion which God has given to both. She is in every way his equal before the Creator.

When Adam saw the woman, he immediately recognized her oneness with himself. “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). As a creature of God, she is good. For man to seek some advantage over the woman would be defiance of the Creator whose very image she bears. Rather, man is to live under the Word of God which describes as good his relationship to the woman, his equal before the Creator.

To be sure, this spiritual equality does not preclude a distinction in identities between man and woman. Genesis 2 takes up also this matter, and its teaching is discussed later in this report under the concept of “order of creation.” However, any such differentiation does not impair the validity of the clear principle laid down in the inspired record of creation: *Man and woman are equal in having the same relationship to God and to nature.*

understand this primarily in the sense of physical weakness (cf. E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* [London: Macmillan and Co. LTD, 1964], p. 187), though Martin Franzmann's caution is appropriate: “In common parlance this phrase has come to have a derogatory sense. But it is human male pride that made it depreciatory, not Peter. He uses it to commend woman to man's love and care. . .” *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 262.

B. Creation and Redemption

The concept of creation—God’s work and will as revealed in the creation of humankind—is critical for dealing Scripturally with the issue of male-female identities. Also of great importance is the concept of “new” creation—God’s work and will as revealed in redemption. Two more formal terms have come into general theological usage to indicate these realities:

1. *The Order of Creation*. This refers to the particular position which, by the will of God, any created object occupies in relation to others. God has given to that which has been created a certain definite order which, because it has been created by Him, is the expression of His immutable will. These relationships belong to the very structure of created existence.

2. *The Order of Redemption*. This refers to the relationship of the redeemed to God and to each other in the new creation established by Him in Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). This new creation constitutes participation in a new existence, in the new world that has come in Christ. It is a relationship determined by grace.

These two terms, “Order of Creation” and “Order of Redemption,” were popularized by Emil Brunner in his work *The Divine Imperative*.²¹ However, the concepts which these terms denote are of long-standing importance in the Lutheran theological tradition. Luther, for example, spoke of the social relationships (such as marriage and family, people, state, and economy) in which everyone finds himself, including the Christian, and in which he is subject to the commandments which God gave as Creator to all people. Husband and wife, parents and children have their own respective positions in relation to each other. The obligatory character of these orders of things derives from the Creator Himself. Luther employed such terms as *Stand* (“station”) and *Beruf* (“calling”) to refer to the relationships in the order of creation.²² Francis Pieper employs the term *Schoepferordnung* (“order of creation”) in his *Christian Dogmatics*.²³ The modern theologian Werner Elert uses this same term,

²¹ Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, trans. Olive Wyan (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 208-33.

²² See, for example, *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, vol. 13, p. 358, and vol. 41, p. 177.

²³ Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), 1:629. See English edition, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:526.

together with the expression *Seins-Gefuege* (“structure of being”).²⁴

How do these two orders relate to each other when applied to male-female identities? According to the order of creation, God has assigned individual identities to each sex. He “from the beginning made them male and female” (Matt. 19:4). The identities and functions of each are not interchangeable; they must remain distinct. This is the burden of the Pauline use of the opening chapters of Genesis in those passages concerned with women in the church.

1. 1 Corinthians 11:7-9. The apostle argues for male “headship” on the basis of Gen. 2:18-25, which teaches that the man did not come from the woman but the woman from the man and that the woman was created for the sake of the man.

2. 1 Corinthians 14:34. Paul cites the Law (very likely Genesis 2 in this particular context) as the basis for the subordination of woman.

3. 1 Timothy 2:13-14. Paul appeals to the temporal priority of Adam’s creation (“Adam was formed first”; cf. Gen. 2:20-22), as well as to Eve’s having been deceived in the fall (Gen. 3:6), to show that women should not teach or exercise authority over men in the church.²⁵

Excursus on Genesis 2-3

The basis for the instructions set forth here by the apostle Paul is the relationship between man and woman presented in Genesis 2 and 3. Genesis 2, like Genesis 1, teaches that the woman is in every way equal, before God, to the man.²⁶ But these passages also reveal an order in their relationship to one another. Equality before God—spiritual equality—does

²⁴ Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, 2 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck Publishing Co., 1953), 2:37-49. See Elert’s *Das Christliche Ethos* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1961), p. 37.

²⁵ The peculiarly Pauline meaning of “teaching” and “exercising authority” is treated in later sections of this document. See pp. 34 – 37 .

²⁶ The creation of woman from man’s “rib” indicates the sameness of nature between man and woman. Karl Barth writes in his *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1985), vol. 3, 1, p. 296: “She is not himself but something of and from himself. He is related to her as to another part or member of his own body . . . With her special existence she fulfills something which he himself ought to fulfill in this special part or member but cannot, so that it awaits fulfillment in her existence. So close is she to him.” In a 1525 sermon on marriage Luther spoke of what this would mean for the faithful husband: “He should not consider her a rag on which to wipe his feet; and, indeed, she was not created from a foot but from a rib in the center of man’s body, so that the man is to regard her not otherwise than his own body and flesh. . . you should . . . not love *her* as much as you love your own body. Nay, nay, *your* wife you should love as your own body” Quoted in Ewald M. Plass, *This Is Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948), p. 257.

not mean sameness. The word which Paul uses to describe this order—subordination—(The Greek word for subordination is **hypotage**, which is formed from the word **tasso**—to appoint, to order, to arrange, and **hypo**—under.²⁷)—does not carry with it any notion of inferior value or oppression. This term is used by Paul simply to refer to order in the relationship of man and woman to one another. St. Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 11:7-9, “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.)”

There are several factors in the creation account in Genesis 2 which provide the basis for Paul’s teaching about the relationship of man and woman.²⁸ First, verse 7 stipulates that man was created first, before woman. He is the “first-born” and hence would have a natural precedence by birth. The creation of man as the first in sequence is integral to the narrative structure of Genesis 2. Second, the man is designated as **Adam** (v. 20), which is also the term used to describe the race. That the man is given this name suggests that he occupies the position as head of the relationship. Third, Adam immediately begins to exercise his authority by naming the animals (v. 10). He also names his wife “woman” (v. 23). Fourth, woman is created to be a helper for man. She is created from him and brought to him.²⁹ While the word “sub-

²⁷ Fritz Zerbst offers the following definition in *The Office of Women in the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 69: “*Hypotage* means subjection, *hypotassein*: to put in subjection, and *hypotassethai*: to subject oneself, or, in the passive, to be subjected, to be under obedience. For the idealistic culture of personality this group of words connotes that which is limiting or restricting, even degrading and humiliating. In its original sense, however; ‘to be in subjection’ means to ‘be placed in an order,’ to be under definite *tagmata* (arrangement of things in order, as in ranks, rows, or classes). This original sense it is which evidently and chiefly underlies the New Testament use of the term *hypotage*.” The implications of this definition are explored on pages 30 – 32 of this report.

²⁸ Michael F. Stitzinger, “Genesis 1-3 and the Male/Female Role Relationship,” *Grace Theological Journal* (Spring, 1981), pp. 30-33.

²⁹ It has been argued that the word *ezer* does not necessarily imply subordination in any way. Sixteen of the twenty-one uses of the word in the Old Testament refer to God as a superior helper to human beings. The remaining three refer to men helping other men. But *ezer* must be seen in context. The phrase says that God created woman to be a help for man; that is to say, the purpose of her creation was to be a help to the man. There is apparently some kind of subordination indicated by the phrase. See Stitzinger, p. 31.

ordination” is not actually used in Genesis 2, this account of the creation presents the foundation for 1 Corinthians 11. Clark summarizes its thrust well:

. . . it is a very specific kind of subordination—the kind that makes one person (sic) 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 part of himself, a partner in life. He was the head of the relationship, head of a relationship that was “one flesh.”³⁰

When the New Testament talks about the **origin** of the subordination of woman to man, it does so on the basis of Genesis 2 and not on the basis of Genesis 3. The foundation for this teaching is not the “curse” of the fall but the original purpose of God in creation.³¹

Genesis 3 describes the disruption and distortion of the order of creation brought about by the fall into sin. The “curse” pronounced in Gen. 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 domination and/or independence.³² The disruption caused by sin is remedied by Christ’s redemption, of course (Rom. 5:12-21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:10), and men and women who are in Christ should perform their respective functions without either oppression or defiance (Eph. 5:21-23). But their redemption is not yet fully manifest in them in this life. (Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 8:18-25)

But what are the implications of the order of redemption for the relationship of male and female? Does not this new order which has come in Christ abrogate the old? Does not Paul say in Gal. 3:28 that in Christ there is “neither male nor female”? Much of the modern debate on the issue of women in the church revolves around just these questions, questions which stem in large measure from a

³⁰ Clark, p. 28.

³¹ David P. Kuske, “The Order of Creation,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Winter, 1985), p. 31.

³² Stitzinger, p. 38. See also Susan T. Foh, “What Is the Woman’s Desire?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37-38 (Fall 1974/Spring 1976), pp. 376-83.

confusion of the order of creation and the order of redemption.

1. Various interpretations are proposed by contemporary theologians for resolving an alleged contradiction between the Galatians passage and Paul's other references to the order of creation. One view candidly acknowledges that Paul directly bases his admonitions in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy on the order of creation, but he sees in the Galatians passage a "breakthrough" which transcends this understanding. This interpretation is set forth by Krister Stendahl in his study on *The Bible and the Role of Women*. He writes:

It is not difficult for us to recognize that we are not yet in the kingdom. But we need badly the reminder of that which is new. We are not in danger of overstating that. We need help to see the forces toward renewal and re-creation. A mere repetition of Paul's reminder of the order of creation is not our most crying need. When Paul fought those who defended the old—as in Galatia—his bold vision of the new expressed itself most strongly, as in Galatians 3:28.³³

Stendahl's point is that in Christ the dichotomy of male and female is overcome. He does not allow for the "hiddenness" of the present eschatological age in which Christians live.

Even more radical is the position of Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy. He sees the issue of the relationship between male and female in terms of social equality. Since, according to his view, Christianity must always be on the side of radical egalitarianism, he cannot allow the order of creation to determine the believer's view of the role of women in the church. He argues for a "Christian transvaluation of all values." According to his analysis, the Christian belief that God is love means first to "negate," and that is what the Christian faith does even in terms of male-female relationships. The new creation completely abolishes the old.³⁴

2. The Biblical view affirms that the New Testament discussion of male-female relationships is rooted in a divinely instituted order and that this order is not overthrown by the new creation. To be sure, the new creation begins to transform that which is sinful, but since the eschatological transformation in the resurrection from the dead has not yet taken place, the relationships between man and

³³ Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 37.

³⁴ David Tracy, "Christian Faith and Radical Equality," *Theology Today* (January 1978), pp. 370-77.

woman must bear the elements of the structure given in creation (Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 7:17-31). This interpretation is carefully articulated by Lutheran theologian Peter Brunner in his treatment of *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*.³⁵

Gal. 3:28 in particular speaks about the new life in Christ. When the apostle says in 3:27 that those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, he uses the verb *enduomoai*—to clothe oneself in. The baptized individual has become completely united with Christ and one with Him. But in this act those who have been baptized also become united with one another. In baptism there can be no question about the differences which are important in the present age such as between Jew and Greek, slave and free. Neither is there in baptism any distinction between man and woman. The division into male and female established in the order of creation is not relevant in reference to baptism into Christ.³⁶ No one is baptized to be either man or woman. Rather, baptism is a baptism into Christ. The objective is union with Him which can be experienced in this life through faith, as Luther stressed, but which in its finality belongs to the age to come. Through faith both men and women become children of God. Thereby a unity is created between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, man and woman.³⁷

In this passage, then, one sees the vision of that one body into which Christians have been incorporated as living members together with all baptized believers—that Body of Christ in which He is the head and where racial, social, and sexual distinctions have no validity. All share in the blessings of Christ's redemption. As Luther observed, "But we are all priests before God if we are Christians. . . . For priests, the baptized, and Christians are all one and the same."³⁸

However, the oneness of male and female in Christ does not

³⁵ Peter Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971). Similar to Brunner's position is that of George M. Knight in *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977).

³⁶ C. S. Lewis makes a similar point in his essay on "Priestesses in the Church?" when he writes, "The point is that unless 'equal' means 'interchangeable,' equality means nothing for the priesthood of women" (that is, for women in the pastoral office). *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 238.

³⁷ Although it would be anachronistic to read present-day striving for equality into the words of Paul, it is obvious that a message such as his does remove the stigmata of the differences between Jew and Greek, slave and free, man and woman. As long as the gospel is a living power, differences in this world cannot become the basis for arrogance and oppression.

³⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition 30 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 63.

obviate the distinction given in creation. Gal. 3:28 does not mean that the identity of man or woman can be exchanged any more than that Greeks can become Jews or *vice versa*. The individual characteristics of believers are not abolished by the order of redemption.³⁹ The things ordained by God in His creation and the divisions in *this* world which reflect in some measure the creation of God are not annulled. This text reveals how believers appear before God, but it does not speak to issues pertaining to order in the church or the specific functions of women in the congregation. To be sure, all the redeemed are equal before our gracious God, but equality does not suggest the interchangeability of male and female identities.

This analysis of the orders of creation and redemption leads to the formulation of a second principle, derived from the Holy Scriptures, for clarifying the function of women in the church today: *Distinctive identities for man and woman in the relation to each other were assigned by God at creation. These identities are not nullified by Christ's redemption, and they should be reflected in the church.*

C. Headship and Subordination

The idea that God desires man to be the head of woman and woman to be subordinate to man is rooted deeply in the Old and New Testaments. While this Biblical truth may offend the sensibilities of some because it is so easily subject to misunderstanding and abuse (even within the church itself), it is the Creator's intention that we gratefully recognize and receive the ordered relationship of headship/subordination as an arrangement whereby the welfare of others may be served.⁴⁰ We have not properly understood the interrelated concepts of headship (1 Cor. 11:3) and subordination (1 Cor. 14:34) if we take them to be equivalent to superiority or domination.⁴¹

³⁹ The Formula of Concord, Article II, notes that the relationship between male and female was created before the Fall. Sins associated with this relationship need to be redeemed, but the relationship itself, since it is created by God, does not stand in need of redemption.

⁴⁰ See the 1981 report of the CTCR on "Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective," p. 256.

⁴¹ The Commission recognizes that much could be said about how the headship/subordination relationship works itself out in marriage. However, it here limits its discussion of this concept to the service of women in the church.

1. *Headship*. In Eph. 5:23 St. Paul writes, “For the husband is the head of the wife. . . .” Having first enjoined mutual submission of husband and wife to one another (5:21), the apostle then speaks of the submission of the wife to her husband and of the church to Christ as a consequence of headship. However, headship does not imply superiority. The man is not the “head” of the woman because he is intrinsically better in any respect than the woman. This is made clear in 1 Cor. 11:3, where the apostle asserts that “the head of Christ is God.” Indeed, the Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the second person of the Holy Trinity is co-equal with the Father in such attributes as majesty, deity, omnipresence, and omniscience.

The Scriptural concept of subordination, rather than implying a superiority/inferiority structure, presents this headship structure as an “ordering into.” Peter Brunner states it well:

The man is the head of the woman; Christ is the head of the man; God is the head of Christ. The “head” is that which is prior, that which determines, that which leads. The head is the power that begins, it is *principium, arche*.⁴²

Similarly, Zerbst notes that Paul believed “that for man, woman, and Christ there is something which has been ordained over them; something which either has been established in creation or which has its foundation in the work of redemption, but which in either case expresses the will of God.”⁴³ Every individual has his/her “head”; everyone has the obligation of rendering obedience in that position to which God has assigned him/her.

The headship of Ephesians 5 stands also as the backdrop for 1 Corinthians 11. Paul states that the appointive headship of the man applies in worship as well as in the home. The problem in Corinth was that women there had stepped out of the relationship assigned to them by the Creator. They were asserting their “freedom” by praying and prophesying with uncovered heads like the men (11:4). But, says Paul, the “newness of the kingdom” does not do away with the creational pattern. There is an order of headship which endures.

Excursus on Headcovering: Principle and Custom

Paul’s discussion of headship in 1 Corinthians 11 focuses on the issue of headcovering. In worship services men should

⁴² Brunner, p. 25.

⁴³ Zerbst, p. 32.

leave their heads uncovered, the apostle says, while women should wear something which covers their heads. The question is sometimes posed as to why Christians who today accept the Biblical principle of headship in 1 Corinthians 11 do not also insist on the practice of headcoverings for women in contemporary worship settings.

This issue is clarified by noting the distinction between a principle and its application in custom and practice. Although it is not possible to determine precisely which customs Paul had in mind (most probably Jewish customs of covering and veiling at worship is the source, though there seems to have been much variation in the synagogue practices of Paul's day), it is clear that the use of headcoverings in worship was a cultural expression which had particular meaning within the original context.

*1 Corinthians 11 addresses a situation where women had disregarded their subordinate position by praying and prophesying with uncovered head like the men. Paul opposes this behavior by declaring that a man who prays and prophesies having his head covered dishonors his head and that a woman who prays and prophesies with uncovered head dishonors her head. In other words, the laying aside of the headcovering is regarded by the apostle as a repudiation of the relationship between man and woman established in creation. The ultimate significance of the headcovering consisted in its potential for expressing a particular differentiation between men and women. Paul's concern therefore is not simply with the maintenance of outward conduct. For order and unity in the family there must be leadership, and the primary responsibility for such leadership is that of the husband and father. The headcovering was a **custom** (v. 15) subservient to a principle ("the head of the woman is the man," v. 3). The custom of headcovering functioned as woman's acknowledgment of the principle of headship.*

Even in earliest times this practice was not universally followed by Christian congregations, and in modern Western society headcovering or veiling is generally devoid of the significance attached to it in Paul's time.⁴⁴ In fact, it has

⁴⁴ Zerbst surmises that "the people of Paul's day felt much more keenly than do people of our day that the outward demeanor of a person is an expression of his inner life, specifically, of his religious convictions and moral attitude" (p. 40).

commonly been understood from the very beginning that these passages of Scripture which pertain to custom are not binding and that the principle involved can be manifested in various ways. We have the affirmation, for example, of the Savior that we should wash one another's feet (John 13:14), a practice highly significant in its original setting. But Christians have not generally regarded this exhortation as instituting a perpetual ordinance. The Christian principles signified by it—humility and love for others—can and should be manifested by other practices. The **principle** of humble love remains, but the **custom** has passed away. Leon Morris comments:

*The application of this principle (Paul's words on headship) to the situation at Corinth yields the direction that women must have their heads covered when they worship. The principle is of permanent validity, but we may well feel that the application of it to the contemporary scene need not yield the same result. In other words, in the light of totally different social customs, we may well hold that the fullest acceptance of the principle underlying this chapter does not require that in Western lands in the twentieth century women must always wear hats when they pray.*⁴⁵

The concept of headship is not only misunderstood, but it is also frequently abused. It is a mistake, for example, to identify the Biblical model of headship with a chain of command. The Scriptures teach that headship exists for the sake of serving others, of building up others. Christ taught that His followers are to be servants. Self-willed assertion over another for one's own personal advantage violates and perverts the headship principle of which the apostle speaks.

2. *Subordination.* The same present-day connotations of superiority and oppression that attach to the Biblical concept of headship also adhere to the concept of subordination. It is true that the Scriptures use the word for subordination (*hypotasso*) in a dominative sense in some contexts (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:27, "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet"; 1 Peter 3:22, "angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him"). There is, in point of fact, a

⁴⁵ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), p. 156. See AC XXVIII, 53-56.

type of coercive subordination which results from force or domination. A slave or a prisoner experiences subordination in this sense.

But there is a subordination which is freely recognized and accepted by the subordinate. The New Testament refers to this type of subordination whenever it speaks of the woman in home and church contexts. It is an attitude of looking to another, of putting first the desires of another, of seeking another's benefit. This is not a subordination imposed by the man on the woman from a position of superior authority or power. Rather, it is rooted in the order (*taxis*) instituted by God to which *both* are subject.

There are also differences in the way subordination and governance are conducted. Governance in a subordinate relationship can be oppressive—a relationship that works for the benefit of the ruler and to the detriment of the subordinate. This relationship is characterized by obedience to command, a “lording-it-over-the-other” attitude. But a person can be subordinate without ever having to obey a command. Nowhere in Scripture is it ever said that power or authority (*exousia*) or rule (*arche*) is given to the man over the woman. All of the passages which speak of the subordination of the woman to the man, or of wives to their husbands, are addressed to the woman. The verbs enjoining subordination in these texts are in the middle voice in the Greek (reflexive). The woman is reminded, always in the context of an appeal to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, that she has been subordinated to man by the Creator and that it is for this reason that she should willingly accept this divine arrangement. The Scriptures never tell the man that he is to “keep his wife in subjection” (unlike the exhortation concerning children in 1 Tim. 3:4) by the issuance of commands. People can be subordinate by serving others, by cooperating with another's purposes, or by following another's teaching. The more love and commitment to the interest of others (Phil. 2:4) are present in the relationship of the man to the woman, the more this subordinate relationship conforms to the Scriptural ideal.⁴⁶

Significantly, subordination is not applied by the apostolic writers to secular society. In this sphere—in the absence of Scriptural guidance—one must resist attempts to identify certain stances as

⁴⁶ Clark makes a discerning distinction between oppressive-subordination, care-subordination, and unity-subordination. The latter, summarized here, is described as “a relationship that is carried on for the sake of unity or a higher cause.” *Man and Woman in Christ*, pp. 39-45.

the Christian or Biblical ones. The fact that a woman may be “over” a man (such as a woman foreman on a construction crew or a woman judge in a legal proceeding) is not to be construed as a violation of the Scriptural concept of subordination.

The Biblical material focuses on the areas of marriage and the church. However, whenever the subordination of women to men in marriage and in the church becomes a matter of domination and whenever anyone, man or woman, behaves in an autocratic, domineering way, such conduct stems not from the creation but from the fall. Men honor the rule of God by submitting themselves to His will concerning their attitude and conduct toward women. Attitudes and actions which suggest that women are insignificant or inferior, or that they have no valid existence apart from men, originate in the fall. Moreover, such a posture toward women is inconsistent with the example of Jesus’ governance of those who live in a subordinate relationship to Him (Eph. 5:25). At the same time, the fact that Scripture speaks of woman being subordinate to man does not rob women of their purpose in life or make them only appendages of men. Both male and female are members of the Body of Christ. They both share in ruling God’s creation and in the proclamation of the gospel. A third principle emerges, then, to guide us in determining the service of women in the church today: *Subordination, when applied to the relationship of women and men in the church, expresses a divinely established relationship in which one looks to the other, but not in a domineering sense. Subordination is for the sake of orderliness and unity.*

D. The Exercise of Authority

The three previous Scriptural principles concerning women in the church converge in St. Paul’s specific directives regarding their speaking and teaching in the congregation at worship. (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-15)

1. *Silence.* At first glance the apostle’s presumption that women will pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5) appears to be in contradiction to his command for silence in 1 Corinthians 14. Commentators have offered a variety of solutions to the difficulties which arise when 1 Corinthians 11 is compared with 1 Corinthians 14. One solution proposed is that a distinction should be made between two kinds of church meetings in these chapters, the one a family, nonplenary meeting (chapter 11), the other an assembly of the entire congrega-

tion (chapter 14). Another solution emphasizes a distinction between two kinds of speaking. According to this proposal “to speak” in chapter 14 means “to ask questions,” while chapter 11 refers to ecstatic speech. Full clarity perhaps is not possible. However, the following conclusions seem warranted.

First, that Paul is not commanding *absolute*,⁴⁷ unqualified silence is evident from the fact that he permits praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11. The silence mandated for women in 1 Corinthians 14 does not preclude their praying and prophesying.⁴⁸ Accordingly, the apostle is not intimating that women may not participate in the public singing of the congregation or in the spoken prayers. It should be noted in this connection that Paul uses the Greek word *laleo* for “speak” in 1 Cor. 14:34, which frequently means to “preach” in the New Testament (See Mark 2:2; Luke 9:11; Acts 4:1; 8:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Cor 12:19; Phil. 1:4; *et al.*), and not *lego*, which is the more general term. (The claim that Paul has a different meaning in mind and that he uses it here to prohibit disturbing chatter is extremely improbable.) When *laleo* has a meaning other than religious speech and preaching in the New Testament, this is usually made clear by an object or an adverb (e.g., to speak like a child, 1 Cor. 13:11; to speak like a fool, 2 Cor. 11:23). Secondly, it must be underscored that Paul’s prohibition that women remain silent and not speak is uttered with reference to the worship service of the congregation (1 Cor. 14:26-33). Any other interpretation is artificial and improbable. Thus, Paul is not here demanding that women should be silent at all times or that they cannot express their sentiments and opinions at church assemblies. The command that women keep silent is a command that they not take charge of the public worship service, specifically the teaching-learning aspects of the service.

⁴⁷ The term which Paul uses for “silence” in 1 Tim. 2:2, 11-12 also occurs in Acts 11:18, 21:14, and 22:24, where total silence is not implied.

⁴⁸ Cf. George Stoeckhardt’s discussion (originally published in 1897) in “Von dem Beruf der Lehrerinnen an christlichen Gemeindegemeinschaften,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 5 (October 1934), pp. 764-73. Stoeckhardt writes, “No, the apostle’s words will hardly allow another interpretation than that he finds nothing objectionable in the public praying and prophesying in itself, if only it occurs with a covered head. But thereby he has not in the least limited or weakened what he writes in 1 Cor. 14 regarding the silence of women. Neither the praying nor the prophesying belongs to that speaking which he forbids for women directly in 1 Cor. 14:33-36. The women are not to teach in the assembly of the congregation. They are not to appear as teaching women, nor to instruct the men, nor to dispute publicly before and with men. This is, as we have recognized, the understanding of St. Paul in the latter passage quoted. Neither the praying nor the prophesying belongs in this category. Obviously the praying is not teaching or disputing” (p. 769).

2. *Teaching and Authority.* While the thrust of Paul's comments in 1 Tim. 2:11-15 is similar to that in 1 Corinthians 14, he makes a more explicit point in this passage. A woman is not to teach or to have authority over man.

Here, too, the limits of what is forbidden to women by the apostle have been widely disputed. Some have understood Paul here to be excluding women from all forms of teaching and exercising authority, including teaching in a public school or serving in a vocation in which a woman has men under her direct supervision. This constitutes a serious misreading of Paul's words. His instructions are directed to the worship/church setting. No doubt the public prayer which is regulated in verse 8 would occur during a liturgical service. The expression "likewise" in verse 9 indicates that the women's activity occurs in the same domain. In 1 Tim. 3:14-15 the apostle explains the purpose of his letter to Timothy: "I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God. . . ." The context of this passage is that of worship/church.

Still, two alternatives remain: 1) women are absolutely prohibited from *every* form of teaching or public address; or 2) women are prohibited from *certain types* of teaching or public address, especially from that exercised by the "teaching office," that is, the pastoral office.

The teaching that Paul forbids women to perform is the latter, namely, that of the formal, public proclamation of the Christian faith. The word for teach (*didaskein*) is used uniformly in this way throughout 1 Timothy. This term is used in this epistle to refer to "false teachers" (1:3,7); "overseers" (i.e., pastors) who are "able to teach" (3:2); the pastor Timothy, who is to "teach" (4:11), to "attend to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (4:13), to "take heed . . . to your teaching" (4:16), and to "teach and exhort these things" (6:2); the "elders . . . who labor in preaching and teaching" (5:17); and especially the apostle Paul himself, who is a "teacher of the Gentiles." (2:7)

Therefore, Paul is not contending that Christian women are to avoid teaching under any circumstances. Elsewhere the New Testament indicates that women did teach in a context other than the community worship service (e.g., Priscilla, Acts 18:26). The apostolic restriction in 1 Timothy 2 pertains to that teaching of God's Word which involves an essential function of the pastoral office. The word *didaskein* is inappropriately applied to the Sunday school teacher,

the Christian day school teacher, the home Bible study teacher. As Bishop Bo Giertz of Sweden suggests, “When in 1 Tim. 2:12 the word *didaskain* is used, it is a rather pregnant expression (the word means: to be a teacher in the church and to be charged by God with the proclamation of His Word).” Teaching which does not “coincide with that commission to which the New Testament refers when using the words *didaskalos* or *didaskain*” is not in view here.⁴⁹

3. *Authority*. The question now arises, what is the relationship between teaching, learning, and exercising “authority over man”? The verb Paul employs in 1 Tim. 2:12 (*authentain*) occurs only here in the New Testament and is never used in the Septuagint. Thus, there is no explicit Scriptural background for interpreting its meaning. Consequently, it is open to varying definitions, some of them quite incongruent with Paul’s actual concern.

One writer has observed that some interpreters separate the components of Paul’s instructions in these verses, making them independent of one another: that women a) learn in silence; b) be in all submission; c) not teach; and d) not exercise authority over men.⁵⁰ However, when the apostle’s phrases are separated in this way and used to formulate a code of rules concerning the role of women, both the text and women are abused. The damage is compounded if they are severed from the context. The result of this way of proceeding is that this passage is taken to mean that women should never, under any circumstances, teach in the church and that they must always, in every circumstance, submit to men by never making any decisions which may impact on them.

In point of fact, however, a careful review of this passage indicates that the terms “teach” and “exercise authority” parallel each other. They are intentionally linked. The kind of teaching referred to in the passage is tied to exercising authority. The authority forbidden to women here is that of the pastoral office, that is, one “who labors in preaching and teaching.” (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12)

A proper understanding of Paul here is of enormous significance for the discussion of the service of women in the church. One cannot divorce the phrase “nor have authority over man” from the pastoral office and then apply it in rather arbitrary ways. For example, if we

⁴⁹ Bo Giertz, “Twenty-Three Theses on The Holy Scriptures, The Woman, and the Office of the Ministry,” *The Springfielder* (March 1970), p. 14. Priscilla, together with Aquila, took Apollos in and expounded (*exethento*) the way of God more accurately. Neither *didaskain* nor any other closely related word is used (Acts 18:26).

⁵⁰ Hurley, pp. 200-201.

are to be faithful to the apostle's instructions in this passage, we cannot simply take the dictionary meaning of "authority" as "the power to act or make decisions" and then proceed, solely on that basis, to eliminate women from all congregational meetings or committees which have the power to act or make decisions.

The theological matrix for the apostle's inspired teaching on the silence of women in the church and the exercise of authority is, again, the order of creation. In 1 Tim. 2:13 Paul points to the order of creation as the basis for the instructions given in verses 11 and 12. God made Adam before Eve; that is, He created man and woman in a definite order. Turning from the creation to the fall, Paul adds that Adam was not deceived but that the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.⁵¹ The conclusion drawn is that the leadership of the official, public teaching office belongs to men. Assumption of that office by a woman is out of place because it is a woman who assumes it, not because women do it in the wrong way or have inferior gifts and abilities.

Of course, the church in all ages stands under the mandate of Christ to preach the gospel to all peoples. This commission is addressed to each member of the Body of Christ. All men and women in the church have a share in the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. However, God has decreed that the church carry out this mandate not only in the context of private, individual actions but by formally selecting individual members for the office of the public ministry. The nomenclature used in the New Testament to refer to this office varies ("bishops," 1 Tim. 3:1; "elder," 1 Tim. 5:17; "leaders," Heb. 13:17), but that the holders of this office are to be engaged specifically in preaching and teaching is consistently enunciated. The oversight and supervision exercised in the office of the public ministry is that of teaching the Word and administering the sacraments.⁵² Paul's directives relating to women

⁵¹ The role of the deception of the woman in the teaching of Paul is viewed by many as an effort to exculpate Adam from guilt and picture women as naturally more subject to deception or prone to temptation than man. Such conclusions are unwarranted. They attempt to explain on the basis of the sexes what can be explained only on the basis of the order of creation which God established. There is no intimation that woman bears the primary responsibility for the fall. The point is simply that the woman was deceived. Being deceived was her role in the fall. See Zerbst, pp. 54-56.

⁵² AC V and XIV speak of the "ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments" on behalf of the church. This office is distinguished from auxiliary offices, which have been created by the church to carry out certain functions of the divinely mandated office of the public ministry. See the CTCR's 1981 report on "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature," pp. 16-19.

in the church in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 provide instructions concerning this position of leadership.⁵³

A fourth principle of benefit in providing guidance for the service of woman in the church today can be formulated as follows: *The creational pattern of male headship requires that women not hold the formal position of the authoritative public teaching office in the church, that is, in the office of pastor.*

E. Summary

Although only four major principles regarding women in the church have been discussed above, it may be helpful to summarize more extensively several key points made in this treatment of the pertinent Biblical texts.

1. In sharp contrast to the deprecation and suppression of women in ancient cultures, and especially in Rabbinic Judaism, the Gospel record affirms their value and dignity. Jesus clearly shows His regard for women, created equally with men in the image and likeness of God.

2. In the order of creation, God has placed woman in a position subordinate to man. This relationship of subordination, however, is radically different from “secular” interpretations of it. The Scriptural concept of subordination is a matter of function between two persons of equal worth and not a matter of inferiority/superiority. The subordination of woman to man is not a dominative subordination. The subordination of wife to husband is analogous to the relationship which exists between Christ and the church.

3. The relationship between man and woman can also be defined as a headship structure of God-Christ-man-woman, each member of the order superordinated to the succeeding member. This is a theological and not merely a sociological relationship.

4. The order of redemption, while affirming that men and women are one in Christ and joint heirs of the grace of life, does not abolish the order established at the time of creation. The distortion of the order of creation brought about by the fall has been remedied by Christ’s redemption, but it has not yet become fully manifest in the redeemed. This will happen only in heaven. Therefore, far from annulling the order of creation, the order of redemption sanctifies it.

⁵³ An expanded discussion of the functions of the office of the public ministry follows below on pp. 41, 42.

The two orders are held together coordinately within God's purposes. The Lordship of Christ spans both creation and redemption.

5. 1 Cor. 14:33b-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 speak of women's roles in the public worship service. The main application of these passages in the contemporary church is that women are not to exercise those functions in the local congregation which would involve them in the exercise of authority inherent in the authoritative public teaching office (i.e., the office of pastor).

6. Men who find themselves in positions of leadership and authority must assume the attitude which Jesus Himself required: "... rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the one who serves" (Luke 22:26). Christian leadership and service must model Him.

7. Women have all of the God-given rights, privileges, and responsibilities of the priesthood of all believers that men do. God's people are called priests not to confer status but to commission all of them to declare His deeds of salvation. All Christians have been given the responsibility to live their Christian faith in their several callings, including the responsibility to profess and share the Christian faith and to judge all doctrine.

8. The inspired writers of Scripture do not discuss the implications of the order of creation for life in the civil estate. In Lutheran theology there is general agreement on the necessity of distinguishing carefully between that which happens in the civil sphere and that which takes place in the spiritual sphere.

III. Guidelines for Practice

How does one address the wide range of practical questions that arise in dealing with the topic of women in the church today? Lutherans recognize that the “prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged” (FC Ep Rule and Norm 1). This article of faith remains true also with respect to the relationship between man and woman. God has revealed His will regarding such a relationship in His Word. To be sure, the political and social milieu of a culture influences the church and always will. Nevertheless, a specific sociological “mind-set” must never be allowed to be decisive for expressing theological judgments.

At the same time, principles alone do not describe reality. Each situation combines many details in a unique way. Faithful, consistent application of Biblical principles requires that each distinctive situation be carefully assessed. We must be sure that we truly understand both the situation or problem with which we are dealing and the full range of Scriptural principles which should be brought to bear on it. This is especially true of the question of the service of women in the church.

While it is impossible to deal with all the practical questions which arise in individual congregations, there are a number of inquiries which the Commission has received or which have been introduced in other contexts that can be addressed briefly in a study of this kind. The purpose of this section of the report is to suggest one approach for using the principles and theses enunciated in Part II and to illustrate that approach through succinct responses to the questions of 1) woman’s ordination to the pastoral office; 2) woman suffrage; and 3) additional practical applications for situations which emerge from the contemporary life of the church.

A. Applying Scriptural Principles: An Approach

James Hurley has proposed three preliminary guidelines for addressing specific questions related to women in the church.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Hurley, p. 246.

These suggested guidelines are by no means exhaustive, but they do provide a helpful frame of reference for approaching the pertinent issues.

1. In response to questions regarding the service of women in the church, we must first ask whether God's Word expressly permits it or whether it expressly prohibits the activity. In the foregoing study of the Pauline passages it is clear that some activities are permitted while others carry restrictions.

2. We must also ask whether an activity is consonant with the purpose of Scripture but prevented by a technicality of human definition. To what extent have cultural definitions—of "authority" or "subjection," for instance—influenced our understanding of the Biblical passages? Or conversely, does an activity which is permitted on the basis of a technicality of definition effectively undermine, nevertheless, a Biblical norm?

3. The third guideline has to do with perceptions and the taking of offense (cf. 1 Corinthians 8; Romans 14; FC SD X). Is an action likely to be misunderstood or perceived in a way that it becomes a stumbling block for others? And, a perennial question in Lutheran theology at least, is this a situation in which an indifferent matter ceases to be a matter of indifference?

Some practical questions about the service of women in the church may be resolved on the basis of a clear mandate of Scripture. Other questions cannot be given a specific answer but will need to be considered according to individual circumstances from the perspective of definitions and/or perceptions. Frequently, all three guidelines will be employed in seeking to determine which ecclesiastical functions are appropriate for women to perform.

B. Women and the Pastoral Office

The ordination of women to the divinely instituted ministry of Word and sacraments is a question that can be addressed on the basis of the first guideline alone. For centuries Christendom has consistently opposed the practice as contrary to the express teachings of Scripture.

There are a number of issues which impinge on the question of women and the pastoral office which remain beyond the scope of the present report (e.g., the meaning of ordination itself⁵⁵). However,

⁵⁵ "The Ministry," pp. 22-23.

the fundamental Scriptural principles (and corresponding theses) examined in this study demonstrate not only that the service of women in the pastoral office lacks Biblical foundation but, in point of fact, is expressly prohibited by the Scriptures.

First, the occupation of the pastoral office by women violates the headship structure rooted in God's order of creation. Peter Brunner writes:

. . . the combination of pastoral office and being woman objectively and fundamentally destroys the *kephale*-structure of the relationship between man and woman and therefore also rejects the "ordering into" and "subordination to" (*hypotage*) which is demanded by God's will. That which contradicts the spiritual and creaturely order with which God has invested being cannot be the good that God wills! God does not contradict Himself in creation and redemption. The apostolic command to silence, as we find it in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, cannot be explained away as the result of the peculiar theological speculation of its author, who was bound by the cultural history and special circumstances of his day. These instructions are based much more on certain hidden, but yet extraordinarily incisive, fundamental laws and commands that God Himself established. . . .⁵⁶

Second, women are not to be pastors nor perform the essential and unique functions of the pastoral office, since the pastoral office has oversight from God over the congregation, "the household of God" (1 Tim. 3:15). Properly speaking, of course, the only authority or power in the church is the Word of Christ, who is Head over all things (Eph. 1:22). However, as noted previously, there are those within the church who are entrusted with the office of the public ministry and are representatives of the Head of the church.

In its 1981 report on "The Ministry" the Commission acknowledges that no specific "checklist" of functions of the office of the public ministry is provided in the Scriptures.⁵⁷ At the same time, it was pointed out that the functions of the pastoral office involve public supervision of the flock. The pastor exercises this supervision

⁵⁶ Brunner, p. 35. Also, Zerbst, p. 121: "Whereas rule over the congregation is exercised through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, the ordination of woman into this office is a practical invalidation of the proclamation concerning woman's subordination. The demands that the office be opened completely to woman must be resisted, because they are essentially an attack upon the order of creation, which must be preserved."

⁵⁷ "The Ministry," p. 15.

through the public proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.⁵⁸ This, in turn, suggests that there are certain specific functions which should not be carried out by the laity (who may hold auxiliary offices) but which are to be exercised by the pastor.⁵⁹ Among them are the following:

- 1) preaching in the services of the congregation
- 2) leading the formal public services of worship
- 3) the public administration of the sacraments
- 4) the public administration of the office of the keys

Since a “headship” over the congregation is exercised through these functions unique to the office of the public ministry, the functioning of women in this specific office is precluded. Just as the wife should not be the “head” of the house, so a woman should not be the “head” over the “household of God” (cf., 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:12). Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession states: “It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call” (*nisi rite vocatus*). Such a call is denied to women by a “command of the Lord.”

Although the Scriptures teach that women may not hold the pastoral office or perform its distinctive functions, the service of women to the Lord and His church in various other offices established to facilitate the proclamation of the Word has been longstanding in the history especially of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The self-denying service, gladly given by the many faithful women who have served over the years in such offices as deaconess, Christian day school teacher, and parish worker, has been of immeasurable importance. Of these coworkers, too, it must be said that they “can never be sufficiently thanked and repaid.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14. As the Commission has stated in its document on “The Ministry,” the office of the *public* ministry and its functions are called “public” “not because the functions are always discharged in public, but because they are performed on behalf of the church” (p. 13).

⁵⁹ In an emergency situation a congregation may request a lay leader to perform some functions of the office of the public ministry. The fact that in unusual circumstances one performs such functions does not mean that one holds the office. Luther’s celebrated comment that if “no one were present . . . then a woman must step up and preach to the others, otherwise not,” is not a basis for saying that a woman may occupy the office of the public ministry.

⁶⁰ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, I, 130.

C. Woman Suffrage

Woman suffrage is an issue that must be decided largely on the basis of the second of the three guidelines noted above. One reason for this is that the matter of franchise is not discussed in the Scripture. A word which can be translated as “voting” (*cheirotoneo*—raising the hand) occurs in Acts 14:23 and 2 Cor. 8:19. However, when in the Corinthian passage the churches are described as choosing a representative to accompany Paul to Jerusalem, nothing is said about the method actually employed. In the Acts verse, the word appears to mean “appoint.” No kind of franchise seems to be involved.⁶¹

In summary, the Scriptural passages employed for guidance on this question have been those verses of 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 14, and 1 Timothy 2 which deal with woman’s subordination, woman’s silence in the church, and woman’s exercise of authority. As has been noted, Paul is not addressing himself here to anything like a contemporary “voters’ assembly.” He is giving instructions to Christians regarding the arrangement of and order in public worship.⁶²

Further, it has been shown that the prohibition in 1 Tim. 2:11-12 of woman’s exercising authority is not a concept independent of “to teach.” According to this text, the woman is prohibited from the teaching in the public worship assembly. To define “authority” simply as the power to make decisions is alien to the exegesis of the passage. There is no express Biblical ground for denying women the vote on issues which facilitate the work of the priesthood of all believers in the congregation.

The definition of “suffrage” is also significant. A “democratic” society of men and women is ruled by a majority vote. However, it is not an exercise of the authority prohibited to women in the Scriptures. In fact, according to this understanding of the matter, it is

⁶¹ Whether congregations establish and maintain a constitutionally organized voters’ assembly is neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture. For those congregations with a voting assembly, the words of Francis Pieper are pertinent: “. . . the voting or balloting in the meetings of orthodox congregations has a different significance when it concerns Christian doctrine than when it concerns indifferent matters. The only purpose of voting in matters of doctrine is to see whether all now understand the teaching of the divine Word and agree to it. . . . In *adiaphora* a vote is taken to ascertain what the majority regards as the best. The natural order is that in *adiaphora* the minority yields to the majority and acquiesces, not because the majority has the right to rule, but for love’s sake.” Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:430. Such votes have no ultimate authority.

⁶² See discussion on pp. 32, 33 .

actually the assembly that exercises authority as a result of suffrage, not the individual voter. Furthermore, in the church, which is ruled by love, the casting of a ballot should also have the added dimension of being an act of service.

The Commission presented a study to the Denver Convention (1969) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on the issue of woman suffrage. It states by way of conclusion: “We find nothing in Scripture which prohibits women from exercising the franchise in voters’ assemblies. Those statements which direct women to keep silent in the church, and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office.”⁶³ Subsequent study of the matter has provided no basis for altering these conclusions. The Commission reaffirms them.⁶⁴

D. Additional Practical Applications

In applying the principles delineated above to concrete situations one must bear in mind that the New Testament presents no ceremonial law regulating the details of public worship. Also, in applying these principles, it is necessary to distinguish the one divinely instituted office of the public ministry of the Word and sacraments from all other offices which the church establishes in Christian freedom in response to various needs (Acts 6). Holy Scripture clearly excludes women from the office of the public ministry of Word and sacraments. For other offices we have no express “thus saith the Lord,” and everything depends on the functions assigned to these offices. Differences in judgment can be expected here in decisions regarding the specific application of general principles. What follows, therefore, is to be understood not as “canon law” but as pastoral and collegial advice to be judged by the church in terms of its faithfulness to such clear Scripture as is relevant.

1. Should a woman participate in public worship in the capacity of reading the Scriptures for the day or in assisting with the formal

⁶³ “Woman Suffrage in the Church,” A Report of the CTCR, 1968, p. 3.

⁶⁴ The historical fact that in the past the Synod restricted woman suffrage does not mean that the 1969 report or the present one rests on a changed understanding of Scriptural authority or the principle of the subordination of women in the church. To a great extent what is reflected is a changed understanding of the nature and function of the franchise as practiced in the contemporary congregation. See 1972 opinion of the CTCR on “Woman Suffrage,” 1973 *Convention Workbook*, pp. 37-38.

liturgical service?

All Christians have access to the Scriptures. They do not require the church as an institution or another person to read and interpret them on their behalf. The reading of the Scriptures belongs to the priesthood of all believers, men and women.

Moreover, there is no ceremonial law in the New Testament regarding the reading of Scripture in the context of public worship. Nor is there explicit apostolic prohibition of such reading by women. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the CTCR that the reading of the Scriptures is most properly the function of the pastoral office and should therefore not ordinarily be delegated to a lay person, woman or man. Pastors and congregations should therefore exercise great care in making decisions permitting the lay reading of the Scriptures or any other activity in the formal liturgical services which might be perceived as an assumption of the pastoral role or a disregard for the Scriptural principles concerning the service of women in the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:3-16; 14:33b-35). The third guideline listed above concerning the perceptions which certain actions may convey is also relevant and should be taken into account in answering this question.

2. May a woman address a congregation on a particular subject in which she possesses an expertise (lectures or presentations on social and ethical issues, etc.) and therefore “teach” in the church?

The answer to this question depends, in the first place, on the interpretation of Paul’s statement in 1 Tim. 2:12 that woman may not teach. The passage does not expressly prohibit the instance envisioned in the above question. The sharing and teaching this question entails does not place the woman in the office of the pastor. She is not seeking to enforce her teaching with discipline and is not usurping the authority of any man. Paul did not forbid *all* teaching by women. In terms of perceptions or the giving of offense, such a presentation by a guest speaker on any topic should be arranged in such a way that the impression is not given that it replaces the sermon. There are women in the church who, through their education and experience, have much to contribute on a wide range of significant concerns. They should be encouraged to serve in such capacities as gifts of God to His church.

3. Does the above response also apply to the regular adult Bible class of a congregation which includes men?

Certainly there is a legitimate distinction between a special presentation to the congregation and the continued instruction offered by the adult Bible class instructor. However, there is also a distinction between “overseeing” the instruction carried on in an adult Bible class and the actual physical teaching of the class (just as there is a more general distinction between “office” and “function”). It is the responsibility of the called pastor to “oversee” the adult Bible class (as well as all of the formal educational programs of the congregation). He may, from time to time, have members of the church teach the class and such teachers could indeed be women with the gifts for such a service. Their participation would be within the bounds of the priesthood of all believers. At the same time, teaching an adult class may involve possible, but very real, confusion regarding the office of pastor for some in a congregation. No doubt the pastor would seek to allay any such misunderstanding by appropriate preparation of the class for the service of laypeople in this capacity.

4. May women hold office in a congregation, serve on committees of the congregation, chair committees of the congregation?

Women may hold any office and serve on any committee of the congregation which enhances the work of the priesthood of all believers. Women also have the privilege to chair congregational committees, since a “chair” does not “have authority over men” any more than the committee *per se* would have such authority in the New Testament sense. The only stricture would have to do with anyone whose official functions would involve public accountability for the function of the pastoral office (e.g., elders, and possibly the chairman of the congregation). The tasks of the elders in a congregation are often directly associated with the pastoral office and the public administration of the office of the keys. As stated in the introductory paragraph to this section, everything depends on the nature of functions assigned to various offices established by the church.

The same general position outlined above applies to various district or synodical committees and commissions. Affairs of the church have never been assigned only to those holding the office of the public ministry. Women offer valuable contributions to the work of such committees, boards, and commissions.

5. What about the service of women in other worship contexts such as devotions conducted in the chapels of synodical colleges and other institutions?

Here, especially in the tradition of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, much has to do with definition and perception. While it is clear from the Scriptures that women should not preach or lead the formal public worship services of the church, many of the church’s educational institutions conduct what has been referred to as extended “family devotions” and have asked women to serve in worship leadership capacities. These “devotions” should be differentiated from the formal (and to a great extent, public) worship services. Institutions that hold public worship services under the responsibility of one who is called to be chaplain, campus pastor, dean of the chapel, etc., would seem to be out of the realm of “family devotions” in any acceptable meaning of the phrase. In such contexts, women should not preach or lead the services of worship. In those other worship opportunities which may be appropriately understood as “devotions,” the chaplain or other “spiritual head” of the community should make responsible decisions regarding the service of women, keeping in mind all of the guidelines presented in this report. It is impossible to anticipate all of the exigencies of such situations in a general study such as that offered in this document.

6. May women serve as assistants in the distribution of the Lord’s Supper?

While some might argue that assisting the presiding minister in the distribution of the elements is not necessarily a distinctive function of the pastoral office, the commission strongly recommends that, to avoid confusion regarding the office of the public ministry and to avoid giving offense to the church, such assistance be limited to men.⁶⁵

7. May young women serve in such capacities as acolytes or ushers in public worship services?

Since such service does not involve the exercise of distinctive functions of the pastoral office, there should be no objection to young women serving in such capacities. Pastoral wisdom requires that those who make decisions in this area be sensitive to such considerations as the effects of change in congregational worship practices, the need for appropriate instruction regarding the principles of Christian worship, and the importance of respectful and modest behavior and attire for those young men and women who perform such acts of service.

⁶⁵ Quoted from the CTCR’s 1983 report on “Theology and Practice of the Lord’s Supper,” p. 30.

Conclusion

In its 1977 report the synodical Task Force on Women alerted the membership of the church to the continuing need for utilizing the gifts of women in the service of the Christian community. This report stated:

It is the responsibility of the individual men and women to work together as equal, redeemed Christians, putting the welfare of the Kingdom ahead of prejudices, customs, or mind-sets. Women and men must realize that each Christian has a calling and a ministry and that the service of each individual is important and valuable to the life of the church.⁶⁶

The present study has reviewed basic Biblical principles and directives which speak of women in the church today with this responsibility and concern in mind.

The nature of the topic itself has drawn attention to questions of headship and subordination in the man/woman relationship as pertinent to the church's life as a worshipping and serving community. To consider these themes in this report is appropriate. Christian men and women will want to know what God's word teaches and humbly submit to His authority in such matters. However, they will be just as willing to receive the apostle's inspired teaching that "the body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body" (1 Cor. 12:12 NIV). Every Christian individual possesses gifts which contribute to the function of the body, and they ought to be joyfully and thankfully received. Thus, the Christian community will affirm the unique and differing gifts of women, seeking ways to enlist them more fully in the church's life and work. But God did not call His church into being and give gifts to His people so that they would be concerned about how they might become the greatest in the Kingdom. Since the life of every Christian is to be characterized by obedience and submission on some level, any demand for "rights" and "power" is inappropriate. The Commission believes that a more precise understanding of the Biblical teaching about the service of women in the church will move further reflection on the topic to its appropriate level—how all members of the church can serve our Lord and one another within the order He has established. On this level there is no thought of

⁶⁶ Report of Task Force on Women, 1977 *Convention Workbook*, p. 54.

inferiority or superiority, of rule and domination, but only of our Savior's words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:16-17)

For Further Reading

The Commission calls attention to the following selected reference works for background reading on the service of women in the church. Inclusion here does not imply endorsement by the Commission of the viewpoints expressed in them.

Brunner, Peter. *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971.

A study of the role of women with respect to the pastoral ministry. Brunner's conclusions are based on the headship structure mandated in the order of creation and whether in the specific office of pastor a woman can really stand in the place of Christ. Questions are included.

Clark, Stephen B. *Man and Woman in Christ*. Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980.

One of the most significant studies to be published in recent years. Clark's book contains a thorough examination of the Scriptural teaching and deals with the controversial issues of application. His material on scriptural teachings will probably be more helpful than his discussion of the social roles of men and women.

Evans, Mary J. *Woman in the Bible*. Downers Grove: Inter-varsity Press, 1983.

An interpretation of Biblical data bearing on women in the home, in the church, and in society. The book is a good example of the most recent thinking on these topics. While it tends to support women in the office of the public ministry, readers will find the exegetical attention to specific Biblical texts helpful.

Foh, Susan. *Women and the Word of God*. Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1979.

This is a response to "Biblical Feminism" and its view of Scriptural authority. The specific issues of deculturation and

hermeneutics are addressed. Contending that some contemporary churches waste the gifts of women, the author focuses on those areas in which women may more fully participate in the life of the church.

Hurley, James B. *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.

A major study of those passages in Scripture which speak to the role of women in the church. Hurley stresses the specific societal and historical settings of the passages but also discusses their relevance to the present.

Ryrie, Charles C. *The Role of Women in the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1970.

A survey of the role of women in Christian history. Helpful reference book which indicates the views of Christian theologians throughout history and how the church reflected those views at various points in its past.

Scanzoni, Letha and Nancy Hardesty. *All We're Meant to Be*. Waco: Word Books, 1974.

A treatment by two "evangelical feminist" authors who seek to further the visibility of women in the churches by emphasizing the "revolutionary" character of Christ's ministry.

Zerbst, Fritz. *The Office of Woman in the Church*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955.

A sound treatment of the Scriptural principles regarding the role of women in the church. The book is especially helpful in examining and understanding the relationship between the orders of creation and redemption. Zerbst views the decision to ordain women as an undermining of the order of creation.

