

Theological Reader

A Process for Decision on Woman as Elders

The following reader is intended to provide an overview of scriptural and theological matters that are important as we seek to make a decision on whether men and women will serve together on the Board of Elders at Mission Creek Alliance Church. The reader is not exhaustive, but rather a helpful place to start your own study and reflection on the matter. The reader contains the following articles:

1. Christian & Missionary Alliance in Canada. "Statement of Men and Women in Ministry." Alliance Manual (2018).

This provides the denomination's official statement about the role of men and women in leadership generally and women as elders specifically. Page 2.

2. Radant, Kenneth. "Men and Women in Christian Ministry: An introduction to the Gender Roles Question For Church Leaders." *Prepared for the Christian & Missionary Alliance* (1999).

This article provides a helpful introduction and overview of the topic, including the various positions that people take and their understanding of the key texts in scripture. Page 6.

3. Hassey, Janette. "Evangelical women in ministry a century ago." *Discovering Biblical* (1996).

This article discusses pertinent historical details regarding women in leadership in the Alliance Church as well as other Church movements like it. Page 27.

4. Waltke, Bruce K. "The Role of Woman in the Bible." *CRUX-VANCOUVER*- 31 (1995): 29-40.

Written from a Complementarian position, this article surveys the roll of women among God's People with emphasis in the Old Testament. Page 37.

5. Fee, Gordon D. "Gender Issues: Reflections on the Perspective of the Apostle Paul." *CRUX-VANCOUVER*-35 (1999): 34-45.

Written from an Egalitarian position, this article surveys the perspective of the Apostle Paul as it relates to the role of women in leadership. Page 49.

6. Selected Reading for Further Study

Page 61.

The Roles of Men and Women in Ministry

Historically, the C&MA in Canada has valued unity in vision while accepting diversity in biblically-supported theological positions. Continuing in this biblically-grounded practice, we welcome, respect, and value those who hold differing views on the role of men and women in the church. We desire for all to work together in unity, requiring none be silent about, or betray their convictions. Our differences are to be managed, not eliminated. We heartily believe that the Alliance “theological tent” is large enough for all of us, and that the person and presence of Jesus Christ is our unifying centre. To this end, the following document has been prepared to assist us in affirming the convictions that we share, understanding and learning from our differences, and covenanting to move forward together amidst our diversity with mutual love and respect as we seek to reach the nations for the glory of God.

1. Before God and one another we share agreement in the following truths:

- 1.1. CREATED EQUAL – Men and women are both created in the image of God and invited into relationship with Him. As such they are equal in value, dignity and worth (Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:26-29).
- 1.2. GIFTED & EMPOWERED TO LEAD – Both men and women are filled with the Holy Spirit and gifted to serve and lead in the Body of Christ. Throughout Scripture God has used both men and women in places of leadership, having influence in governance and in spiritual affairs (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-18; 1 Corinthians 11:4-5; Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 12).
- 1.3. CALLED TO BIBLICAL-LEADERSHIP – All leaders in the church are called to follow the model of Christ by leading with sacrifice, humility, and love. There is no room in the church for domineering or abusive forms of leadership. The Bible is our guide for discerning the qualifications and mandate of leaders in the church (Philippians 2:5-8; Mark 10:42-45; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Peter 5:1-5).
- 1.4. COMMISSIONED TO PARTICIPATE IN A GLOBAL MANDATE – In responding to the call of our Lord Jesus to follow Him and take His message of love and reconciliation to the whole world, we in the C&MA believe that God has called both men and women, empowered by God’s Spirit, to serve in this Kingdom task (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20).

2. Before God and one another, we covenant:

- 2.1. To wholeheartedly embrace, teach, and lead in willing submission to our C&MA Statement of Faith.
- 2.2. To hold fast to the unity that is founded upon our mutual belonging to Christ and each other, while respecting and appreciating the differences among us on this issue (Ephesians 4:1-6).
- 2.3. To be men and women who continue to diligently study the Scriptures, being open to the Spirit’s leading as we respectfully enter into continuing dialogue, understanding that our theological disagreement doesn’t need to stir division, but rather can strengthen us by sharpening our commitment to be grounded in God’s truth (2 Timothy 2:15, 3:14-17; 1 Corinthians 2:10b-16; 1 John 2:27).
- 2.4. To be servant-leaders who are accountable and sensitive to the Spirit of God for the way we release and empower men and women to serve in vital ways within our church context, paying particular attention to those appointed to the office of elder/overseer, ensuring that their life and doctrine reflect the biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 4:16).
- 2.5. To allow churches the freedom to hire based upon their theological convictions.
- 2.6. To be a denomination that trains, credentials and ordains those who interpret Scripture from both egalitarian and complementarian perspectives. We will welcome both to fill denominational leadership

positions. The Alliance is committed to allowing denominational leaders to live within their theological convictions regarding the roles of men and women in the church while providing reasonable accommodations that enable them to uphold Alliance policies where conflict between convictions and policy arises.

We acknowledge that there are a variety of positions regarding this issue. The complementarian guideline and egalitarian guideline that follow are therefore not meant to be exclusive, but rather to delineate the range of options within the C&MA. These papers are provided to assist individuals and churches as they discern their local practice.

3. Amendments

This Statement may be amended by a majority vote of General Assembly, with written notice having been given prior to General Assembly.

Complementarian Guideline

1. Both men and women are created equal before God as persons, and as such are encouraged, equipped, and empowered to use their gifts to serve the body of believers in the church, as is consistent with Scripture.
2. Complementarians hold to the distinctions of the male and female roles as found in Scripture to be ordained by God, and as such are not subject to change. In a marriage and in the church, headship is assigned by God to men; the husband in a marriage and biblically-qualified men in the church. Headship consists of the God-ordained responsibility for the flourishing of those under one's leadership and a corresponding authority to carry out that task. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the fall and is not a result of sin. Since the fall into sin brought distortions in those roles, the Gospel provides not a nullification of those roles but a restoration to their original purpose and glory (Genesis 2:16-18, 21-24; Genesis 3:1-13; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9).
3. Christ, our Saviour, demonstrates both headship (in relation to the Church) and submission (in relation to God the Father). Christ's example shows the glory, beauty, and worth of both roles (Ephesians 5:22-29; Philippians 2:5-11).
4. While both husbands and wives are responsible for leading and teaching within the home, God has assigned headship specifically to the man, not as a weapon used to lord over, but to mirror the sacrificial love seen in Jesus Christ and His love for His Church (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9).
5. Elders have been assigned authority through the headship of Jesus to lead with, preach, and teach the Word of God to the body of believers. The role of elder (or its equivalent) is therefore restricted to biblically-qualified men (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-2; Titus 1:6-9).
6. Biblical headship in the church requires that the elders bear primary responsibility to ensure that the church is led by, fed with, protected with, shaped by, and obedient to the Word of God, and, in so doing, ensure that the Church is ultimately led by Christ, her Head, who loved her enough to take her punishment. It is the responsibility of the elders of a church to ensure that women and men are pursued as co-labourers in the Gospel, equipped with the Word, and given opportunities to serve wherever they are gifted and Scripture would not forbid. In so doing, they ensure that all the gifts that the Spirit would graciously give us are being used to build up the Church for Christ's glory.
7. We believe that headship and submission within marriage and Church were ordained by the Lord to be living parables of the Gospel. Therefore, the church's embrace of this design bears witness to the Gospel. We believe that obedience to Christ's complementarian design for marriage and the church is a way of testifying to Christ and the Gospel and therefore is a conscience-binding religious/faith conviction.

Complementarian Practice

1. In the local church, only biblically qualified males are to fill the office of elder, which includes the Lead Pastor (or equivalent). Beyond that, many variables produce a spectrum of how complementarian theology is taught and practiced.
2. Local church leadership (elders and pastors) is responsible to prayerfully affirm the ministry functions of men and women in the local church.
3. Church leaders may teach a complementarian interpretation of Scripture with conviction and humility while respecting those who, with equal conviction and humility, come to other conclusions.

Egalitarian Guideline

1. In creation, women and men together reflect the image of God by illustrating the unity and diversity of the Godhead. Together, women and men, in equal partnership, are charged to be fruitful, to fill the earth, and to steward creation (Genesis 1:26, 28). Man and woman's relationship of mutuality, partnership, and equality was marred through sin, resulting in a distortion of the created order and the subjugation of the woman under the man (Genesis 3:14-19).
2. The former inequality between men and women has been eradicated in Christ, and the original unity and equality — rooted in creation — can now be restored (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Scripture reveals God's grace, breaking down inequality and moving toward what God first intended. This restoration has profound social and relational implications with respect to gender and leadership. The primary expression of Christian leadership is servanthood, including the empowerment of others to serve (Mark 10:42-45; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
3. At Pentecost, God established and empowered His Church by pouring out the Holy Spirit on women and men. In the Church, the Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes gifts to all members, without gender preference or limitation (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:14-18; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11). Gifts of leadership, teaching, pastoring, and prophecy are to be used by the women and men to whom they are given.
4. Every disciple of Jesus, young and old, male and female, married and single, has been given spiritual gifts to glorify Christ, to build up His Body, and to bear witness to the world (1 Peter 4:10-11). The church is to create an environment in which all of God's people — women and men — are encouraged to exercise all of the Spirit's gifts in all the biblical offices in order to fulfill these tasks. Women and men who lead within the church extend God's blessing to the world and glorify God through their obedient service.

While Scripture does limit the speech, teaching, and improper authority of some women in some specific contexts, this cannot be applied to all women in all situations (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35; 1 Timothy 2:11, 12). The Bible portrays women employing spiritual gifts in a variety of leadership roles, including judge (Judges 4:4, 5), apostle (Romans 16:7), prophet (Exodus 15:19-21; 2 Kings 22:14; Acts 21:7-9; 1 Corinthians 14:26-31), teacher/preacher (Acts 18:24-26), evangelist (Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 4:2,3), deacon (Romans 16:1,2), and house church leader (Romans 16:1,2; Romans 16:7; 1 Corinthians 14:31; Acts 18:26). These examples of female ministry, leadership, and authority model valid and necessary roles for women within the Church today and guide churches to provide opportunities for ministry on the basis of spiritual giftedness and godly character.

Because men and women image God together — in life and in leadership — they are invited to submit to God and to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 4:15; 5:21). Christ's relationship to the Church as Head illustrates how relationships can work within a church and a marriage. Christ's headship is explicitly expressed through humble, self-sacrificing love (Ephesians 5:25-28). The Church distinguishes herself from those who rule by power and control as men and women follow His example together (Mark 10:42-44).

5. The Gospel breaks down barriers of restriction and privilege, replacing old hierarchies with new freedom (Galatians 3:28). This freedom has personal, theological, and social implications. Jesus and Paul demonstrate a respect for and inclusion of women (Matthew 28:5-7; Luke 24:9-11; Luke 10:38-42; Luke 8:1-3; Acts 18:18, 18:26; Romans 16:1,3,7; 1 Corinthians 11:5), modelling the freedom the Gospel extends and encouraging the church to extend this same freedom.

Egalitarian Practice

1. In the local church, only biblically qualified individuals are to fill the office of elder, which includes the Lead Pastor (or equivalent). Beyond that, many variables produce a spectrum of how egalitarian theology is taught and practiced.
2. Local church leadership (elders and pastors) is responsible to prayerfully affirm the ministry functions of men and women in the local church.
3. Church leaders may teach an egalitarian interpretation of Scripture with conviction and humility while respecting those who, with equal conviction and humility, come to other conclusions.

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Men and Women in Christian Ministry:
An Introduction to the "Gender Roles" Question
For Church Leaders

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Calgary, Alberta
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Prepared for the Western Canadian District
Of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada

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INDEX

I. The Question

II. Putting the Issue in Context

- A. Background: where does this question come from?
- B. Significance: Why does this question matter?
- C. Legitimacy: Is it right for us to treat this issue as an "open question," since Scripture appears to answer it directly in several passages?

III. Major Options on the "Gender Roles" Question

- A. Chart 1: Hierarchicalism
- B. Chart 2: Egalitarianism
- C. Chart 3: Equal Nature, "Economic" Hierarchy
- D. Chart 4: Evangelistically-Based Role Distinctions
- E. Chart 5: Gender Equality, Family-Based Role Distinctions

IV. Decisive Factors to Consider

V. Conclusion

VI. Some Suggested Sources for Further Study

VII. Footnotes

Men and Women in Christian Ministry: An Introduction to the "Gender Roles" Question

Does God intend men and women to exercise distinct, different ministry roles in His church?

More specifically: does Scripture limit the kinds of ministry roles exercised by women in the local church (and/or other Christian organizations) on the basis of their gender? In particular, does it restrict them from roles of leadership and authority over men?

I. The Question

A woman in my church feels the prompting of God to become more involved in active ministry. She asks me what opportunities are open to her. Do I respond that she can serve in any capacity for which she has the skill and spiritual maturity? Or do I steer her toward certain kinds of service and away from others—even before I consider her own personal giftedness and calling—since her womanhood makes her ineligible for some ministry roles in our church?

This, in very practical terms, is the "gender roles" question. For the sake of clear-headed discussion, I have put it in more abstract language above. But it is not an abstract issue. It is an ever-present, emotionally-charged, passionately debated subject for Evangelical Christians. This week, it will be discussed in Bible studies, board rooms, and seminary classes world-wide. The pool of books and articles on the subject expands every month. Out of all this conversation, a growing number will now say that they have reached a satisfactory conclusion on the matter—or argue that it should never have become an issue in the first place. Still, for many churches and ministry organizations and for the individuals who serve in them, it continues to be one of the most significant theological questions of our generation.

It has certainly been a challenge for the Christian and Missionary Alliance. For some years, we have discussed the question, without arriving at a widespread consensus on it. Recognizing that we cannot leave it unsettled much longer, the C&MA in Canada has resolved to establish a policy on the roles of men and women at its General Assembly in Calgary in the summer of 2000.

But the conclusion reached in 2000 will only be as good as the preparation of the delegates who attend. If we want our denomination to arrive at a solid, biblical position on the roles of men and women, the leaders of our churches must lay a foundation for it in advance with competent biblical study and thoughtful reflection.

This paper is designed to provide church leaders with a brief introduction to the "gender roles" question. It will attempt to clarify the issue, outline some of the most common positions in the debate, and identify some of the decisive factors that must be addressed as we seek an answer together. It is not a full study guide on the subject, and it will make no attempt to convince the reader of the superiority of one view over against the others. It is simply an introduction, and an invitation to a serious study of the "gender roles" question in preparation for the upcoming General Assembly.

II. Putting the issue in context

Why has our generation become so concerned about the "gender roles" question? Is it really that important? If

we expect church leaders to invest time and energy studying this subject, we owe them some explanation of its background and significance.

A. Background: where does this question come from?

Some highlights:

- **For most of history, the formal leaders of God's people (Israel and the church) have been men.** People have often asked why this is so, and whether it is right—especially when confronted by the notable exceptions where women took on highly effective leadership roles. Nevertheless, male leadership has been the normal practice and the general expectation over the centuries.
- **Until recently, the same pattern was predominant in society around us. In the last century, however, questions as to the legitimacy of this tradition have multiplied.** Women's suffrage and equity movements have become a powerful force in the Western world since 1900—especially after the 2nd World War. As egalitarian voices have grown louder, the church has faced more calls for change from its own membership, and has felt more pressure to change from outside.
- **The 20th century has also seen the flowering of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement and the subsequent emphasis on "spiritual gift based ministry."** Renewed interest in spiritual gifts has spread far beyond Charismatic circles into every corner of the Evangelical church. It brings with it a valuable stress on the need for *every member* of the church to be engaged in ministry. This in turn has prompted women to ask why they should be prohibited from certain roles in the church if they seem to have the gifts that correspond to those roles.
- **Increased travel and communication have sensitized the church to the inconsistencies in its practice.** With more inter-denominational dialogue and easier access to global information, we have become more aware of the different policies of Christian organizations on the matter of gender roles and church leadership. The fact that church leaders from the non-western world are increasingly studying and traveling abroad has also forced us to think more seriously about the apparent inconsistency of allowing women missionaries to plant and lead churches in other cultures while we restrict their roles in church ministry at home.
- **Intensified study of the "gender roles" question in Scripture has convinced many that this issue is not as simple as has often been thought.** The increasing sensitivity to matters of gender equality in our society has prompted biblical scholars to look more closely at the roles of men and women in Scripture. This has led some to reject the traditional approach to gender roles in ministry.¹ It has reinforced the traditional convictions of others. But this very diversity of opinion has alerted the church to the possibility that the issue may not be as simple as it once appeared, and has encouraged further discussion on the topic.

B. Significance: Why does this question matter?

There are at least six reasons why the Christian and Missionary Alliance needs to address the "gender roles" question, and why we must address it to the best of our ability.

1. **The women of the C&MA deserve a clear, biblical statement on their roles and responsibilities in the denomination.**

Half and more of our constituents are women. Those women are gifted, committed, active contributors to the work of the C&MA. If we do not offer a clear statement on the roles of men and women in ministry now that the issue has been raised, we communicate ambivalence toward their involvement. Whatever conclusion the Alliance reaches on this issue, we owe the women of our churches a clear affirmation of their importance, and a clear explanation for any limitations that might be placed upon their leadership.

2. We are called to make Jesus Christ relevant to an egalitarian society.

If the gospel is to make an impact in the communities where we serve, we must address their concerns and avoid creating unnecessary obstacles to their faith. In many of the cities and towns where we minister, people care deeply about gender equality. If we do not speak relevantly to this concern—either showing that the church shares this value for biblical reasons, or explaining persuasively why it does not—then people will be convinced that the church is irrelevant and our mission will be hindered.

3. Inconsistency in practice hurts our ministry effectiveness.

When women are given a range of responsibilities in one church, district, or mission field, but denied the same range of ministry responsibilities in another setting, we create the potential for confusion ("What *do* we teach, anyway?") and division ("I like *our* position better than *theirs*"). We also undermine our own credibility and the authority of Scripture when both the "freer" and the "more restrictive" positions are presented as being taught by the Bible. To avoid these problems, we must either establish consistent policies for various ministry settings, or else offer a cogent explanation as to why different practices are acceptable in different settings.

4. People's feelings on this issue run deep enough to split churches, and perhaps even the denomination.

As Protestant Christians, we continually wrestle with the balance between the *unity* and the *purity* of the church. We understand that our one-ness is important, but we also believe that some issues are significant enough to make us leave a church or denomination. There are many Evangelicals for whom the "gender roles" question leads us into foundational matters that might justify the splitting of a church. Some believe that any restriction on the roles of women implies that they are inferior to men, potentially justifying a variety of social and marital abuses. Others hold that the authority of Scripture is compromised when restrictions are not placed on women's roles. If the C&MA discussion of gender roles is allowed to polarize around these positions, it *will* result in broken churches and a fractured denomination.

5. The members of our congregations need to see us model good leadership as we handle this issue.

We tell our congregations that their lives should be guided by Scripture, that they should accept correction and instruction with humility, that they should show Christlike love and unity of spirit even in disagreement, that they should give their very best to know Christ and to serve His Kingdom. Issues like this one give Alliance church leaders an opportunity to model these qualities for our churches and our neighbors. We must capitalize on such an opportunity—especially when the alternative is to model indifference, divisiveness, and the priority of "pragmatics" over Scripture.

6. Our commitment to the authority of Scripture requires a thorough study of this issue.

As local churches, and as a denomination, we *will* make decisions on the roles of men and women in ministry. We are already doing so. The question is: what is the basis for those decisions, now and in the future? Will they be firmly rooted in Scripture, or will they be driven by our culture, our Evangelical Protestant traditions, or something else? If we do not have a clear understanding of the teaching of Scripture, and if we do not make a conscious commitment to let it direct our thinking and practice, our conclusions will inevitably be dictated by other factors. The only way for us to establish an enduring biblical decision on a question like this one, where the tensions of universal principle and cultural

application are complex and the opinions of learned students of Scripture are divided, is if we give it careful study. Study will not guarantee a clear, biblical decision; but lack of study will guarantee something other than a firm, Bible-based decision.

C. *Legitimacy: Is it right for us to treat this issue as an "open question," since Scripture appears to answer it directly in several passages?*

As noted above, some participants in this discussion are convinced that the authority of Scripture is tied to a particular view on the roles of men and women in ministry, because of the forceful limitations Paul placed on female church involvement in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. That conviction may make some wonder whether it is even legitimate to treat the matter of gender roles as an open-ended question. This is a valid concern.

Nevertheless, there are several reasons why the C&MA should feel freedom to discuss the matter in this way.

1. It is always legitimate (and generally wise) to review our theological ideas.

It is an established principle of good scholarship and good leadership that we review our beliefs and practices on a regular basis. As Christians we sometimes forget this principle, because we are convinced that our ideas rest on timeless truths from God. However, we must always be conscious of the difference between God's revealed truth, which is infallible, and our own fallible attempts to explain and apply those truths. If our doctrines and practices reflect the message of God's Word accurately, regular review will only strengthen and enrich them. If we have failed to interpret the Word rightly at some point, it is only through renewed study that we will ever notice. Either way, it is always appropriate to revisit longstanding beliefs, including our position on the question of male and female roles in the church.

2. Sometimes established ideas are *rightly* overthrown in light of fresh study.

With the spread of theological liberalism and moral relativism in our world, Evangelicals are understandably hesitant to propose changes in any long-standing doctrinal tradition. However, there have been occasions when traditional ideas were rightly set aside in light of a closer study of Scripture. Recall, for example, the abandonment of the doctrine that the sun moves around the earth, or the abolition of slavery (not to mention the Protestant Reformation's revolutionary overhaul of the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation). The issue here is not whether departure from tradition is *ever* allowable, but rather whether a particular change is warranted by a careful study of Scripture. So in this case, the question is not whether it is legitimate to reconsider the role of women even in the face of a substantial tradition; rather, it is whether the biblical data warrants a change in perspective when we review it afresh.

3. It is especially important to review issues where the Bible's teaching is closely intertwined with the culture in which it was given.

An accurate Evangelical Protestant doctrine of Scripture always affirms that the Bible is *God's Word* given to us *through human authors in historical situations*. It was written first of all to the readers who received it direct from the human authors; and though God intended it for the rest of His people in other places and times as well, we only understand it accurately as we interpret it in light of the language, culture, and setting to which it was first given. This history-rootedness of Scripture sometimes causes us to struggle with which biblical commands are universally applicable, and which were designed to be applied in a direct way only to the first readers in their own setting. These points of tension between the universal and the cultural are one of the main reasons Christians differ in their interpretation of Scripture. And they have often played a role in the overthrow of traditional ideas in light of subsequent study. Since the "gender roles" question centers around Scripture passages where the division of universal principle and limited cultural application is widely debated, it is especially important for us to be sure that we are handling this issue correctly. Some "double-checking" is surely in order.

4. Certain kinds of theological ideas are naturally susceptible to misunderstanding, requiring special attention and careful review.

To be more specific, we should always be careful when we develop doctrines or policies: (a) which are based on *only a few biblical passages*; (b) which are based on biblical passages where *the exact meaning of the language is not completely clear*; (c) which *rest heavily on inferential reasoning* that goes beyond the obvious intention of the biblical author; and (d) where different biblical passages appear to present *different points of view*.

These are simple precautions, designed to help us recognize what is clear in Scripture and what is not. They do not apply to any of the central, essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Note, however, that in one way or another all of them plague the "gender roles" question.

- There are many Bible passages which speak about the roles and activities of men and women. But the vast majority of these merely speak of what men and women *did*, without making any attempt to say what men and women *should do* (caution c).
- Several NT passages speak about the roles of women in the church. Of these, however, only 3 place explicit limitations on female leadership (1 Cor 11:2-16, 1 Cor 14:33-36, and 1 Tim 2:8-15). At the same time, there are clear examples of women in leadership in Scripture (especially in the OT, though there are also hints in the NT). But these, too, are relatively few in comparison to the examples of male leadership. So, the number of passages that strongly support either side in the debate is actually relatively small (which should cause us to be careful, remembering caution a).
- Though the general thrust of the discussion in 1 Cor 11, 1 Cor 14, and 1 Tim 2 is quite clear, each passage also contains at least 1 expression or point which is very difficult to understand (caution b)—making the exegete wonder whether there are things in these passages which were evident to their first readers, but which are not so plain to us today.
- The very existence of a debate on the "gender roles" question reminds us that there are biblical passages which seem to promote a great deal of freedom for women in Christian ministry and leadership, and others which appear to place firm restrictions on that ministry. Both perspectives seem to have some basis in Scripture (caution d).

There is no point in reviewing an established doctrine or policy unless we are open to the possibility that we might have been wrong. It is only reasonable, therefore, that the C&MA treat the "gender roles" question as an "open issue." It is also vital that all of us who participate in this study come to the question with open minds, willing to consider that our own personal convictions may not be as well grounded as we think.

Of course, a careful study of the subject may not change our convictions. But at least it should ground those convictions more firmly in the Scripture. And perhaps it will also give us all a greater appreciation for the thinking of those with whom we disagree, even if we disagree all the more firmly in the end.

III. Major Options on the "Gender Roles" Question

When a person first encounters a subject like this one, "multiple choice" is always easier to handle than "fill in the blank." Though the C&MA may not align itself completely with any of the most popular options in the Evangelical "marketplace," it is at least helpful to review the main alternatives as we struggle to put together a solution of our own.

There are many points of view on the "gender roles" question. To keep things from becoming too complicated, I have summarized 5 which—I think—represent the field of Evangelical options fairly well.² These 5 views form a kind of continuum. The first two mark the most extreme positions commonly held in Evangelical circles: one insisting that there should be *firm restrictions* governing women's roles in church leadership, the other affirming that there should be *no restrictions whatsoever* in the authority a woman may exercise. Between these two outer points, I have described three "mediating views," each arguing that women may take on a wider range of leadership roles than the "hierarchical" alternative would allow, but without stripping boundaries away completely as proposed by the "egalitarian" model.

I have presented all 5 options in the same format, showing how they would respond to several basic questions. In this way, I hope to highlight their similarities (only the first 2 are mutually exclusive) and their differences. Those differences, in turn, will help us to identify the crucial issues that must be resolved in order to reach a conclusion on the roles of men and women in Christian ministry.

Before we begin, however, let me point out **several areas in which all 5 positions are in agreement**. All would affirm:

- That men and women are equal in value and dignity, sharing fully the image of God and contributing to His plan for history.
- That all Christian men and women have spiritual gifts which empower and qualify them for significant ministry in the church.
- That the Bible is God's revealed Word to humanity, infallible in all that it affirms (when properly interpreted), and authoritative for all people in all places and times (when correctly applied).
- That the Bible should be interpreted "literally," "grammatically," "historically," with sensitivity to its literary and cultural context.
- That "ordination" is not a conferring of spiritual privilege or power, but rather is a formal expression of the church's recognition that God has gifted and called an individual for Christian leadership.
- That being a man, in and of itself, does not qualify anyone for spiritual leadership; rather, there are clear guidelines as to the kind of character and ability that an individual must have in order to serve as a leader in the church.

It is important to identify these areas of common ground, because they help us to be clear about what the issue is not. The "gender roles" question is *not* about whether men and women are equal in dignity as God's image. It is *not* about whether women can have significant and fulfilling ministries in the church. Nor is it about whether *all* men have authority—spiritual or otherwise—over *all* women. Nor is it about who is and who is not Evangelical, Bible-believing, and hermeneutically literate. As noted at the outset, the question is whether God intends men and women to have *different ministry roles* in the church, where only men should be given responsibility for certain kinds of spiritual leadership and authority.

The five representative positions I will summarize on this issue are:

- Hierarchicalism
- Egalitarianism
- Equal Nature, "Economic" Hierarchy
- Evangelistically-Based Role Distinctions

- Gender Equality, Family-Based Role Distinctions

A. Hierarchicalism

Basic Position:	<p>God made men and women different, and assigned them different roles in human society.</p> <p>It is God's intention that men should be responsible for leadership/authority roles (in the home, society, and the church), and that women should play a nurturing, supportive, complimentary role.</p>
Practical implications for church ministry	<p>Some men are given responsibility for spiritual leadership and authority in the church.</p> <p>Women should not exercise roles of spiritual leadership and authority over adult men in the church.</p> <p>Therefore, women should not be ordained, they should not hold pastoral positions which involve broad leadership and authority over the congregation (some limited pastoral staff roles might be allowable), they should not sit on governing (Elders) boards or in other positions of local church or denominational authority, and they should not participate in public teaching or preaching where men are present.</p>
Decorum?	<p>Women should conduct (and dress) themselves in a way that communicates their attitude of modesty and submissiveness. (This may involve wearing of a literal headcovering, as in 1 Cor 11, or may be more culturally adapted.)</p>
Exceptional cases?	<p>Where no men are available to lead, women may be forced to do so. But this is never ideal; male leadership should be installed as soon as possible.</p>
Fundamental logic: why do men and women relate in this way?	<p>The <i>male leadership principle</i> was established by God at creation. It is built into the essential make-up of men and women. It has therefore been the predominant model throughout history (and especially across the history of God's people—Israel and the church).</p>
Key arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation-fall narrative (Gen 2-3 especially) places the man first as leader, the woman second as complement. • Throughout Scripture there is an overwhelming pattern of male leadership. This was true in the NT with the 12 disciples and the other prominent church leaders who are named, just as it was in the OT. • The NT "headship" passages (1 Cor 11, Eph 5) clearly teach the male leadership principle. • The NT "prohibition" passages (1 Cor 14, 1 Tim 2) explicitly restrict women from roles of public leadership and authority over men in the church. • Church tradition reinforces this same pattern.

How has sin affected male-female relations and roles?	Because of sin, healthy authority and leadership roles often degenerate into oppression and abuse. However, the basic authority relationship between men and women is not a result of sin, but was intended to be a beautiful expression of the loving care of God.
Interpretation of the "headship" passages (1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:22-33)	These passages clearly teach the male leadership principle, and connect it both to the creation account and to the nature of the God and His church. It should therefore be treated as universally applicable.
Interpretation of the "prohibition" passages (1 Cor 14:33-36, 1 Tim 2:8-15)	<p>These passages clearly teach that women are not to teach or perform other public ministries which would imply authority over men in the church. This teaching is based in the Law (1 Cor 14:34) and in the creation (1 Tim 2:13-14), so it cannot be taken as a mere cultural application of a larger principle.</p> <p>If we "culturalize" these passages without exegetical warrant, we undermine the authority of Scripture, because we open the door to "culturalize" any biblical teaching that we do not like.</p>
Nature of church authority, ministry	<p>The NT clearly teaches that some positions in the church involve responsibility to guard true doctrine and to teach it authoritatively, and also to preside over the life of the church for the good of its members.</p> <p>It is appropriate for us to identify many of the pastoral, governing, and teaching roles in our churches with these "authoritative" roles described in the NT.</p> <p>Authority is always to be exercised in a loving and giving spirit, but carries with it the ability to instruct, command, correct, and discipline.</p>

B. Egalitarianism

Basic Position:	<p>God made men and women equal in all respects.</p> <p>God gives each individual a unique set of talents, abilities, and gifts—irrespective of their gender.</p> <p>All Christians should be allowed to minister in whatever way they are gifted. Ministry roles should be determined <i>entirely</i> by giftedness and personal suitability, <i>without regard to gender</i>.</p>
Practical implications for church ministry	<p>Some people are given responsibility for spiritual leadership and authority in the church.</p> <p>Such leadership responsibility can be given to any individual who is appropriately gifted and who shows the suitable level of spiritual maturity.</p>

	<p>Any church role that a man might have can also be given to an appropriately gifted women. Absolutely no distinction should be made on the basis of gender.</p> <p>Furthermore, in the interests of balance and equality, the church should seek to encourage women to take positions of leadership, to compensate for the historical tendency to be too male-dominated.</p>
Decorum?	Generally a non-issue. If asked, the response is that all members of the church should dress in a culturally-appropriate manner to express Christian values.
Exceptional cases?	In certain cultures, it may be wise to use more men or women in public leadership to avoid giving offense. This is not ideal. Where possible, the church should model biblical equality and promote it in society at large.
Fundamental logic: why do men and women relate in this way?	God made men and women equal in His image. He relates to us all individually, and gifts us all uniquely. And He explicitly promised that a feature of the New Covenant would be the universal work of the Holy Spirit in all believers, so that all can serve freely according to their gifts.
Key arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation narrative identifies men and women as equal in God's image (see especially Gen 1:26-30), and shows them exercising an identical range of roles. The fall narrative indicates that gender hierarchy is a result of sin (Gen 3:16). • In spite of a predominantly male-centered social setting, the Bible identifies a number of prominent women leaders who were approved by God (Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, Huldah, several "wise women" and prophetesses, women who followed Jesus, Dorcas, Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, etc.). • The NT proclaims that sources of division and inequality which are the result of sin are no longer applicable in the church, and should be left behind (Gal 3:28). • The NT illustrates this renewed equality in Jesus' positive attitude toward women and in many references to prominent women in ministry (see for eg Rom 16 and Phil 4:2-3). • Male-centered church tradition proves nothing except that the church sometimes fails to live up to its calling, and has only recently come to a widespread appreciation of the true equality of men and women in Christ.
How has sin affected male-female relations and roles?	Sin is the reason for hierarchy in male-female relationships. As sin's effects are overturned in the gospel, we should begin to experience true equality again.
Interpretation of the "headship" passages	<p>The Greek word "head" (<i>kephale</i>) was normally used for other concepts such as "source" rather than for "leader." (Other terms were used for authority figures.)</p> <p>These passages are therefore better interpreted as meaning that the man was</p>

(1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:22-33)	created first, and is to be the nurturer who supplies for the woman. They do not clearly teach a universal principle of the authority of men over women.
Interpretation of the "prohibition" passages (1 Cor 14:33-36, 1 Tim 2:8-15)	<p>1 Cor 11-14 says that women can pray and prophesy in public before it commands that they be "quiet" (14:34). Thus, this command cannot be an absolute restriction on women speaking, but must rather be an issue of preserving order in a church where the women were creating confusion by their public outbursts (cf verses 33 and 35).</p> <p>1 Timothy warns repeatedly of false teaching. We know from various sources that there were many problems with false teaching in Ephesus, where Timothy was—some of which were likely connected with the behavior of loose or domineering women. As a result, this prohibition is best interpreted as a command to a particular cultural/historical situation.</p> <p>The fact that there are only a few of these passages, that they appear in books which address church problems, and that they seem to contradict other principles of equality, are ample reason for us to treat them as cultural/historical applications of larger principles.</p>
Nature of church authority, ministry	<p>The primary point of ministry is service. Good Christian leadership always follows the example of Christ, who gave Himself for His people.</p> <p>There is a place in the Body for instruction and correction. However, these are functions performed by the Body, following the lead of those who are gifted to offer guidance. And they are done in the name of Christ and under the authority of His Word, not by virtue of the authority of individuals within the church.</p>

C. Equal Nature, "Economic" Hierarchy

Basic Position:	<p>Men and women are fundamentally equal in nature and value. However, God has assigned them different roles in order to accomplish His purpose in the world.</p> <p>It is God's intention that men be responsible for ultimate leadership and authority in the God-ordained institutions of home and church (not necessarily in society).</p>
Practical implications for church ministry	<p>Women should not be placed in roles of ultimate church authority: senior pastor, preaching/teaching pastor, board of Elders (if that board has responsibility for direct spiritual leadership in the church).³</p> <p>However, women can perform a wide variety of public ministries, including teaching mixed groups (where it is understood that this teaching is explaining the authoritative Word), so long as those ministries are under the umbrella of ultimate male authority.</p>

Decorum?	Generally a non-issue, except that one's appearance should express Christian values in a culturally-appropriate way.
Exceptional cases?	Where no men are available, women may take leadership roles. But it is best if this is done under the auspices of a larger ministry organization with male leadership. And local male leadership should be installed when possible.
Fundamental logic: why do men and women relate in this way?	<p>The basic issue is not the essential nature of men and women, nor even their make-up (though that does lend itself to role diversity).</p> <p>The basic issue is one of God-ordained order: He has clearly commanded men to take leadership responsibility and women to cooperate with this arrangement. To diverge from this pattern without clear warrant in Scripture is to undermine biblical authority and depart from God's best intention for us.</p>
Key arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation-fall narrative suggests <i>ontological</i> equality and <i>functional</i> hierarchy between men and women.⁴ • Throughout Scripture we see the tension between equality and subordination at work. Men and women are treated as equals before God. Yet the predominant model was male leadership (with some exceptions). • In the NT, we see more emphasis on women in ministry than in the OT, but do not have clear examples of women in positions of <i>ultimate</i> leadership. (The women named in Rom 16, etc., were "co-workers" and ministers; but there are no clear examples of women serving as "ruling elders" or apostles on par with Peter and Paul.) • The NT "headship" and "prohibition" passages explicitly teach the male leadership principle, though they also suggest that this principle operates in a climate of equal value and mutual service.
How has sin affected male-female relations and roles?	Because of sin, healthy authority and leadership roles often degenerate into oppression and abuse. However, the basic authority relationship between men and women is <i>not</i> a result of sin, but was intended to be a beautiful expression of the loving care of God.
Interpretation of the "headship" passages (1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:22-33).	These passages clearly teach the male leadership principle in the home and in the church, and connect it to the creation account.
Interpretation of the "prohibition" passages (1 Cor 14:33-36, 1 Tim 2:8-15)	There are certainly cultural factors at work in these passages (eg: the reference to braided hair, etc., in 1 Tim 2 and the need for wives to be instructed by husbands at home in 1 Cor 14), but the fact that they are connected to male "headship" and to the creation narrative suggest that the general prohibitions given here should be treated as universally applicable. There is no clear warrant in the text to treat them any other way.

Nature of church authority, ministry	<p>The NT teaches that there is a need in the church for leaders to guard and teach true doctrine, and to preside over the affairs of the Body.</p> <p>However, much that is done by way of ministry in our churches (including some of the public "teaching," and even many of the roles assigned to Elders and Deacons boards) does not carry that kind of ultimate authority, but simply serves others under the authority of Scripture.</p> <p>Apart from certain foundational leadership roles, the NT says little about the day-to-day ministry of the church. Its primary emphasis is on Christ-like service in ministry.</p>
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D. Evangelistically-Based Role Distinctions

Basic Position:	<p>It was Paul's conviction that the Christian minister should always avoid creating unnecessary barriers to faith among those to whom the gospel is preached. We should therefore be willing to set aside our own personal rights, and "let go" of non-essential concerns, if this will help us to present the gospel message to our society more effectively.</p> <p>Since the question of male/female roles is not at the core of the gospel, and since it is a debatable issue, our practice should be determined by what will aid the proclamation of the gospel to our neighbors most effectively.</p>
Practical implications for church ministry	<p>If the social expectations around us dictate that leadership be male, our women must be willing to set aside their equal rights in the church (if indeed that is what Scripture teaches) and submit to male leadership in order to avoid creating unnecessary offense.</p> <p>If the social expectations around us urge that there should be gender equality in church leadership, then those who are convinced that the best interpretation of Scripture is a "male-leadership" model ought to be willing to acknowledge that their position is not a clear, universally held, essential doctrine of Scripture, and they should tolerate a more egalitarian practice in their churches for the sake of the gospel and the lost.</p>
Decorum?	Christians (both sexes) should dress and conduct themselves in ways that harmonize biblical principles of godliness and relevance to the culture.
Exceptional cases?	These are a non-issue. We adopt whatever form of leadership is necessary in order to make an impact for the gospel.
Fundamental logic: why do men and	<p>The biblical evidence for gender roles in the church is unclear.</p> <p>However, our mandate to make disciples is very clear in Scripture—as is Paul's teaching that we create no unnecessary offense. This must therefore be the primary₁₈</p>

women relate in this way?	basis for our practice. This is a life-and-death matter, which is not true of the "gender question."
Key arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation narrative clearly shows that men and women are equal before God (Gen 1:26-30). Whether the more detailed account in Gen 2 also teaches a distinction in their roles (including a male leadership principle) prior to the fall is debated. • Scripture depicts a predominantly male leadership model, but with prominent exceptions. It does not tell us how to interpret these examples in a direct way, and so we debate their significance. • The NT shows many women in ministry, but the possible examples of women in roles of ultimate authority are debatable and unclear. • Intelligent, informed Christian thinkers continue to debate the meaning and significance of the "headship" and "prohibition" passages, suggesting that they are not as clear as either side often suggest. • However, there is no debate over the meaning of the Great Commission (Mat 28:18-20) or Paul's discussion of his own missionary principles (Rom 14-15, 1 Cor 8-10).⁵
How has sin affected male-female relations and roles?	Sin certainly results in the abuse of authority. Whether it was the source of authority relationships is debatable.
Interpretation of the "headship" passages (1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:22-33).	The term "head" (<i>kephale</i>) was not the word most often used for "authority" or "leader" in Greek, but it was sometimes used with this meaning. In these passages, "head" could refer to male leadership, or it could simply refer to the fact that Adam was created first and that the husband is the one who cares for his wife. We should be careful about dogmatism on this point.
Interpretation of the "prohibition" passages (1 Cor 14:33-36, 1 Tim 2:8-15)	<p>Arguments that there were cultural reasons for the "prohibitions" of 1 Cor and 1 Tim are plausible though not conclusive.</p> <p>We must be careful not to use "culture" to rob Scripture of its authority. However, in practice we do sometimes treat NT instructions as culturally limited even though the text of Scripture does not explicitly say that this is so. (Example: we do not give "holy kisses" in our churches, nor do most churches practice head covering, though Paul does not <i>say</i> that these commands were only to be taken literally in the NT setting.)</p>
Nature of church authority, ministry	<p>Focus is generally placed on the spiritual dimension of ministry rather than on positions and structures involving formal authority. Ministry is service in Christ's name.</p> <p>There is a need for preservation and teaching of the true gospel. But what is most important is not who preserves it, but that it be preserved and taught.</p>

E. Gender Equality, Family-Based Role Distinctions

Basic Position:	<p>Men and women are fundamentally equal before God. And each individual has a unique set of talents, abilities, and gifts. Church ministry roles should therefore be dictated by giftedness and suitability, not by gender.</p> <p>However, in the family, God has assigned spiritual leadership to parents, and to husbands/fathers in particular.</p> <p>The church must support this family structure and not undermine it. It may sometimes be necessary, therefore, to limit a woman's involvement in church leadership in order to promote healthy spiritual leadership in the families that comprise the church.</p>
Practical implications for church ministry	<p>A woman should not be barred from any ministry role for which she is personally gifted and qualified simply because she is a woman.</p> <p>However, a married woman should not be put in a position of spiritual leadership in the church which undermines her husband's spiritual leadership in the home, or which creates the impression that family leadership roles are unimportant in the minds of other church members.</p> <p>In concrete terms, this means that ordinarily a married woman would not be a senior pastor or a member of an Elders board (if board members' responsibilities included direct spiritual leadership for families in the church). A single woman might play either of these roles, unless there were grounds to believe that this would communicate the wrong message about family relationships to other church members.</p>
Decorum?	<p>Generally a non-issue, except that one's appearance should express Christian values in a culturally-appropriate way.</p>
Exceptional cases?	<p>Women married to unbelieving men <i>are</i> the spiritual leaders in their homes—of necessity. But special care must be taken not to allow their leadership in the church to hinder their witness to their husbands or convey an inappropriate message to other members of the church.</p>
Fundamental logic: why do men and women relate in this way?	<p>The basic issue is not the essential nature of men and women, nor is it a God-ordained order in which one gender has authority over the other in the church and society.</p> <p>Rather, the primary concern is two-fold: (a) God's design for the family, in which spiritual leadership is entrusted to parents for their children, and ultimately to the father for the family as a whole. (b) God's design for the church as a body that builds whole people and whole, healthy families.</p>

For the church to accomplish its mission, it must respect principles of spiritual leadership in the family as it appoints its own leaders.

Key arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation-fall narrative suggests ontological equality between men and women, and functional role diversity between husbands and wives in the marriage relationship. (Adam and Eve were husband and wife as well as prototypical man and woman; and at least in the case of Eve, the unique responsibilities she had for child-bearing were understood to be exercised in the context of marriage.) • Throughout Scripture, husbands are expected to assume responsibility for spiritual leadership in their families. This principle is generally extended to society at large, since society is made up of families. There are exceptional examples of female leadership in society, but no clear examples of female spiritual leadership in the home where the husband is also a mature and competent believer. • There is one Greek term for our English words "man" and "husband" (<i>aner</i>), and one term for our English words "woman" and "wife" (<i>gyne</i>). The only way to know which meaning is in view in the "prohibition" passages is by considering the context. • Context tells us that at least 2 of the 4 pivotal NT passages on this issue are <i>clearly</i> directed to the husband/wife relationship (1 Cor 14, Eph 5). There is good exegetical reason to believe the other 2 passages (1 Cor 11, 1 Tim 2) are also speaking about how husbands and wives should relate to one another in the context of the church meeting. If so, then the apparent tension between NT passages teaching equality and NT prohibitions is resolved.
How has sin affected male-female relations and roles?	Because of sin, healthy authority and leadership roles often degenerate into oppression and abuse. However, the basic spiritual leadership role of the husband in the marriage is not a result of sin, but was intended to be a beautiful expression of the loving care of God.
Interpretation of the "headship" passages (1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:22-33).	<p>Ephesians 5 clearly teaches that the <i>husband</i> ought to image Christ in his spiritual leadership in the home.</p> <p>1 Cor 11 speaks in more general terms of a relationship between "men" and "women"; but elements in the passage (v. 5,9), in the larger context in the book (discussion of sexuality and marriage in ch 6-7, instruction to <i>wives</i> to be quiet in 14:34-35), and the parallel with Eph 5 all suggest that this "headship" applies primarily to husbands and wives.⁶</p>

Interpretation of 1 Cor 14 is clearly speaking about *wives* keeping silent in church and asking

<p>the "prohibition" passages (1 Cor 14:33-36, 1 Tim 2:8-15)</p>	<p>questions of their <i>husbands</i> at home.</p> <p>Paul's prohibition in 1 Tim 2 would make sense if applied to "women" or to "wives." However, the predominance of "family" themes throughout 1 Timothy, the metaphor of the church as "household of God" (3:15), and the parallel with Eph 5 (Timothy is in Ephesus) all suggest that prohibition has more to do with husband/wife relationships than with the general roles of men and women. (Paul would have no reason to distinguish these more clearly, since all women but the widows and young girls would normally be married in that time and culture. It would be assumed that speaking to "women" was the same as speaking to "wives.")</p>
<p>Nature of church authority, ministry</p>	<p>Though there is a need to preserve good teaching and to provide direction, spiritual leadership is fundamentally about Christlike service, not domination (Eph 5). This is true in the family, and also in the church.</p> <p>The church is not identical to the family. But there are many analogies between the two, since churches are comprised of families, and are themselves the "family of God." Thus, church leaders must also be capable family leaders (1 Tim 3), and must work to promote strong families in their churches.</p> <p>Like families, every church is unique—though all should reflect certain basic principles established by God.</p>

IV. Decisive Factors to Consider

When we compare the main options on the "gender roles" debate, a number of "critical decision factors" begin to emerge. If we are to reach an effective conclusion on the larger question of men's and women's roles in the church, we must first come to grips with at least the following issues.

1. Interpretation and application of Scripture

- How do we distinguish the universal principles from the specific applications of those principles which were only intended for a particular historical and cultural setting? What kinds of clues must there be before we agree that a scriptural command was not intended to be applied literally everywhere and at all times? (Must it be stated in the text? Implied by the context of the chapter or book? Can information about the historical setting of the book decide it for us? Etc.)

2. Concept of church leadership and authority

- In our understanding of the nature of the church, where do we put more emphasis: on the concept of leadership as "servanthood" or on the idea of leadership as "authority" to preserve and teach the truth, guide the actions of the church, etc?
- What is "authority" in the local church and in our denomination? What is authority for? How

does it work?

- What is the role of church Elders and other formal leaders in the Alliance? Are these people servants who empower the Body? Are they instructors and directors who command it? Are they ministry specialists who perform administrative and organizational tasks which help to coordinate the work of others? Is their spiritual leadership a matter of example, expertise, or vested authority? (For that matter, is the role of "Elder" or executive board member the same in every church? Should it be?)
- What is "teaching"? What is "preaching"? What kind of authority do these activities carry in our churches?

3. Spiritual gifts

- What is our understanding of the NT teaching about "giftedness"? Do we believe that men and women have different gifts, with some gifts only available to men or to women? What is the basis for this conviction? Or, if gifts are given regardless of gender, does this imply that anyone who has a gift, man or woman, could hold any ministry role? If not, why not?

4. Creation narrative

- Does the creation narrative teach that God intended a leadership-supportive relationship between men and women (or husbands and wives) prior to the Fall? Or does Gen 2-3 teach us that role distinctions between men and women (or husbands and wives) are entirely the result of sin?

5. Biblical examples and precedents

- The Jewish and pagan cultures which we encounter in the Bible were clearly structured around male leadership in the home, the society, and the temple/church. Does Scripture endorse this structure, or simply record it as a historical fact?
- What is implied by the exceptional examples of female ministry and/or leadership which we find in the Bible, especially in the NT? How do we know?

6. NT celebration of equality in Christ

- What is the intention of Gal 3:28? Is the purpose of this passage to give instruction on the way ministry is done in the local church, or is it an affirmation of a new principle of "equal access to God for all people" in the NT era? Does it teach the removal of all male/female distinctions? How does this passage fit in with the larger message of the NT about salvation and ministry?

7. "Headship" passages (1 Cor 11:2-16, Eph 5:22-33)

- Do the NT "headship" passages teach leadership and/or authority of men over women? Of husbands with respect to their wives? If so, what kind of leadership and/or authority? If not, what is the relationship of men/women (or husbands/wives) to be like?

8. "Prohibition" passages (1 Cor 14:33-36, 1 Tim 2:8-15)

- Which elements, if any, in the "prohibition" passages can be shown to be specific to the culture and historical setting of the Corinthians and the Ephesians, and not directly applicable to us today? On what basis?
- If we believe that these passages were specific to the cultural and historical setting of the first readers, how do we explain the appeals to the Law (1 Cor 14:34) and to the creation account (1 Tim 2:13-15)?
- If these commands are directly applicable to all churches today, should we also apply Paul's instructions about braided hair, gold, pearls, and costly garments (1 Tim 2:9), or his teaching about head coverings and long/short hair (1 Cor 11:2-15) literally in our setting? Why or why not?

9. Significance of family relationships to the "gender roles" question

- Is "headship" in 1 Cor 11 about *maleness and femaleness*, or about the relationship between men and women who are *husbands and wives*? Why?
- Is the principle behind Paul's comments about female submission in 1 Tim 2 the idea that *men* should have authority over *women*, or is it that *wives* should respect the leadership of *husbands*? Which line of reasoning makes better sense of the flow of thought in the book of 1 Timothy? Which fits better with the overall shape of Paul's theology and the teaching of Scripture at large?

10. Clarity, status, and practical implications of the "gender roles" question

- How essential is the "gender roles" question to the Christian faith? Is this a core doctrine or a "debatable" matter where it is acceptable to let individuals and/or churches follow their own conscience? On what basis do we decide this?
- How will our decision on this issue affect our ability to present the gospel effectively in our own North American context? How will it affect our involvement in the church's global mission—both in our own sending of missionaries and in our relationship with our sister churches in other lands?

V. Conclusion

As leaders of Canada's Alliance churches, we all want to know God's will and to do it. Every one of us desires to honor His Word, to follow His leading, and to reflect His perfect plan—in our own lives, and in our areas of ministry.

Sometimes, though, we struggle to know what our Lord wants. In the past, we have certainly found it difficult in the matter of the roles of men and women in the church.

In a little over a year, we will meet to discuss this matter again, this time with a mandate to draw up conclusions that will guide our denomination into the next century. May God grant us grace to study well as we prepare. May

He keep our minds sharp and our spirits gentle as we deliberate. May He lead us together to conclusions which will be best for every member of the Body, empowering us for even more effective service.

God grant that we may be
of the same mind,
maintaining the same love,
united in spirit,
intent on one purpose,
doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit,
with humility of mind regarding others as more important than ourselves,
not looking out merely for our own interests, but also the interests of
others,
having the same attitude as Christ Jesus.
(See Phil 2:2-5)

VI. Some Suggested Sources for Further Study

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VII. Footnotes

1. Those who have done so often compare the "gender question" to the issue of slavery. In the 18th and 19th centuries, growing social sensitivity drove Protestant scholars to a more careful study of the biblical teaching, which overturned the common belief of earlier generations that Scripture endorsed the practice of owning slaves.
2. I have attached a brief bibliography to this paper, for those who wish to "shop the marketplace" more carefully. The reader who wants to get a "feel" for different positions and their arguments will probably find that the most helpful introductory source is Bonnidell Clouse and Robert Clouse, ed., Women in Ministry: Four Views, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989. Though I have made modifications and additions of my own, the summary of options which follows is heavily indebted to Women in Ministry, particularly for the first 3 options presented.
3. Individuals who hold this position will sometimes point out that the NT does not give a precise description of the roles and responsibilities of elders, deacons, etc., suggesting that the church has some freedom to develop these offices in different ways. If the responsibilities of a church board member are more administrative or supportive, rather than involving direct spiritual leadership over the members of the church, then supporters of this position may allow for women to hold such a position.
4. The parallel is sometimes drawn here with the doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equal in divine nature, but also recognizes that--for the sake of accomplishing God's plan of salvation--they have voluntarily adopted an "economy" in which the Son submits to the Father and the Spirit glorifies the Son. Since humanity is created in God's image, it is argued that it is reasonable for us also to live in *essential* equality but also in relationships marked by *functional* or *economic* subordination.
5. Note that Paul's insistence that the minister set aside his/her own rights for the sake of the gospel in 1 Cor. 8-10 comes immediately before the passages on "headship" and "quietness" in 1 Cor. 11-14, perhaps setting the context in which they should be understood.
6. It is also sometimes noted that 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus, which adds to the likelihood that Paul would have similar issues in view when he wrote instructions on headship and male/female behavior in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and 1 Timothy.

issues and ministry placement—showing favor to those who supported George Whitefield's Calvinism as opposed to Wesley's Arminianism. For decades the "Huntingdon Connection" was a power to be reckoned with.³⁸

Of all the early Methodist women, the one who stands out the most for faithful service is Mary Bosanquet Fletcher (1739-1815), who actively served in the ministry from age eighteen until her death at seventy-six. Born into wealth, she used her inheritance to found an orphanage, where she served for two decades while preaching and leading Methodist societies on the side. In 1781, at the age of forty-two, she married John Fletcher, one of the most respected Wesleyan theologians and a close associate of John Wesley. Four years later he died, and Mary continued in the ministry as a widow for thirty years. She was a powerful preacher and sometimes spoke to crowds as large as three thousand. She regularly spoke at the "cottage barn," a facility that drew large numbers of itinerant ministers who regarded her as a pastor to pastors. Even after the age of seventy, she continued to preach at as many as six meetings a week.³⁹

For John Wesley and other churchmen over the centuries, coming to terms with women preachers was not an easy matter. He was convinced that the apostle Paul did not permit women to preach under ordinary circumstances. But he was also convinced that "the whole world of God termed Methodism is an extraordinary dispensation" and thus did "not fall under the ordinary rules of discipline." To Mary Fletcher, whose ministry was often criticized, Wesley wrote: "I think the strength of the cause rests there—on you having an *extraordinary* call."⁴⁰

Mary Fletcher stood in a long line of women who had served faithfully from the time of Mary Magdalene, Phoebe and Lydia—a line that includes Perpetua, Marcella, Paula, Lioba, Hildegard, Katherine Zell, Teresa of Ávila and Margaret Fell Fox. These women were convinced of their extraordinary call to preach the gospel, and their gifts made a way for them in various and often remarkable ministries through the history of the church.

2

EVANGELICAL WOMEN IN MINISTRY A CENTURY AGO

The 19th and Early 20th Centuries

Janette Hassey

In 1927 the Moody Bible Institute *Alumni News* proudly published a letter containing an astounding personal account of the ministry of Mabel C. Thomas, a 1913 MBI graduate. Thomas, called to the pastorate in a Kansas church, had preached, taught weekly Bible classes and baptized dozens of converts. She concluded her letter with praise, since she "could not have met the many and varied opportunities for service without the training of MBI."¹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, evangelical churches in America grappled with two thorny issues—theological liberalism and feminist demands for women's equal rights. Many evangelicals responded to the first challenge by reasserting scriptural inspiration and inerrancy. Some of these same "proto-fundamentalists"² were convinced that a literal approach to the Bible, and especially to prophecy, demanded equality for women in church ministry.

Today, however, female graduates of MBI and other evangelical institutions rarely enter the pastorate or pulpit. Why do evangelical groups that once welcomed women as pastors and preachers now prohibit or discourage such ministry? How could evangelicals a century ago have held high their inerrant, verbally inspired Bi-

¹Mabel C. Thomas, letter in *Moody Alumni News*, June 1927, p. 12.

²The term *fundamentalist* is used here in the classic sense, referring to the theologically conservative Protestant organizations that emerged in the early twentieth century, such as the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (IFCA). This early fundamentalism arose largely as a response by evangelicals to the growing movement of theological liberalism. See also N. J. Cohen, ed., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within, a Response from Without* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990).

³⁸Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983), pp. 105, 185-98.

³⁹Ruth A. Tucker, *Private Lives of Pastors' Wives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 62-70.

⁴⁰John Wesley, quoted in Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism*, pp. 27-28.

ble in one hand while blessing the ministries of women preachers, pastors, Bible teachers and evangelists with the other? This chapter will analyze these provocative historical questions.

While investigating women's roles in early fundamentalist circles, I found that fundamentalism a century ago was neither exclusively male dominated nor inherently antifeminist.³ Specifically, when I examined the life and ministry of transitional evangelical figures such as Dwight L. Moody and A. J. Gordon, or of self-avowed fundamentalists such as W. B. Riley and J. R. Straton, I discovered key leaders who saw their support of women preachers as consistent with their biblical literalism.

These historical findings counter the popular but misleading claim that evangelical feminism, or biblical equality, is simply an accommodation to recent secular feminist and theologically liberal movements for women's rights. Rather, evangelical feminism in America first surfaced in the mid-nineteenth century and accelerated into the early twentieth century. Even before concern for women's equality had coalesced into a social/religious movement, a number of evangelical women had stepped out into public ministry as part of the revival activity of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century.

Evangelical Women and the Early Bible Institutes

Bible institutes provided a significant training ground for evangelical women who entered public ministry a century ago. Many women received formal biblical and theological training for the first time. Nationally prominent evangelical leaders—Moody in Chicago, A. B. Simpson in New York, Gordon in Boston and Riley in Minneapolis—established major Bible institutes that dominated the movement. Each man's openness to women's public ministry decisively affected women's roles in each school and also influenced the church at large.

Albert B. Simpson (1843-1919) established North America's first Bible institute in 1883—the Missionary Training College for Home and Foreign Missions in New York City. In 1887 the school relocated to Nyack, New York. In 1897 Simpson formed the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). Simpson gave women a prominent place in church ministry, encouraging women's participation

³For an in-depth account of my research (including bibliography and appendices), which this chapter summarizes, see Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986; reprint Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality).

and leadership in virtually every phase of early C&MA life.⁴ He included women on the executive board committee, employed them as Bible professors, and supported female evangelists and branch officers (the early C&MA equivalent to a local minister).⁵ Simpson's school at Nyack required women to practice preaching in chapel along with men. Having women in church leadership was consistent with Simpson's lay missionary concept—that ordinary people given basic Bible training could evangelize the lost just as effectively as could seminary-trained clergy.

In 1889 Baptist pastor A. J. Gordon opened the Boston Missionary Training School, later called Gordon Bible College. He claimed that a sanctified, Holy Spirit-filled life, not gender, qualified one for church ministry. In "Women as Evangelists" his wife Maria Gordon described how Gordon's training prepared women to "answer any call of the Spirit."⁶ Yearbooks clearly document the wide ministry of women graduates serving as preachers, pastors and Bible teachers.

William Bell Riley, pastor of First Baptist Church in Minneapolis, opened what was perhaps the most aggressive of the fundamentalist Bible schools in 1902. Riley's Northwestern Bible and Missionary Training School employed women preachers in its extension department, while alumnae preached, pastored and evangelized with official school recognition.

Major evangelical schools such as Nyack, Gordon and Northwestern provided women with the training to preach, enter the pastorate and teach Bible while committed to a high view of scriptural authority. Leading the pack was Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, opened by Dwight L. Moody in 1889 as the Bible Institute of the Chicago Evangelization Society.

MBI women openly served as pastors, evangelists, pulpit supply preachers, Bible teachers and even in the ordained ministry. The school's official publication, *Moody Monthly*, listed Lottie Osborn Sheidler as the first woman to graduate from the pastor's course, in August 1929. The activities of alumnae provide the most important indication of MBI's openness to women in public ministry. Equipped at Moody with the skills they needed, female graduates served as pastors and preached in a wide range of denominations.

⁴John H. Cable, *A History of the Missionary Training Institute, 1883-1933* (Nyack, NY: Nyack College, 1933), p. 20 (available at A. B. Simpson Historical Library, C&MA headquarters building, Nyack, NY).

⁵Wendell W. Price, "The Role of Women in Ministry of the Christian and Missionary Alliance," D.Mn. diss., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1977.

⁶Mrs. A. J. (Maria) Gordon, "Women as Evangelists," *Northfield Echoes* 1 (1894): 151.

Although MBI leaders may not have always explicitly encouraged women to preach, pastor or seek ordination, their implicit endorsement of women in those authoritative roles for over forty years cannot be denied. MBI offers the clearest documentation of a turn-of-the-century evangelical educational institution outside of the Wesleyan holiness camp that actively promoted public church ministry for women. None questioned Moody's commitment to a verbally inspired, inerrant Bible. Consequently, the early MBI stands as an appropriate educational symbol of "fundamentalist feminism."

Denominational Approaches to Women in Ministry

Of the Methodist groups, holiness churches were the most open to women's public ministry. For them, the Holy Spirit's second work of grace, not necessarily ordination or education, properly qualified a person to preach. The Free Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists and Church of the Nazarene all promoted equality for women. The Salvation Army admitted women to all ranks of leadership. Newly formed Pentecostal denominations of the early twentieth century continued this holiness practice, often employing Spirit-baptized women as pastors, evangelists and healers.

Roles for women in Baptist circles differed widely. The Free Will Baptists ordained women, and the German and Swedish Baptists encouraged women as pastors and evangelists. American Baptist churches in the North ordained dozens of women in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In contrast, Southern Baptist women who desired to preach or pastor faced enormous opposition.

Smaller groups, such as Bible-believing Quakers, Evangelical Mennonites and the Advent Christian Church, also endorsed women's public church leadership. With their historic emphasis on a seminary-trained clergy, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Lutheran churches largely excluded women from the pastorate by limiting seminary education to males. Only the revivalistic Cumberland Presbyterians, who waived the traditional educational requirements for the ministry, utilized women in leadership to a greater extent. In the wake of the modernist-fundamentalist conflict around the 1920s, groups of conservative Christians began to leave existing denominations and form new associations such as the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (IFCA). Until 1930 this organization welcomed ordained women as members.

Several factors undoubtedly influenced denominational openness toward women in public ministry. The relative freedom for women in the holiness wing of

Methodism points to the influence of theology, especially with respect to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, in opening doors for women. The wide divergence of practice among Baptists—generally more restrictive in the South—illustrates the impact of regionalism on evangelical feminism. The preaching ministry of some Cumberland Presbyterian women represents the powerful force of revivalism in changing traditional roles for women. The surge of women into Congregational pastorates at this time exemplifies the impact of form of church government on opportunities for women.

The Evangelical Free Church denomination, formed in the 1880s, was revivalist in spirit, congregational in church government, premillennial and "Bible-only" in theology, and concentrated among pietist Scandinavian immigrants in the upper Midwest region. The Free Church utilized women as evangelists, Bible teachers and pastors. The committee that drafted the 1908 constitution for the incorporation of the Swedish Evangelical Free Church of America intended that men and women have equal status in the church. The rules for ordination in 1925 state that "a candidate for ordination shall request a reference from the church of which he or she is a member."⁷ Two key leaders of the Free Church, Fredrik Franson and John Gustaf Princell, wrote in public support of women's preaching ministry.

Evangelical Egalitarian Biblical Exegesis

In looking historically at evangelical feminist biblical exegesis concerning women's public church ministry, we will consider ten representative documents written by evangelicals committed to the authority of Scripture. These publications spanned almost seventy years (1859-1926) and helped open doors for women to minister. Thanks partly to the circulation of these books, pamphlets and articles, evangelical women who preached and pastored understood their public ministry to be consistent with their commitment to biblical authority.

Methodist holiness leader Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874) wrote *Promise of the Father* in 1859 to defend the call and need of women to speak in public. She asserted that the gift of the Spirit promised by the Father arrived at Pentecost and was received by both men and women. She argued for the right of women to preach Christ when so led by the Holy Spirit. Palmer's ministry and writing influenced Catherine Booth, Frances Willard and B. T. Roberts.

After hearing Palmer preach, Salvation Army founder Catherine Booth (1829-

⁷Della E. Olson, *A Woman of Her Times* (Minneapolis: Free Church Press, 1977), p. 81.

1890) was appalled to read a local minister's violent "scriptural" attack on Palmer and other women preachers. Booth responded with a letter, which was expanded and published as the pamphlet *Female Ministry* in 1859. Booth quoted from Palmer and closely paralleled Palmer's exegesis. For Booth, the Bible urges women gifted and called by the Spirit to preach.

Methodist temperance leader Frances Willard (1839-1898) professed sanctification under Palmer's ministry. Willard wrote *Women in the Pulpit* in 1888 to defend women's ordination. Her book displayed familiarity with the writings of both Palmer and Booth. She found close to forty biblical texts in support of women's public ministry.

Free Church leader Fredrik Franson wrote the article "Prophecy's Daughters" in 1889 in response to criticism of his advocacy of female evangelists. He concluded that Scripture overwhelmingly supports women's public ministry and the church must never silence women gifted as apostles, prophets, evangelists or shepherds. For Franson, the Bible cannot forbid what the Spirit blesses. A premillennial dispensationalist like Gordon, Franson interpreted women in the pulpit as an essential sign of the end times.

Converted under Palmer's ministry, B. T. Roberts fought for women's ordination within the Free Methodist denomination. In 1891 Roberts wrote *Ordaining Women*, a scriptural argument emphasizing parallels between slavery and the women's issue. Just as opponents of abolition who appealed to the Bible were greatly mistaken on slavery, so were the opponents of women's ordination.

Baptist A. J. Gordon attended a convention where conservatives forbade a female missionary to speak. In response Gordon wrote "The Ministry of Women" in 1894 to vindicate scripturally the preaching of female missionaries. According to Joel 2:28, female prophecy today should not be the exception but the rule.

When Methodist medical doctor and reformer Katharine Bushnell (1856-1946) sensed God's call to China as a missionary, she agreed on one condition: that God prove to her that Paul did not forbid women's preaching. A scholar of both Hebrew and Greek, Bushnell studied the Bible in depth and then assembled the results of her years of research in a Bible correspondence course for women. In 1919 these lessons were published in book form as *God's Word to Women: One Hundred Bible Studies on Woman's Place in the Divine Economy*.⁸ Bushnell exegesed Old Testament pas-

⁸Katharine Bushnell, *God's Word to Women* (Oakland, Calif.: K. C. Bushnell, c. 1923; reprint, North Collins, N.Y.: Ray B. Munson, 1976).

sages at length, devoting twenty lessons to Genesis 1-3. She charged that a misunderstanding of Genesis 3:16 lay behind the misinterpretation of Paul's words. Bushnell saw no contradiction between belief in women's equal status in the church and a high view of Scripture as infallible. Because her technical scholarship went over the heads of many untrained laypeople, in 1919 Jessie Penn-Lewis published, with Bushnell's permission, *The Magna Charta of Women*, which presented *God's Word to Women* in simplified form.

In 1926 Lee Anna Starr published *The Bible Stands for Woman*, which frequently quoted Bushnell's work. Skilled in both Hebrew and Greek, Starr was ordained by the Methodist Protestant Church and ministered as a local pastor. Dismayed that "modern" women might reject Christianity as a whole because of supposed biblical teachings on women's subordination, Starr sought to correct that misunderstanding in an intellectually viable way.

After welcoming female evangelist Uldine Utley to his pulpit, John Roach Straton came under criticism from those who held that allowing a female to preach constituted a denial of biblical authority. To refute these charges, in 1926 Straton wrote *Does the Bible Forbid Women to Preach and Pray in Public?* He grounded his support of women's preaching in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, seen in Joel 2 and Acts 2. This pamphlet by such a militant fundamentalist proves that a commitment to both biblical inerrancy and women's public church ministry was feasible in the early twentieth century.

These ten documents reveal two general approaches in early evangelical feminist exegesis. Those authors who argued primarily for women's right to preach tended to focus on the Joel 2-Acts 2 prophecy-fulfillment passages, which state that "your daughters shall prophesy." They viewed Pentecost as the pivotal event in women's liberation. Other writers pushed for women's equality in all spheres of life, not just the pulpit. They stressed the broader theological issues of creation-redemption. They saw the incarnation of Christ and his victory on the cross over Satan as the crucial event for women, since Christ's atonement ameliorates the effects of the Fall.

Without evangelical publications such as these, the rise of women to positions of leadership in evangelical, Bible-believing circles would have been inconceivable. Evangelical women preached, pastored and taught the Bible in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because they and many other evangelicals were convinced that their ministry entailed obedience to God's Word, not rebellious disobedience.

Reasons for the Rise of Evangelical Women in Public Ministry

Why did so many evangelical women find pulpits and pastorates open to them for the first time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Evangelical theology, a charismatic style of church leadership, and social activism provide keys to understanding this phenomenon.

Evangelical theology. Evangelical women entered the pulpit because significant elements of their own theology supported such a practice. At interdenominational Bible institutes and conferences, many evangelicals rubbed shoulders with other Christians whose theology promoted an egalitarian concept of women in ministry, including the Quakers, the United Brethren and those in the Salvation Army. In addition, the interaction of holiness churches and even some Pentecostal groups with other branches of evangelicalism significantly influenced views toward women. For example, Moody Bible Institute opposed Aimee Semple McPherson's Pentecostal doctrine of healing but not her right to preach or pastor.

Along with Bible institutes, Bible conferences served as key agencies in the promotion of premillennial and fundamentalist theology among evangelical laypeople. The earliest Bible conferences welcomed women preachers and Bible teachers, thus exposing thousands of conference participants to women in positions of authoritative leadership. In 1880 Moody, for example, organized the Northfield Conference, which frequently featured women such as Maria Gordon. Winona Lake Bible Conference, founded in 1895 and closely tied to MBI, widely publicized the public ministry of women from MBI, the Salvation Army and elsewhere.

An emphasis among evangelicals on the sanctifying, empowering work of the Holy Spirit usually corresponded to increasing openness to the exercise of women's gifts. Bishop Alma White, founder of the Pillar of Fire Church, declared that "so long as the Holy Spirit operates in the world, women must necessarily preach the Gospel."⁹ Moody, Gordon, Simpson and Franson also emphasized a second work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian to provide power for witness and missions.

Franson clearly tied his use of female evangelists to the urgent needs he sensed in worldwide missions:

Brothers, the harvest is great and the laborers are few. If the ladies want to help out in the fields during the harvest time, then I think we should let them bind as many sheaves as they can. It is better that women bind the sheaves, than that the sheaves

get lost. When one has been sent out on the field and heard the real cries for help from dozens of places, places to which one cannot possibly reach, then one cannot help but think, "It seems strange that only such a few verses of Scripture, about which there are so many disputes, should be made such obstacles to hinder those who otherwise would have responded to these calls for help."¹⁰

These pietistic evangelicals sought personal holiness expressed concretely in evangelistic witness and missionary concern. Given that context, who dared silence a sanctified woman who was Spirit-led to preach and testify? "It was the theology of the movement and the essential nature of the place of public testimony in the holiness experience which gave many an otherwise timid woman the authority and power to speak out 'as the Holy Spirit led her.'"¹¹

Eschatology and prophetic interest as well as emphasis on the Holy Spirit contributed to new attitudes toward women's ministry. For many premillennialists, Joel's description of "prophesying daughters" in the last days took on vital significance (Joel 2:28). Franson concluded that "we seem to see Psalm 68:12 being fulfilled in our day, 'the Lord gives the command: the women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host.'"¹² Since Christ's second coming would be preceded by a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, many interpreted the increase in women preachers as visible evidence of such an outpouring.

Truly convinced that the end was near and that at Christ's return the unconquered faced damnation in hell, turn-of-the-century premillennialists urgently pursued fervent evangelism and intensely promoted worldwide missions. Faced with what they considered an emergency situation with eternal souls at stake, these evangelicals often enlisted male and female workers alike to preach the gospel to a dying world.

Bible institute founder Charles H. Pridgeon based his forceful appeal for women in ministry on the reality of hell and the imminent return of Christ in these "last days."

If it was "last days" on Pentecost, it certainly is now. Millions are perishing for the bread of life. If there is not only a present world that needs regeneration, but also a hereafter of heaven and hell, we who have the light can realize our awful responsibility.

¹⁰Fredrik Franson, quoted in Edward P. Torjesen, *Fredrik Franson: A Model for Worldwide Evangelism* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1983), p. 47.

¹¹Melvin Eastertday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival in the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1980), p. 42.

¹²Franson, quoted in Torjesen, *Franson*, p. 62.

⁹Alma White, *Woman's Ministry* (London: Pillar of Fire, n.d.), p. 2.

ity. Our forces need to be mobilized and that not only of men but also women and children. The question of the ministry of women is more than just an academic question. The force of men who offer for His service is inadequate. Souls are perishing. There is no time to argue whether it be a man or woman that performs the service. The need must be met. The dying one that is saved will be saved just as well by whomsoever brings the Word of Life. We can split hairs, look wise, and hold up some possible meaning of a text or two of Scripture when the whole trend of God's Word is on the other side; millions are going to hell while we delay.¹³

It was said that God's obvious use of women preachers to convert sinners proved he was blessing their ministry. Surely God would not put such a seal of approval on women's disobedience, proponents argued. Arguing that women are morally superior and consequently have the potential to be even more effective preachers than men, T. De Witt Talmage said women preachers "have a pathos and a power in their religious utterances that men can never reach."¹⁴

There were, of course, those who disputed women's biblical right to preach publicly—but not always with clear knowledge of what they were disputing. When Christian Golder accused proponents of women's ordination of denying biblical inspiration and charged that "in order to emancipate woman, one must first divorce himself from the Word of God," he had not read the evangelical feminist interpretations that were circulating.¹⁵ When P. D. Stephenson blamed the women's movement on "free thinkers, Socialists, agnostics, evolutionists and other foes of the Bible and Evangelical Christianity," he failed to account for advocates of biblical inspiration who also fought for women's equality.¹⁶ The editor of the *Western Recorder*, who opposed women's public ministry, finally conceded that some faithful disciples do believe Scripture yet do not silence women.¹⁷

At any rate, it was obvious that one's commitment to biblical authority was not the deciding factor in whether to oppose or endorse women's ministry; intransigent sat on both sides of the fence. Most evangelicals at this time were obliged to toler-

¹³ Charles H. Pridgeon, *The Ministry of Women* (Gibsonia, Penn.: Pittsburgh Bible Institute, n.d.), pp. 26-28. Pridgeon (1863-1932), a Presbyterian minister who worked as an evangelist with Moody, had contact with Simpson and professed sanctification in 1892. He founded Pittsburgh Bible Institute with his wife, Louise Shepard Pridgeon, in 1901.

¹⁴ T. De Witt Talmage, *Woman: Her Power and Privileges* (New York: J. S. Ogilvie, 1888), p. 16.

¹⁵ Christian Golder, *History of the Diaconess Movement in the Christian Church* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Jennings and Pye, 1903), p. 528.

¹⁶ P. D. Stephenson, *The Woman Question* (Charlotte, N.C.: Presbyterian Publishing, 1899), p. 227.

¹⁷ "Editorial Response," *Western Recorder*, February 8, 1923, p. 8.

ate legitimate interdenominational differences of opinion on such issues as sacraments, church government, Calvinism and even women's ministry.

Charismatic church leadership. Evangelical women experienced increased freedom to preach and pastor in those circles that emphasized Spirit-given gifts of leadership (Greek *charismata*) as the essential qualification for ministry. In the early charismatic stages of the revivalist, holiness and fundamentalist movements, evangelicals often perceived women to be as spiritually gifted as men.

Revivalism, which emphasized personal conversion and testimony, tended to loosen institutional structure and foster informal, spontaneous worship; women enjoyed new opportunities to preach in such settings.¹⁸ The emphasis on charismatic authority and lay leadership resulted in relaxed educational requirements for the clergy. Most early fundamentalists continued with this concept of a nonprofessional ministry, sending workers with only Bible institute training or less into gospel ministry and pastorates. Turn-of-the-century women, barred from most evangelical seminaries, could attend Bible institutes and prepare equally with men for ministry in revivalistic churches.

Doors to public ministry were more open to the daughters and wives of evangelical men holding egalitarian views. Presbyterian minister A. T. Pierson, for example, agreed with his close friend A. J. Gordon on the need for wider opportunities for women in ministry.¹⁹ Pierson fully supported his own daughter, who served as a pastor and evangelist in Vermont.

The wife-husband team ministry approach of women such as Phoebe Palmer, Catherine Booth and Hannah Whitall Smith exemplified the importance of male support for women in public ministry. Similarly, women like Josephine Prineas and Maria Gordon were able to teach along with their husbands at newly opened Bible institutes.

Social activism. Between the 1880s and the adoption in 1920 of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the vote, the United States completed its transition from an agricultural society to a worldwide industrial power. Social factors such as accelerating immigration, rapid urbanization and industrialization trans-

¹⁸ Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, "Women and Revivalism," in vol. I of *Women and Religion in America*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), discusses the early-nineteenth-century setting. The major exceptions to the rule were the revivalistic churches in the South.

¹⁹ Dana Lee Robert, "Arthur Tappan Pierson and Forward Movements of Late-Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1984, pp. 308-10.

formed American life after the Civil War and prepared the ground for various reform movements.

Most nineteenth-century feminists had championed other reform movements such as abolition or temperance. By the turn of the century, the feminist movement encompassed a wide spectrum of advocates and reform platforms. Religious or evangelical feminism held up religion or Scripture as woman's basis for equality. In contrast, secular feminism, exemplified by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, grounded equality for women in natural law or Enlightenment philosophy, rejecting traditional religion and the Bible as degrading to women.

The social activism of this period provided a positive context for many evangelical women to enter public church ministry. Temperance and suffrage did what the abolition movement had done in antebellum America: they provided an impetus for women's rights.

As socially concerned women spoke out on behalf of slaves or victims of alcohol abuse, they found the power and reason to speak out on their own behalf. Women trained through temperance and suffrage work to organize and speak publicly gained the confidence and experience needed for local church leadership. In 1910 Stanton Coit called every suffrage platform a pulpit and each suffragist a preacher.²⁰ In many evangelical churches, the first woman to preach from the pulpit was a temperance or suffrage worker.

Evangelical women in church leadership were often associated with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), an organization that grew out of the 1873-1874 crusade of Midwestern Protestant women to close saloons.²¹ The strategy of "gospel temperance" relied on religious conversion to reform both the drunkard and the liquor industry. Frances Willard, WCTU president from 1879 until 1898, developed the Union into the largest, most powerful and most influential organization of women in the nineteenth century, enlisting more than two million members worldwide by 1897. The WCTU enabled many women to develop a changing role for themselves and served as a base for other causes and reforms.²²

²⁰Stanton Coit, *Women in Church and State* (London: West London Ethical Society, 1910), p. 27.

²¹Barbara Leslie Epstein, *Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); Susan Dye Lee, "Evangelical Domesticity: The Woman's Temperance Crusade of 1873-74," in *Women in New Worlds*, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller, 2 vols. (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon, 1981-1982), 1:293-309.

²²Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981); Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, "For God and Home and Native Land: The W.C.T.U.'s Image of Woman in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Women in New Worlds*, 1:310-27.

Many evangelical leaders openly promoted women's gospel temperance work. Moody utilized Willard herself in his campaigns. Maria Gordon led the Boston-area WCTU, and Josephine Princell of the Free Church organized a Swedish WCTU. MBI approvingly advertised the temperance work of several WCTU representatives, such as national evangelist Helen L. Byrnes.

Suffrage was likewise a major issue to millions of American women of this era, including evangelical women in public ministry. Willard combined temperance and suffrage advocates. Many evangelical women followed her challenge to support suffrage as a matter of Christian duty. Pious women, they argued, could use their votes to elevate American society. In fact, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) depended on the support of evangelical women. Many churches also supported these women. William Bell Riley, citing Willard as a convincing argument for women's right to preach, opened his church to suffrage meetings.

Anna Howard Shaw represented the overlap in evangelical women's leadership in both church ministry and the temperance and suffrage movements. Rev. Shaw, ordained by the Methodist Protestant Church, served as superintendent of the WCTU Department of Franchise from 1888 to 1892. She resigned from her pastorate to lecture and organize woman's suffrage, serving as NAWSA president from 1904 to 1915. For Shaw, the right to vote was a key to woman's freedom.

Winona Bible Conference speaker Viola D. Romans also symbolized the relationship between the temperance and suffrage crusades and evangelical women in ministry. Romans, a suffragist and WCTU representative, lectured in 1914 on equality with men in home and church, basing her presentation on Genesis.

I am a suffragist. . . . I understand most of you here are suffragists. . . . My grandmother was a Quaker preacher. I was brought up with the idea in the home and church that we had co-privileges along with our brothers. . . . God blessed them and set them at much the same work, that of replenishing the earth and subduing it. He said not a word about subduing each other.²³

The story of Christabel Pankhurst ties together many of the factors that led to the rise of women in public church leadership a century ago.²⁴ A strategist of the militant suffrage crusade in Britain before World War I, Pankhurst developed her leadership and public speaking skills in women's struggle to gain the vote. After her conversion to premillennial fundamentalist Christianity, a reporter wrote that "she

²³Viola D. Romans, "The Nation's Call," *Winona Echoes*, August 1914, pp. 349-50.

²⁴David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts: A Study in Tenacity* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

has been converted to Christianity of a somewhat rigid type, which brings her into great demand as a lecturer in churches on literal inspiration."

Like D. L. Moody, Catherine Booth and others, Pankhurst influenced evangelism on both sides of the ocean. She began her public ministry in 1921 and gained new fame in America as a prominent preacher for the premillennial cause, traveling nationwide to speak at Bible conferences, including Winona. A frequent visitor at Moody Bible Institute, Pankhurst preached at Stratton's Calvary Baptist Church in New York City in 1924 and then at the National Bible Institute. For more than twenty years she attracted immense audiences and rallied premillennialists; she claimed that thousands were converted through her evangelistic preaching.

In a sense Pankhurst represented the end of an era. Shortly after her time, other conservative evangelical women who were called to preach began to find the pulpits of revival tents, fundamentalist churches, Bible conferences and Bible institutes off limits.

Reasons for the Decline of Women in Public Ministry

What can account for the gradual decline of public ministry opportunities for evangelical women between the world wars? First, fundamentalist separatist subcultures emerged which tended to harden on the women's issue. Second, as fundamentalism institutionalized, women were squeezed out of leadership roles. Third, the conservative Protestant backlash against changing social values resulted in restrictions on women in ministry. Finally, a more literalist view of Scripture among fundamentalists meant less flexibility in interpreting the subject of women in ministry.

Separatist fundamentalist subcultures. Between the world wars, fundamentalists lost the battle for control of mainline denominations and schools; in regrouping, they created a host of separate institutions. Whereas the nineteenth-century evangelical empire had stood near the center of American culture, the fundamentalism of the 1930s withdrew and formed distinct subcultures. Part of the movement veered in a militant, separatist, extremist direction, often allied with far right-wing politics. In that process of narrowing, opportunities for women also tightened.

Although united briefly in the initial attack on modernist theology, fundamentalism began to splinter in defeat. A growing disputatious, antiecumenical attitude among fundamentalists eliminated earlier cooperative interdenominational undertakings such as WCTU meetings. The Pentecostal practices of tongues and healing and even Methodist perfectionism increasingly antagonized fundamentalists.

The feminist heritage was lost even among the holiness churches, except where it was institutionalized, as in the Salvation Army. By World War II most evangelicals could go a lifetime never having heard a woman preacher or pastor, and girls grew up with fewer and fewer role models of women in public ministry.

Significantly, fundamentalism widened geographically during the same decades in which it narrowed denominationally. Whereas early fundamentalist strength had lain in the urban North, the welcoming into their fold of southern conservative cousins like the Southern Baptists produced a shift of strength to the southern Bible Belt. This change paralleled the establishment of Dallas Seminary, a fundamentalist graduate school in the South. Southern conservative social values, which traditionally included the subordinate place of women in society and church, typified an increasingly large segment of the fundamentalist constituency.

The early fundamentalist involvement in social action waned as the movement became more rigid. Historical distance from earlier temperance and suffrage crusades decreased one's chances of hearing evangelical women speak publicly in church. The secular feminist movement certainly lost steam and direction after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment granted women the vote in 1920. As evangelicals turned from active social concern and reform to institution-building and theological squabbles, women lost opportunities to speak out on behalf of others as they had done in support of temperance and suffrage.

Institutionalization. Both Moody Bible Institute and the Evangelical Free Church illustrate the process of institutionalization and its effect on women's roles. Changes in educational programs in these denominations furnish one indication of this change. MBI, for instance, began in the 1880s as a practical training center for women and men in lay ministry. MBI's inauguration of a graduate school a century later suggests an enormous transformation. Similarly, early Free churches typically supported itinerant lay evangelists rather than seminary-trained pastors. The establishment of doctoral programs at Trinity University later in the twentieth century also indicates immense institutional transition.

With the rising social status of many churches came the demand for professional, seminary-trained clergy in place of charismatic lay ministry. As frontier churches previously viewed as home mission fields increased in numbers and wealth, congregations could afford to support a married man as minister. Some considered the presence of a female pastor a tacit acknowledgment of a church's poverty.

Educational attainment and credentials often replaced spiritual gifts as the es-

sential leadership qualifications. The establishment of interdenominational Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924—the nation's first strictly fundamentalist seminary—symbolized this shift.²⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, undoubtedly influenced by Charles Scofield's view on women while teaching at Philadelphia College of the Bible, was the founder of Dallas. Emerging from the modernist-fundamentalist debates of the 1920s, it admitted only born-again male college graduates endowed with ministry gifts. Chafer clearly distinguished his school from Bible institutes, claiming that "those Bible courses which have been designed for laymen and Christian workers generally are not adequate as a foundational Bible training for the preacher or teacher."²⁶

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Bible institutes furnished a large slice of local church leadership and influenced theology accordingly. Later, Dallas and similar schools began training the men who went on to administer and teach at Bible institutes.²⁷ When evangelical churches were clamoring for seminary-trained pastors, Dallas sent out only men to fill those posts. Other seminaries trained women but discouraged them from preaching and pastoral roles.

By the mid-twentieth century, churches increasingly directed women gifted to minister away from pulpit and pastoral duties toward safer spheres of service. Since World War I, the rapidly rising field of religious or Christian education has drawn trained women into its fold. A female Bible institute graduate who in 1910 might have pastored a small church or traveled as an itinerant revivalist would by 1940 more likely serve as a director of religious education.

Professionalization affected women's service on the mission field as well. Foreign missions continued as an acceptable ministry option for women throughout the twentieth century. But the shift to overseas specialties in medicine, education, agriculture and construction influenced perceptions of appropriate roles for women. Before specialization, churches sent missionaries primarily as preachers, church planters and Bible teachers, with women filling those positions along with

²⁵ Rudolf A. Renfer, "A History of Dallas Theological Seminary," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1959.

²⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Effective Ministerial Training," *Evangelical Theological College Bulletin*, May 1925, p. 9.

²⁷ An examination of the educational background of the men who teach Bible and theology on MBI's faculty listed in the 1985-1986 catalog illustrates the phenomenal impact of Dallas. Thirteen of the nineteen Bible and theology professors graduated from Dallas. The dean of education and chairs of five departments—Bible, Theology, Pastoral Studies, Evangelism and Christian Education—also graduated from Dallas.

men. As specialization increased, women more often than not filled supportive roles as men handled preaching and pastoring. And female missionaries unused to preaching overseas felt less comfortable in American pulpits on furlough.

In summary, women found declining opportunities for leadership in evangelical churches, schools and agencies as institutionalization squelched earlier gift-based forms of ministry.²⁸ In worship as well as in education, routinization set in. In a shift toward more regulated and formalized church services, praying and speaking were no longer left to chance. Structured rather than spontaneous worship tended to exclude women from public participation.

Fundamentalist reaction to social change. Opposition to women's public ministry was part of a post-World War I reaction to vocal, extreme feminism and a perceived decline in womanhood. Dress, appearance and habits constituted the most conspicuous signs of American women's growing independence. Shorter skirts, bobbed hair, cosmetics, public smoking and drinking—these externals marked the "liberated" woman. More substantially, the expansion of women into the workforce produced growing economic independence.

The onset of the Depression undoubtedly accelerated the return of fundamentalists and evangelicals to traditional values. Evangelicals feared that cultural trends toward women's freedom in dress, habits, morals and occupations might destroy the family. As churches identified women preachers and pastors with the secular women's movement, opposition rose. Hoping to save the American home, many evangelicals narrowed their view of appropriate women's roles. The attack by John R. Rice, a separatist fundamentalist, against *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers* illustrates how these issues connected in this era.²⁹

The backlash in conservative Protestant circles against changing social mores can be traced in *Moody Monthly* magazines of the 1930s. Numerous articles appeared on the "new woman," exposing the ill effects of modern morality. The disturbing shifts in the roles and behavior of women in American society frightened conservative Christians. Convinced that the survival of the traditional family and of the entire social order was at stake, many evangelicals tightened their approach to women in church ministry. Might not women's leadership there give encouragement to other destructive tendencies?

²⁸ See David Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), and H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), on the institutionalization process in religious groups.

²⁹ John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers* (Wheaton, Ill.: Sword of the Lord, 1941).

MBI and other evangelical institutions began to advocate a more limited role expectation for women in an effort to maintain traditional family and moral values. In the process, evangelicals took away ministry opportunities from women.

Fundamentalist exegesis. In reaction to perceived threats to the family and society, many fundamentalist institutions revised their earlier perspectives on biblical teaching on women. Fundamentalists no longer interpreted the passages in 1 Timothy 2 or 1 Corinthians 14 as occasional advice for specific problems; instead these passages were regarded as giving transcultural principles for all times and places.

In the early twentieth century, fundamentalists had tightened the lines around the concept of inerrancy; it became one of the Fundamentals and was understood to require a literalistic interpretation of Scripture. Opposition to women ministers may have been formalized as a byproduct. Just as the South had employed extremely authoritative and literalistic views of Scripture to justify slavery, the North adopted similar attitudes toward women after the modernist battles. As this type of literalism became entrenched, fundamentalists interpreted passages about women more rigidly.

Opportunities for women to preach and pastor declined as evangelical churches identified such service as contrary to Scripture. Support of women's public ministry came to be seen as a denial of biblical inerrancy. Straton's 1926 pamphlet was one of the last publications from the fundamentalist camp arguing for women's right to preach. Few evangelical men followed in the steps of Moody, Gordon, Simpson, Franson, Riley and Straton to publicly defend women preachers. When the publications containing feminist exegesis from the evangelical perspective went out of print, little appeared to replace them.³⁰ Unable or unwilling to view women's public ministry as consistent with Scripture, evangelical churches increasingly labeled their pulpits "For Men Only."

This shift in biblical exegesis produced theological reformulation. For example, the same premillennialism used by Gordon and Franson to advocate women preachers was utilized by later writers to restrict women. Certain dispensationalists began to interpret women's leadership as an *evil* sign of the end times, identifying such women with the whore of Babylon.

Turn-of-the-century evangelicals committed to the imminent, premillennial return of Christ had put their intense convictions into action. The urgent need to mobilize workers to spread the gospel worldwide left no time for one sex to remain

silent. Later premillennialists apparently retained intellectual assent to Christ's soon return but relaxed considerably on the urgency of evangelizing the world. They proved more concerned with opposing evolution than promoting evangelism, and thus evangelical recruitment of female preachers subsided.

Although knowledge of the past does not and should not dictate the future, it helps illumine how recent attitudes toward women developed. For several decades at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, evangelical churches did not leave the public gifts of women in the church buried. We, in turn, dare not bury the accounts of those courageous, committed pioneer women.

³⁰ Only recently have reprints of these books, pamphlets and articles been made available.

The Role of Women in the Bible

Bruce K. Waltke

Introduction

In this article I aim to offer as an exegetical theologian a broad survey of the role of women in "worship," with particular emphasis on the Old Testament, my area of expertise. I prefer to define the role of women in the Bible in terms of their "worship" because from the biblical perspective believers offer their entire lives as an act of worship to God, even as Adam and Eve offered theirs in the Garden before the Fall.

Since the church is not united in its understanding of the role of women in the church, in the home, and in society, let me say at the outset that I regard these matters as non-essentials for the unity of the church; our differences regarding the role of the sexes should not divide the church either spiritually or politically. Nevertheless, the topic is important. Godly men and women, as citizens of heaven, earnestly desire to play out their lives in a way that is worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27). Furthermore, the church must face the practical issue of whether to ordain gifted women to various ministries and/or to the office of ruler.¹ I offer this essay to further our mutual endeavours to live godly lives, to handle rightly the Scriptures, and to attain to the unity of the faith regarding the role of women, though we all still see through a glass darkly.

Before looking at specific texts, however, the hermeneutical question of how texts conditioned by historical particularity can be normative for the contemporary church must be addressed.

I. Hermeneutical issues and the method of criticism

The order of creation is normative. To transcend the historically particular and culturally-conditioned situation in which Scripture is given and to find what is normative for the practice of the covenant people I first examine the role of women in worship before the Fall. The two creation accounts, Genesis 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25, represent God's design for men and women, husbands and wives. The rest of Scripture recounts a sacred story that to a large extent is moving toward the restoration of this ideal.¹ It treats this charter for humanity as normative for the covenant community, though sometimes concessions are made because of the hardness of the human heart (Matt 19:8). Foundational to my view is my understanding that the situation represented in these first two chapters of Genesis is regarded as normative for humanity in the rest of Scripture. This ideal is not imposed upon men and women but presented to help them understand their natures and the roles for which they were created.² Their sexuality lies deeper than their physical characteristics to reproduce, but in their very embodiment as human beings, in the way they view the world and in the way they are perceived.³ Men and women have distinctive "glories." In the light of this ideal for men and women I will examine the rest of the Old Testament and note, as necessary, its continuities and discontinuities with the New Testament.

The order of creation, which is set forth in these two accounts, stands behind the order of



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Covenant theology
 { order of creation
 order of redemption }

redemption, which is represented in the rest of Scripture. For example, the Fourth Commandment (Exod 20:8-11) to refrain from work on the Sabbath is based on the first creation account that God ceased his own work on that day (2:2-3). The Seventh Commandment (Exod 20:14) to not commit adultery is founded on the institution of marriage in the Garden of Eden according to the second account (Gen 2:18-25). The Sixth Commandment (Exod 20:13) protects innocent life because every life is created in God's image (Gen 1:26-28; cf. 5:1-3; 9:6).

Moreover, our Lord aimed to recapture for his church the Creator's original intention for marriage (Matt 19:3-9), and the Apostle Paul based on these accounts his arguments concerning the roles of women in the home and in the church (1 Cor 11:3-12; 1 Tim 2:12-15).

In sum, the Bible is a story of Paradise lost in the first Adam and being regained in the Second. The Garden of Eden symbolically represents the ideal culture that was lost and that Moses restores in the Law and that Christ restores more perfectly in his church through the Spirit. These accounts present what is normative for the role of women in "worship."

Furthermore, the historically conditioned texts in the rest of the Old Testament cannot be ruled out of hand as not normative practices of the church in its worship before God for at least three reasons:

God ordained Israel's culture. First, (God sovereignly ordained the culture in which he became incarnate.) The roles played by godly women in ancient Israel are due to his design, not chance. The Sovereign God, not Lady Luck, is Israel's Lord. Since his sovereignty extends even to assigning the pagans their gods and their cultures (Deut 4:19), we may rightly suppose that the Sovereign did not hand over to Chance either his representation of himself as Father, Son and Spirit or the role of women in the nation that he chose to bless the world by embodying and disseminating his teaching (cf. Gen 18:18-19).

Orthodox theology cannot consent to Krister Stendahl's comment, made while he

was still dean of Harvard Divinity School, that God's numerous and strong masculine metaphors for himself are largely an accident.³ According to Stendahl: "The masculinity of God and of God-language, is a cultural and linguistic accident, and I think one should also argue that the masculinity of the Christ is of the same order. To be sure, Jesus Christ was a male, but that may be no more significant to his being than the fact that presumably his eyes were brown."⁴ In truth, however, the biographies of Jesus in the New Testament curiously do not mention anything about our Lord's physical appearance apart from his masculinity, suggesting it has theological relevance. His incarnation occurred at the right time and in the right way according to God's own sovereign purposes (Gal 4:2-4).

Prophets critique Israel's culture but not patriarchy. Second, Israel's prophets, God's mouth, were iconoclasts, not traditionalists, who called Israel into the dock for numerous injustices. Abraham Heschel in his justly praised work *The Prophets* makes the point:

They challenged the injustices of their culture. The prophet is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered and awesome beliefs cherished as certainties, institutions endowed with supreme sanctity. They exposed the scandalous pretensions, they challenged kings, priests, institutions and even the temple.⁵

However, [not one of these cultural revolutionaries regarded patriarchy as an unjust or oppressive form of government.] Quite the contrary. They interpreted the rule by women as God's judgment against the sinful nation. Isaiah, for example, ridicules it: "Children are their oppressors, and women rule over them" (Isa 3:12). They inveighed, however, against abuse of power that oppressed women: "The women of my people you cast out from their pleasant homes" (Micah 2:9). They gave a voice for those too weak to have a voice, especially the fatherless and widows. Against unjust magistrates Isaiah complained: "They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the widow's cause come before them" (Isa 1:23; cf. v. 7).

Practice of Christ Jesus confirms male rulership. Third, our Lord was a revolutionary in his own age with regard to the role of women in worship. He amazed his disciples by conversing with a woman because he violated the prejudice of both the Jews and the Romans against women (John 4:27). The Son of God bestowed dignity upon the Samaritan adulteress, "unclean" by Jewish standards, by revealing to her for the first time that worship would now be directed toward the Father in heaven, not toward "Mecca-like" Jerusalem on earth (John 4:21-25). Moreover, our Lord entrusted women to be the original witnesses to his resurrection, the cornerstone of the Christian faith, though their testimony would have been discounted in a Roman court (Luke 24:1-4). He rewarded the devotion of Mary of Magdala, out of whom he had cast seven demons, by allowing her to be the first person to meet him after his resurrection (Mark 16:9-10; John 20:14-18). His disciples refused to believe Mary's report of the risen Lord. In fact, they dismissed it as an "idle tale" (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11). Later Jesus rebuked them for their unwillingness to believe her (Mark 16:14). Yet he implicitly confirmed the role of men as rulers by not appointing a woman as an apostle, though women followed him, ministered to him, and were his close friends.

Does it make sense to argue that Jesus, who in these matters pertaining to theology was so counter-cultural with respect to women, only appointed male apostles, upon whom he founded his Church, because he was culturally conditioned? Is it not more plausible to think that had he intended to empower women to have equality with men in government, he would have called a woman to be an apostle, either before or after his resurrection? The appointment of men or women to this important office is not a matter of theological indifference.

II. Forbidden Fruit

There are those today who would argue for a perspective about women, the world, and God which is based on human autonomy, the attempt to know truth apart from divine

revelation.⁶ Elsewhere in this journal I have argued that an adequate epistemology must be based on revelation, not on human reason, experience (e.g., so-called "callings"), and/or tradition (cf. Deut 8:3; Ezek 28:6, 15-17).⁷

This truth is symbolically represented in the second account by God's prohibition not to eat of the "tree of knowledge and good and evil." "The tree of knowledge of good and evil" represents knowledge that is God's prerogative. As Christians we know that the only accurate description of reality is that which is known to God. He is the maker of reality and our only clear interpreter of it. Therefore only the good Creator and moral Sovereign of the universe can legislate inerrantly what promotes life and social well-being and what harms them. Our first parents, by seizing this prerogative for themselves in order to become equal with God, died spiritually and lost Paradise. To be sure, eating the forbidden fruit (i.e., living independently from God's revelation) appeared good for food (i.e., of practical value), pleasant to the eye (i.e., having aesthetic appeal), and desirable to make one wise (i.e., provided intellectual gratification). The price, however, was too high. They lost a relationship with both God, symbolized by hiding among the trees, and with one another, symbolized by putting a barrier of clothing between them.

Some Christian feminists acknowledge the authority of the Bible, but they tend, I suggest, to interpret Scripture in a way that favours their social agenda, viz.: the equality of women in authority and leadership. Regarding their zeal to ordain women rulers, we need to ask, are they projecting their system upon the Bible, as a better system, and thereby imposing their own will for power against God's design?

The mutual submission of men and women to one another is unique to the New Testament. However, their equality before God, in their nature, spiritual gifts, and prayer is found in both testaments.

Until the twentieth century the Church universally understood Scriptures to teach male rulership in the Church,⁸ but I observe that many evangelical churches, certainly not all, have overthrown that heritage on the superficial basis that scholars are divided on the issue. The truth is that scholars are divided on most theological issues, including the Bible's trustworthiness. On that basis no doctrine is safe, and the more liberal perspective and practice must prevail. Anthony Thiselton, citing Robert Morgan, rightly advised pastors to be on guard that "some disagreements about what the Bible means stem not from obscurities in the texts, but from conflicting aims of the interpreters."⁹

Furthermore, we must guard ourselves against political correctness, conformity to a consensus, and demagoguery. To be sure, all of us interpret texts out of a tradition, a consensus, and/or under the influence of some authority. This is inevitable and rational, for, as Gadamer¹⁰ explains, we are aware of our own limitations and accept that others have better understanding. As followers of Christ, however, we must always submit that heritage, consensus, and/or authority to Scripture lest we make Scripture void. Like the Bereans, we need to examine "every day" the Scriptures for ourselves to see what is the truth.

III. Marriage and Motherhood

Those who would urge married women to give priority to fulfilment in careers outside of the home over against fulfilment in child-bearing within the marriage structure—in my understanding of the biblical text—are not offering sound advice.

According to the first creation account God created humanity as male and female (Gen 1:26-28; cf. Matt 19:4), whereupon he blessed them (i.e., filled them with potency to reproduce life and to triumph over enemies [cf. Gen 22:17]) and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. He intended that they procreate his image and similitude (cf. 5:1-3), thereby affording the opportunity to as many people as possible to sit at his banquet table of life. Humanity is grounded in being male and female, an immutably fixed, natural reality. It

is my view that any form of feminism which, in a desire for freedom and power, depreciates this fundamental design is inconsistent with the biblical revelation. "Grace," as Pope John Paul II noted in his remarks to Roman Catholic bishops, "never casts nature aside or cancels it out, but rather perfects it and ennoble it."¹¹

In the second creation account God gives Adam his bride and thereby institutes marriage, defining them now as husband and wife. By instituting marriage in the Garden of Eden, God represents marriage as an ideal and holy state, an act of worship (Heb 13:4). We recall that the Church restores the Garden. Therefore, believers commit themselves in marriage to one another in the presence of God. Marriage is the only social institution that precedes the Fall, and the homes established through marriage provide the foundation stones for society. After the Fall God instituted the State to protect society from criminals and the Church to promote a new community of love in a world of hating and being hated (Titus 3:3).

The Gift of the Bride story emphasizes the goodness of marriage. The Lord's statement that Adam's singleness "is not good" (Gen 2:18) is highly emphatic. Instead of saying "it is lacking in goodness," a normal Hebrew way of saying that a situation is less than ideal, he emphatically calls it in effect "bad." God completes the man by the gift of a bride, not by placing him in a community, which is no surrogate for a wife. This account ends, with no trace of male chauvinism, with the coda that *the man* leaves his parents to cling to his wife (2:24). However, as we shall again note, the New Testament presents a singleness devoted to Christ as even better than marriage.

The rest of the Old Testament also defines marriage as a holy and an ideal state. Though certainly marriage was not required for holiness, it is instructive to observe that the most holy people in the Old Testament were married. The high priest, who alone could enter once a year with awe and trembling into God's presence in the Most Holy Place, was married.¹² Nazirites, the most holy people in the Old Testament by their own choice, not by birth as in the case of the high priest,

likewise were married (see Num 6:1-21). By definition he or she (see v. 2) was "separated" to God, but Nazirites never fasted sexually. They showed their separation to the Creator by not cutting their hair, just as an orchard was set apart to God by not pruning it and an altar dedicated to God was not made of cut stones. They symbolized their separation from earthly pleasures by not eating the fruit of the vine that cheers both gods and people (Judges 9:13), and they showed they belonged to the God of life by a total separation from death. However, they did not show their separation to God by celibacy. Marriage was part of their consecration, worship, and holiness.

Paul, as noted, elevates singleness for "gifted" individuals to an even higher state (1 Cor 7). In regard to women who are called to singleness, however, his design is not to favour women's careers outside the home over motherhood within it, but, in addition to minimizing the dangers of an "impending crisis" (v. 26), to enable them to be fully devoted to Christ without distraction (vv. 32-35). Apart from this "giftedness," the apostle teaches as normative behaviour that older women teach younger women "to love their husbands and be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:4-5).

God elevates godly mothers to a high status after the Fall. In sovereign grace he changed the fallen woman's affection to enmity against Satan: "I will put enmity between you [the Serpent] and the woman [who had earlier denied faith in the goodness of God and in the trustworthiness of his word]" (Gen 3:15). By his promise to give this new woman a triumphant, though suffering, offspring, he implicitly assigned her the role of bearing the seed that would destroy the Serpent, the Adversary of God and humanity. The quintessential expression of that seed is Christ, who defeated Satan on the cross, but the mandate finds its fulfilment in every covenant child: "The God of peace," says the Apostle to the church at Rome, "will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20). In response to

the promise to give the woman seed to defeat Satan, believing Adam named his wife Eve, "because she would become the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). Every Christian mother by being in Christ bears his holy children (1 Cor 7:14; cf. Isa 53:10). If a woman has suffered any loss of leadership through her creation (1 Tim 2:12-13; cf. Gen 2:18-25) and (Greek *kaí*)¹³ through her historical guilt by Satan's deception, in contrast to Adam, in connection with the Fall (1 Tim 2:14; cf. Gen 3:1-14), says the Apostle—if I understand him correctly—she will be saved from that loss through bearing children in Christ, if the children continue in the faith, love, and holiness with propriety (3:15; 1 Tim 2:15). In short, the Apostle is saying, "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." Pastors need to hold before the women of their churches Mary's response to the angel's announcement that she would be with child: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Mary models for Christian women a most important aspect of woman in worship and ministry. Jonathan Mills¹⁴ helpfully pointed out that Mary's submission is not a passive, unthoughtful, abject resignation, but an obedience she offered out of her freedom, her independence, her thoughtful commitment so that her submission is meaningful and glorious.

IV. The Equality of Men and Women

Most debated issues have the heuristic value of enabling one to see truth in a new way. The varied contemporary versions of "feminism," have had the heuristic value of reasserting the equality of women with men. Unfortunately, as has been documented many times, both the synagogue and the Church have not only failed to proclaim this glad truth but have shouted it down. It is a black mark in sacred history.

The error, however, lies in the interpreters of Scripture, not in the Holy Bible itself. In the first creation account both men and women are created in God's image (Gen 1:26-28). An image of the deity in the ancient Near East, as D. J. A. Clines has shown, entailed dominion.¹⁵ He cites a cuneiform text dated about 675

B.C.: "It was said to Esarhaddon [the Assyrian king], 'A free man is as the shadow of god, the slave is as the shadow of a free man, but the king, he is like unto the very image of god.'"¹⁶

God crowned men and women as kings and queens to rule over his entire creation, including the mysterious serpent who "was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made" (Gen 3:1). Together, as his image, they share this derivative authority to be culture makers.

The second account reinforces this equality and clarifies it. When the Lord says "I will make for Adam a helper suitable to him," he means that he will form a woman who is equal to and adequate for the man. She stands opposite him in her sexual differentiation but equal with him in her personhood and dignity. Adam's response to her formation from his own body are the only human words preserved from before the Fall. Untouched by envy and/or a desire to dominate and control her, he celebrates with admiration her equality with him in elevated poetry, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." At the same time he recognized her sexual differentiation from him: "She shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man" (Gen 2:23).

The rest of the Old Testament reinforces women's equality in being and in dignity with men. Let me cite a few of many illustrations to make the point. After Sarah over-reacted to the arrogance of her maidservant, Hagar, and had driven her out of the house, the angel of the LORD found the runaway at a well. He said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai..." (Gen 16:8). The modern reader misses the significance of that address. This is the only instance in all of the many thousands of ancient Near Eastern texts where a deity, or his messenger, calls a woman by name and thereby invests her with exalted dignity. Hagar is the Old Testament counterpart to the Samaritan woman (see John 4). Both were women, both were not of Abraham's family, and both were sinners, yet God treated both with compassion, gave them special revelations and bestowed on them unconventional dignity.

In the Old Testament women were called to be "prophetesses," God's mouth in the

world, on an equal footing with prophets. Miriam (ca. 1400 B.C.) (Exod 15:20f.) was the first of several who are named, including Deborah (Judges 4:4-7), Isaiah's wife (725 B.C.) (Isa 8:3), Huldah (640 B.C.) (2 Kings 22:13-20), and the false prophetess, Noadiah (ca. 450 B.C.) (Neh 6:14). Joel 2:28 predicts that in the last days the LORD will fulfil Moses's prayer that all the Lord's people, men and women alike, shall become prophets (Num 11:29). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to both men and women, young and old alike, to enable them to proclaim boldly the triumphant news, Jesus is Lord of all, and to build his Church (Acts 1:8, 14; 2:1-4, 17-18).

Huldah is a most remarkable prophetess with regard to the question of women's roles in worship and ministry. During the reformation of Josiah, his workmen, who were repairing the temple, found the Book of the Law, which King Manasseh had neglected during the previous generation. Josiah directed five leaders to inquire of the LORD about the book. Instead of going to the now famous prophets, Jeremiah and Zephaniah, they went to their contemporary, Huldah, to verify the book (2 Kings 22:3-20). Clarence Vos in his superb doctoral dissertation on our topic says:

That officials from the royal court went to a prophetess relatively unknown with so important a matter is strong indication that in this period of Israel's history there is little if any prejudice against a woman's offering of prophecy. If she had received the gift of prophecy, her words were to be given the same authority as those of men.¹⁷

Women and men were also equal in prayer. Covenant women prayed directly to God without the priestly mediation of their husbands. For example, when carnal Jacob defaulted in his responsibility to pray for his barren wife (Gen 30:1-2), in contrast to his godly forefathers who prayed for their children and wives (cf. 24:7, 12-15; 25:21), Rachel petitioned God directly, and he listened to her and opened her womb (30:22-24). Barren Hannah also sought dignity and worth through child-bearing. She too went directly to God in

prayer, independently from her husband, Elkanah, and the high priest, Eli, both of whom were insensitive to her need. In fact, when challenged by Eli, she spoke up and defended her right (1 Sam 1:15-16). She named her boy, "Asked of God," and dedicated him to the LORD with the prayer that he would introduce kingship into Israel (2:10b). Hannah's prayer turned Israel around from the nadir of its spiritual history and political misfortune and started it on its upward ascent to its glory under David. A mother's prayer saved Israel and ruled it.

In addition to these prophetesses other women also received direct revelations from God. When Rebekah felt the twins struggling in her womb, she asked the LORD, "why is this happening to me?" (Gen 25:22), a question written large across the page of history. The LORD revealed to her Jacob's triumph over Esau.

Women sang and danced in worship, expressions of the acme of life. Miriam and Deborah composed the two oldest pieces of literature preserved in the Bible, which are regarded by scholars as literary masterpieces (Exod 15 and Judges 5). Women celebrated before the LORD with singing, dancing, and tambourines (e.g., 1 Sam 18:6; Ps 68:25), although they were not a part of the temple choir.

Mothers stood on equal footing with fathers in teaching children: "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue" (Prov 31:26). Israel's sages were also cultural revolutionaries with regard to the role of women teaching in the home. The father's command to the son, "do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8), seems unexceptional to the average reader. However, nowhere else in the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East, from the Euphrates to the Nile, is the mother mentioned as a teacher. In order for the mother to teach Israel's inherited wisdom, she herself had first to be taught, suggesting that "son" in the Book of Proverbs is inclusivistic, not gender specific.

Women in the Old Testament offered sacrifices and gifts along with men (cf. Lev 12:6). The laws for ceremonial cleansing in

connection with bodily emissions were essentially the same for both sexes (chapter 15). Women as well as men consecrated themselves to God as Nazirites (Num 6:2). Sarah, when wronged by her female servant and by the apathy of her husband to the injustice inflicted upon her, appealed to God for justice, but did not issue an ultimatum that either Hagar goes or she goes (Gen 16:5).

The role of woman in ministry in the New Testament is better known. Luke takes pains

to stress the important role that women played on Paul's second missionary journey when he established the church in Macedonia and Achia (cf. Acts 16:13; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:2). The Apostle had a vision of a man of Macedonia begging him to come and help him (16:9), and when he arrived he found women in prayer who became his first converts (vv. 11-15).

Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, Euodia, and Syntyche are celebrated as "minister" (*diakonos*), "co-worker" (*sunergos*), and "missionary" (*apostolos*).¹⁸ However, a woman was to keep silent in the church if she had a question about her husband's prophecy; she should ask him about it at home (1 Cor 14:34-35).¹⁹

The mutual submission of men and women to one another is unique to the New Testament. However, their equality before God, in their nature, spiritual gifts, and prayer is found in both testaments. It is a dramatic irony that it has been some of the more radical feminists, who malign the Old Testament for its patriarchy, who have opened my eyes to this truth. Their perspective has had the heuristic benefit of bringing to the forefront these equalities. Thanks to this perspective, women are being liberated to use their gifts to enrich the church. This is a real gain.

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ministries as
men.*

In sum, we are now in a position to draw the conclusion from Scripture that the Church should ordain women to various ministries according to the Spirit's gifts and callings.

We now turn again to the question whether the Church should ordain women to the office of ruler (e.g., of priest, elders, and the pastor of the Anglican, Presbyterian and Baptist traditions respectively). Here we need to distinguish clearly between call to ministry and appointment of an office. They are not the same.

V. Male Priority in Government

There is a growing consensus within the Church that rejects male government. Nevertheless, as best I can tell, male authority in the home and in the Church is founded on the order of creation and reinforced in the order of redemption as presented in both the Old and New Testaments.

God established this pattern by creating Adam first and the woman to help the man (Gen 2:18). As Paul noted in a passage dealing with the role of men and women, one which demands its own study: "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man, neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Cor 11:8-9). If I understand Paul rightly, he gives priority to the man by the sequence of the creation of man and woman and by the purpose for which the woman was created. For these two reasons the man has a priority in government. Is it not plausible to assume, if this interpretation is valid, that had he intended equality in government he would have formed Eve and Adam at the same time and have said, "It is not good for the man or woman to be alone, I will make them to be helpers suitable to each other"? If he had wanted a matriarchy, would he would not have formed Eve first and created the husband to be a suitable helper to his wife? However, he created a government in which the husband has authority.

As stated earlier, the "Gift of the Bride" story does not aim to impose an ideal upon us but to give us an insight into our natures. It is a truism of anthropology, I am told, that

male leadership is normative in every culture and that there is no evidence of matriarchy. George Gilder says:

Steven Golberg's rigorously argued book *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, described by Margaret Mead as 'flawless in its presentation of data,' refutes every anthropological claim that there has ever existed in human affairs either a society where women rule or a society where final authority resides with them in male-female relations.²⁰

Hierarchy in government is not the result of the Fall. It existed eternally in the Godhead itself, wherein the Son was always voluntarily subservient to the Father's will and the Spirit to both. However, Christian hierarchy, it must be insisted, is unlike those of the world. It is a government of mutual, active, voluntary submission. Leaders, on the one hand, love and serve others, become their servants; they do not lord it over the governed. They abhor the worldly concepts of "having the last word" and of defining hierarchy as "a pecking order" (Matt 20:25-28). Those who are led, on the other hand, actively, independently, and freely submit to this leadership. The mutual submission and ownership of each other's body in marriage (1 Cor 7:4-5) probably offended the pride of the Graeco-Roman male. "Patriarchy," "obedience," "submission," are red-flag words because we invest them with worldly meanings, not with biblical ones. We need to sanctify them or invent new vocabulary. A power struggle between the sexes, as we note again below, resulted from the Fall. Christ saves his people from seeking to lord it over one another into submitting themselves to one another in a way appropriate to their sexual differences.

God prepares the husband for leadership before giving him his bride by having Adam name the living creatures (Gen 2:19-20). In the ancient Near East, as today, naming is a form of leadership. For example, when the Israelites conquered Transjordan, they asserted their authority by renaming the rebuilt cities (Num 32:38), and Pharaoh Neco asserted his rule over Eliakim by renaming Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34). After the Lord gives Adam

his bride, Adam tactfully uses the passive form of construction, presumably not to dominate, for her generic name: "she shall be called woman..." (Gen 2:23b). After the Fall, he calls out her personal name, "Eve" (3:20).²¹

Paul, as noted above in connection with 1 Timothy 2:14, forbids women to have authority over men in the church (1 Tim 2:12) also because the woman, not the man, was deceived and became a sinner. We need not detain ourselves here, however, in an exegesis regarding Paul's reason for his ruling. What is important for our purposes is his ruling. Elsewhere I argued for the traditional understanding that this text is normative for the church.²² It will not do to obscure the New Testament teaching about husband-headship by appealing to Galatians 3:28: "there is neither male nor female." While in the eschaton, of which we are already members, that is true, until the redemption of our bodies we still participate in the first creation with its distinction between the sexes. The biblical instructions regarding the distinctive roles of men and women, of husbands and wives, address that obvious reality and serve the best interests of both sexes.

As a result of the Fall and God's judgment upon them, the woman desires to rule her husband and he seeks to dominate her (3:16b).²³ The solution to this tragic power struggle that divides the home is the new creation in Christ, in which the husband humbles himself and in love serves his wife, and the wife voluntarily submits herself to him in faithful obedience (Eph 5:22). The rest of Scripture sustains hierarchy, not democracy or matriarchy.

God, who is over all, represents himself by masculine names and titles, not feminine. He identifies himself as Father, Son and Spirit, not Parent, Child and Spirit, nor Mother, Daughter and Spirit. Jesus taught his church to address God as "Father" (Luke 11:2) and to baptize nations "in the name of Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). God's titles are King, not Queen; Lord, not Mistress.²⁴ God, not mortals, has the right to name himself. It is inexcusable hubris on the part of mortals to change the images by which

the eternal God chooses to represent himself. We cannot change God's name or titles without committing idolatry, for we will have re-imaged him in a way other than the metaphors and the incarnation by which he revealed himself. His representations and incarnation are inseparable from his being. Moreover, in contrast to male imagery, one cannot introduce feminine imagery without introducing sexual connotations. For example, in Hebrew grammar the masculine form is

inclusivistic (i.e., with reference to animate beings it can be used of male and female), but the feminine form is marked (i.e., with reference to animate beings only the female is in view).²⁵

In the mystery of Godhead, in which the three persons are both one and equal, the Son obeys the Father, and the Spirit obeys both. Paradoxically Jesus says both that "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Jesus veiled his own glory to follow the path of humble obedience (Phil 2:6-11). The idea that hierarchy is an evil that can be transcended is a failed Marxist notion, not biblical teaching.

Although God gave Israel prophetesses, he did not give them priestesses in contrast to other religions in the ancient Near East. Recall it was the priests' duty to teach the Law of the Lord to the people (Deut 17:11; 33:10) and the parents' duty to teach it in the home (6: 7-8).

A woman had the right to make vows to the LORD independently from her husband, as in the case of Hannah, but the husband, in the case of a married woman, and the father, in the case of

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a young daughter living in her father's house (Num 30:16), had the right to overrule it: "But if her husband overrules her on the day that he hears it, he shall make void her vow which she took ..., and the LORD will release her" (30:8). A wife or daughter could not overrule the husband's or father's authority in the home by claiming she made a vow to the Lord, a higher authority than her male attachment, which she was obliged to fulfil. A direct vow to the LORD could not overrule their earthly authority. The Lord stands behind the authority of a husband or father. This is not because women are inferior but to protect the male leadership of the home. (That the ruling is based on male leadership, not on male superiority, can be seen in the provision that the vow of a woman who was without male attachment was as binding upon her as that upon a man (30:9).

It is on the spiritual foundation that husbands and wives submit to one another out of reverence for Christ that Paul specifies the relationship between a husband and his wife. They express their submission in ways appropriate to their sexuality. He expresses his submission to her by loving her as Christ loves the church, and she to him by obeying him in everything: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Eph 5:21-24). If, however, the husband denies God's authority over him, he undermines his own authority. His own authority is derivative and bestowed upon him to effect God's will on earth as it is in heaven. Should he seek to govern his home selfishly, not sacredly in accordance with God's revealed will, then the wife must obey God, the ultimate authority, not her husband (cf. Acts 5:29).

Peter holds up Sarah as an example of a godly wife. In her self-talk, not in polite address, she referred to Abraham as her lord (Gen 18:12): "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her

master" (1 Pet 3:1-6). These texts today in many circles are not politically correct, but they should not be neglected or explained away.

There are other texts in both testaments that teach husbands have authority over their wives. For example, "the elder must be the husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2), never "... the wife of one husband." One cannot appoint a wife as a leader of the church without upsetting this government for if a wife were an elder her husband would be subject to her authority: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority" (Heb 13:17). Deborah, however, who was married, is one clear exception to "patriarchy" (Judges 4:4-9). Probably, however, it is the exception that proves the rule. In addition to being a prophetess, Deborah was "judging" (i.e., "ruling") Israel. The narrator, however, makes his intention clear by carefully shaming the Israelite men at that time for their fear of being afraid to assume leadership. Note, for example, how Deborah shames Barak, the military commander of Israel's army, for his failure to assume leadership. After she mediated God's command to him to join battle with Sisera, commander of the Canaanite army, Barak replies: "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." To which Deborah responds, "Very well. I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this [i.e., full of fear] the honour will not be yours, the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman [i.e., to shame him]" (cf. Judges 9:54). She did not seek to overthrow patriarchy through her gifts but to support it. Apparently, the LORD raised up this exceptional woman, who was full of faith, to shame the men of Israel for their lack of faith, as such faith is essential to leadership in the holy nation. If so, the story aims to reprove unfaithful men for not taking leadership, not to present an alternative norm to male authority. The story also shows, however, that the Spirit of the Lord is above culture and not restricted by normative patriarchy.

We are now in a position to draw the conclusion that the church ought not to appoint women to the office of ruler. The

distinction between ordaining them to ministry, but not to office, is important, but too often neglected in the discussion about the role of women in the church.

VI. Conclusion

According to my interpretation of Scripture the Bible commends the equality of women with men as equals in being, dignity, gifts, and ministry. The Spirit validates it by calling and gifting women to the same ministries as men.

However, Scripture condemns the arrogance of anyone, male or female, who autonomously names God, the world and self. It also contends against those who see marriage as a galling bondage or who look down upon motherhood within the structure of marriage as a lesser ministry than ministries outside the home. Finally, we find the insistence on the equality of wives with husbands in authority and leadership as unbiblical. In my understanding of Scripture it is essential to the message of the gospel that husbands love their wives and that wives submit to the authority of their husbands. If husbands and wives are equal in leadership, how does the husband exemplify a new model of leadership wherein the ruler becomes a servant (Matt 20:25-28)? And if a woman seeks to become empowered as an equal to her husband in authority, how does she show the submission of the church to its Lord (Eph 5: 24)? Tragically, the elders in the church and husbands in the home, often out of a distorted emphasis on their headship and their depreciation of the Spirit's gifts that empower women to minister, have both consciously and unconsciously suppressed women and quenched the Spirit. Feminist perspectives have rightly exposed this abuse. Again, however, the problem is our failure to interpret the Bible accurately. The model of leadership is that of a servant. Jesus models the servant King who so loved his queen that he died for her. The willingness to do the grand gesture of dying for a loved one becomes practical to the extent that one practices self-surrendering services as a way of life. C. S. Lewis wryly observes: "The real danger [in

the Christian doctrine of man's *imitatio Christi* in marriage] is not that husbands will grasp [the crown of thorns] too eagerly, but that they will allow or compel their wives to usurp it."²⁶ The "servant" empowers his wife to use her spiritual gifts to their fullest potential. On the other hand, the Bible instructs the wife to respect her husband as her lord, which entails obeying him in everything as we have qualified it above. It is important to note the Bible neither instructs the woman to manipulate the man to serve her, to be the proverbial "neck that turns the head," nor the husband to have his wife in subjection, to be the head that lords itself over the body. Serving and obeying in mutual subjection are inward beauties worked in our hearts, consciences, behaviours and customs by the Holy Spirit. These are ideals for which we strive, though recognizing they will never be fully attained any more than any of the other perfections of holiness. Our failure to attain them should be accompanied with repentance and renewed faith, not by cynicism, despair, or seeking new social structures.

I am a member of a church where I submit to women leaders, whom I trust and respect, because, even though I disagree with the practice, I am called upon to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit until we come to the full knowledge of Christ (Eph 4:1-13). It is wrong to divide the body of Christ, which confesses Jesus as Lord and believes in its heart that God raised him from the dead, on such non-moral and non-essential issues for the unity of the church as modes of baptism, eschatology, forms of government, and belief in the continuation or cessation of gifts. However, I ask my church, as individual members and not as a political body, and others like it, because we "want to find out what is acceptable to the Lord" (5:10), to reassess for themselves whether our practice of ordaining women to rule us is biblically justified. ☞

Endnotes

¹Revelation 21 and 22 present the end of that history in images representing the Garden of Eden as regained.

²Stanley Grenz, *Sexual Ethics* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), pp. 10-17.

³God uses six feminine similes for himself (e.g., Isaiah 42:14).

⁴Krister Stendahl, "Enrichment or Threat? When the Eves Come Marching In," in *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church: No More Silence!* Alice L. Hageman, ed., in collaboration with the Women's Caucus of Harvard Divinity School, New York: Association Press, 1974, p. 120 as quoted in *Words and Women*, eds., Casey Miller and Kate Swift (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), p. 67.

⁵Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 10.

⁶It is not my purpose to critique specific advocates of the many and varied feminist positions. But I must take exception to those like Mary Daly who begin their analysis with human autonomy rather than biblical revelation. Cf. Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

⁷Bruce K. Waltke, "Exegesis and the Spiritual Life: Theology as Spiritual Formation," *CRUX*, 30/3 (September, 1994): 28-35.

⁸See Bruce K. Waltke, "1 Timothy 2:8-15: Unique or Normative?" *CRUX* 28/1 (March, 1992): 22-27.

⁹Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 49.

¹⁰H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1975), p. 248.

¹¹Richard John Neuhaus, "True Christian Feminism," *National Review* (November 25, 1988), p. 24.

¹²The High Priest had to marry a virgin, not a widow or divorcee, to guarantee that the successor to his high and holy office was Aaron's offspring (Lev 21:13-15), not because a formerly married woman was discarded as used property. In fact, the Old Testament looks with compassion on both widows and divorcees (Mal 2:13-16, 3:6).

¹³Pace Grenz, p. 29.

¹⁴Jonathan Mills, "Notes on a Faithful Rebel Woman," *Etcetera* (November 8, 1994). Editor's note: *Etcetera* is the weekly publication of the Regent College Student Council.

¹⁵D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin*, 19 (1968):53-103.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁷Clarence J. Vos, *Woman in Old Testament Worship* (Delft: N.V. Verenige Drukkerijen Judels & Brinkman, 1968), p. 168.

¹⁸Mardi Keyes (*Feminism & the Bible*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995, p. 12) claims that Phoebe is also called "leader": "described in the Greek as a gospel minister [Greek *diakonos* (Rom 16:1)] and leader [Greek *prostatis* (16:3)]. Using the same Greek root, Paul told leaders to govern [Greek *ho proistamenos*] diligently (Rom 12:8)." Her argument, however, is flawed philologically. To be sure, *prostatis* derives from *proistemi*, but in usage it never means "leader" but "protectress, patroness, helper" (BAGD, p. 718) (cf. "succourer" (KJ), "a great help" (NIV), "benefactor" (NRSV). Moreover, *ho proistamenos* in 12:8 may also mean "those who give aid" (BAGD, p. 707, entry 2) (cf. "he who gives aid, with zeal" (RSV)).

¹⁹Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988).

²⁰George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1981), p. 136.

²¹In the rest of the Old Testament both parents name the children: naming of children is ascribed to women 26 times, to men 14 times, and to God 5 times.

²²Waltke, *op. cit.*

²³I arrived at this interpretation, based on the same Hebrew expression in Genesis 4:7, independently from Susan T. Foh, *Woman and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 68f.

²⁴In Psalm 123:2 David uses the simile of a maid to a mistress but he never uses "mistress" as a title for God.

²⁵Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 108.

²⁶C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Geoffrey Bles), p. 98, cited by Jonathan Mills in personal correspondence.

Gender Issues: Reflections on the Perspective of the Apostle Paul



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The task set out for me in this lecture is not an easy one, because so much of the controversy on gender issues in evangelical circles swirls around the Pauline data. Many of the problems, of course, are of our own making; here in particular examples of poor *exegesis* and selective hermeneutics are legion.¹ At issue as well is our tendency to throw too many disparate matters (male/female; husband/wives; ministry/structures) into the same container and homogenize them.

But some of the problems clearly stem from Paul himself and the *ad hoc* nature of his letters. Lacking the need to systematize his own thinking, Paul spoke to different situations in different ways. Take for example his advice to widows in 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy 5, where on the one hand (1 Cor 7:40) he discourages them to remarry, while on the other (1 Tim 5:14) he falls just short of commanding them to do so.² So at issue for us hermeneutically is how to handle some of the differences that are actually present in Paul.

Perhaps the worst thing the evangelical tradition has done on gender matters is to isolate them from the bigger picture of biblical theology. Indeed, I think we are destined for continual trouble if we do not start where Paul does: not with isolated statements addressed to contingent situations, but with Paul's theology of the *new creation*, the coming of God's eschatological rule inaugurated by Christ—especially through his death and resurrection—and the gift of the Spirit.

Paul and the New Creation

Two texts in particular serve as the proper starting point here. First, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, where Paul argues with the Corinthians who are calling into question both his gospel of a crucified Messiah and his cruciform apostleship. He responds that the new creation brought about by Christ's death and resurrection nullifies one's viewing anything any longer from the old age point of view (Gk. *kata sarka*, "according to the flesh"). Christ's death means that the whole human race has come under the sentence of death (v. 14), so that those who do live (in God's new order) now live for the one who died for them and was raised again (v. 15). The result, he goes on, is that from this point on, to view either Christ or anyone/anything else from a perspective that is "according to the flesh" is no longer valid (v. 16). Why? Because being in Christ means that one belongs to the new creation: the old has gone, the new has come (v. 17). It doesn't take much reading of Paul to recognize that this radical, new order point of view—life marked by the cross—lies at the heart of everything he thinks and does.³

Which leads to our second text: Galatians 3:26-29. This passage offers the first of two conclusions³ to the theological-scriptural argument of Galatians 2:16-4:7, in which Paul is adamant that Gentiles do not have to conform to the old covenant boundary markers/identity symbols, in order to belong to the new covenant people of God. The three primary markers were circumcision, food laws, and the keeping of special

days. Although each of these is mentioned at some point in Galatians,⁴ the major focus is on circumcision, because his opponents regularly appealed to it as the way Gentiles would also be included in the people of God (Gen 17:1-14).

To counter this argument and to recover his Gentile converts from further capitulation to the former covenant, Paul argues first from their experience of the Spirit (3:1-5), and then from Scripture regarding Christ (3:6-22). In his first conclusion Paul's concern is singular: that the old order has given way to the new—promised by God even before the covenant of circumcision. The old order, which helped to distinguish Israel from its Gentile neighbours, was signaled by the law—the legislation of the former covenant that, as Iain Provan pointed out and Paul makes clear, was designed for sinners and assumed human fallenness. Paul's way of putting it in the present argument is that the law served to hem people in until the time for faith to come, with the appearance of God's Messiah (vv. 22-24). All of this because some Gentiles were being persuaded that to please God fully they had to adopt the identity markers of the former covenant as well.

"No," Paul says, as he now appeals to the new creation. Over against former slavery (Jews to the law; Gentiles to idols), he says emphatically: "*All of you are children of God* [not slaves] through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 26), which is further evidenced by their "one baptism" (v.27). All who have been baptized into Christ have thereby been clothed with Christ. Behind this sentence lies the baptismal theology of Romans 6, full of "new creation" eschatological presuppositions. Death and resurrection have taken place in Christ. As believers go through the waters of baptism, we assume our own role in that death and resurrection, thus dying to the old and rising into newness of life—into the new creation.

In verse 28 Paul comes to the conclusion that we have been led to expect, namely, that in the new creation there is neither Jew nor Greek. But right at that point, typically of

Paul, he recognizes that the new creation obliterates *all* the old sociological categories that separated people. So he adds, what is true of Jew and Greek is equally true of "slave and free, male and female." His point: In our baptism "into Christ" and through the work of the Spirit we enter the new order, the new creation; and where death and resurrection have taken place, the old distinctions have been obliterated.⁵

Paul, of course, does not mean that the three categories themselves cease to exist in the new creation, at least not in its present "already/not yet" expression. To the contrary, as part of the continuity between the old and the new, all of us are some combination of the three: e.g., Gentile, free, female. What has been obliterated is the *significance* of these distinctions and the (basically divisive) *values*—ethnic-racial (Jew/Gentile), socio-economic (slave/free), and sexual-gender (male/female)—based on them.

Our difficulty with understanding the truly radical nature of Paul's assertion is twofold. First, most contemporary Christians have very little sense of the fundamental eschatological framework which was common to the entire New Testament experience, and which in fact was the *only* way the earliest believers understand their existence. Second, Western culture in particular is quite foreign to that of these early believers at some fundamental points. In the culture into which Paul is speaking, position and status prevailed in every way, so that one's existence was totally identified with and circumscribed by these realities. By the very nature of things, position and status gave advantage to some over others; and in Greco-Roman culture, by and large, there was very little chance of changing status.

Thus Gentiles had all the advantages over Jews, so Jews took refuge in their relationship with God, which they believed advantaged them before God over the Gentiles. The hatreds were deep and mutual. Likewise, masters and slaves were consigned to roles where all the advantages went to masters;⁶ and the same was true for men and women, where women were dominated by

men and basically consigned to childbearing. In fact, according to Diogenes Laertius, Socrates used to say every day: "There were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: first, that I was born a human being, and not one of the brutes; next that I was born a man and not a woman; thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian."⁷ The Jewish version of this, obviously influenced by the Greco-Roman worldview, is the rabbi who says that "everyday you should say, 'Blessed are you, O God, ..., that I'm not a brute creature, nor a Gentile, nor a woman.'"⁸

It is especially difficult for most of us to imagine the effect of Paul's words in a culture where position and status preserved order through basically uncrossable boundaries. Paul asserts that when people come into the fellowship of Christ Jesus, significance is no longer to be found in being Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. The all-embracing nature of this affirmation, its counter-cultural significance, the fact that it equally *disadvantages* all by equally *advantaging* all—these stab at the very heart of a culture sustained by people maintaining the right position and status. But in Christ Jesus, the One whose death and resurrection inaugurated the new creation, all things have become new; the new era has dawned.

The new creation, therefore, must be our starting point regarding gender issues, because this is theologically where Paul lived. Everything else he says comes out of this worldview of what has happened in the coming of Christ in the Spirit.

The Impact

What, then, was the impact of this radical worldview on male/female relationships? We begin by noting that in the new creation both of the essential matters from the first creation—mutuality/complementarity and differentiation—are restored. It is the new creation, after all. This can best be seen in two passages in 1 Corinthians—7:1-40 and 11:2-16—where some women (apparently) in the believing community have overdrawn the implications of their new eschatological existence.⁹ That is, they appear to have been

arguing for, or assuming, a "mutuality" without "complementarity," as well as for the elimination of differentiation. This Paul simply will not allow since these, too, are a part of the creation, both old and new.

What most likely lies behind this is their view of speaking in tongues. In 13:1 Paul says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels." You might have heard in passing the text that Rikk Watts cited in the preceding lecture from the testament² of Job, where Job's daughters are given a waistband to put on, by means of which they are transported into heaven by the Spirit, and by the Spirit speak the dialect of the angels. This appears to have been a common understanding, that the one speaking in tongues was speaking the language of heaven.

A kind of ultimate "spirituality" seems thus to have set in at Corinth, which included a disregard for the body. Recall from Iain Provan's lecture that very early on Christians got messed up about the body's being a good thing (given that God created it). Such a view goes back at least to Paul's Corinth. Because they were already speaking the language of the angels, some of the women considered themselves already as the angels (who neither marry nor give in marriage, Luke 20:34-36) and thus were arguing for no sex in marriage (7:1-16) and were also removing a symbol of differentiation (11:2-16).

Paul corrects the former abuse by insisting that each person's body does not belong to oneself, but to the other (7:3-4)—not in an abusive, possessive way, of course, but as gift to the other person. Because of mutuality and complementarity in the marriage relationship, every husband and every wife must be in continuing sexual relations with each other (v. 2) and must stop defrauding one another on this matter (7:5). Thus this passage radically alters the sexual relationship within marriage. Instead of the more common pattern of sex as something the husband does to his wife for his sexual gratification, sexual intimacy is a celebration of belonging to one another, where one's "body" is not one's own private possession; rather, both partners give their bodies for the

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In the same way Paul argues in 11:2-16 that wives continue to wear the head-covering because it served as a symbol of differentiation between men and women. Although it is often suggested otherwise,¹⁰ this passage has nothing to do with the subordination of women to men—a view arrived at by making verse 10 say the opposite of what Paul in fact asserts. The Greek text cannot be more clear, that a woman has authority over her own head “because of the angels.”¹¹ If there is still plenty of obscurity about the latter phrase (I think it relates to their being like the angels), there is no question about who has authority over what. The woman in Christ has authority over her own head, even with regard to the traditional head-covering. But Paul wants her to use that authority to maintain differentiation in the new order. That the issue has to do with differentiation between male and female is found in the rhetoric of verses 5 and 6. If she insists on removing the familiar sign of differentiation, Paul argues, why not go the whole way of “shame” (to herself in this case) and have her head shaved or shorn—in that culture evidence of the “male” partner in a lesbian relationship.¹²

The bottom line issue in this text has to do with “shame” (see vv. 4,5,6,13,14) in a culture much like present-day Asian cultures, where shame counted for everything. With a wonderful word play on “head”—where the issue literally lay—Paul argues that the wife was shaming her husband (her “head” from v. 3) by removing the symbol of differentiation, just as a husband would have shamed Christ by wearing the wife’s symbol.

In response Paul does not subordinate the woman, but rather insists that she maintain this symbol of their differences. In a purely *ad hoc* way, Paul argues in verses 7-9, that a wife should not shame the one whose glory she is by creation. To be sure, that is often read as referring to subordination. But nowhere else does “glory” appear in Scripture as having to do with subordination. The woman, rather, is seen as complementary, the glory of the man, as is evi-

denced in the narrative of Genesis: she was made from man and for man (vv. 8-9), not to be subordinate to him, but as his glory, to complement him. That she has regained her place of mutuality lost in the Fall is made clear in verses 10 to 12. Immediately following verses 8 and 9, he concludes by first stating the reality of the woman’s own authority over her (now literal) head: “For this reason, the woman has authority over her own head because of the angels.” “Nonetheless,” he qualifies in verse 11, with both 8 and 9 and now 10 in view, the wife is not to exercise her “authority” as one who is independent of her husband; nor are they to understand verses 8 and 9 wrongly: because “in the Lord” there is total mutuality. After all, God has ultimately reversed things—man now comes from the woman—so that “in the Lord” neither is independent of the other, because “everything comes from God.”

Thus, the thrust of this argument is twofold: that the woman should continue with the cultural symbol of differentiation—because of the issue of shame—but that this should not be understood to mean subordination, but mutual interdependence in the Lord. The new creation has not removed mutuality and differentiation, but has restored it. In the Lord male and female are both one and different. Thus men and women equally pray and prophesy, the two basic forms of worship in the Christian assembly (which took place in homes), but do so as male and female, not as androgynous beings.

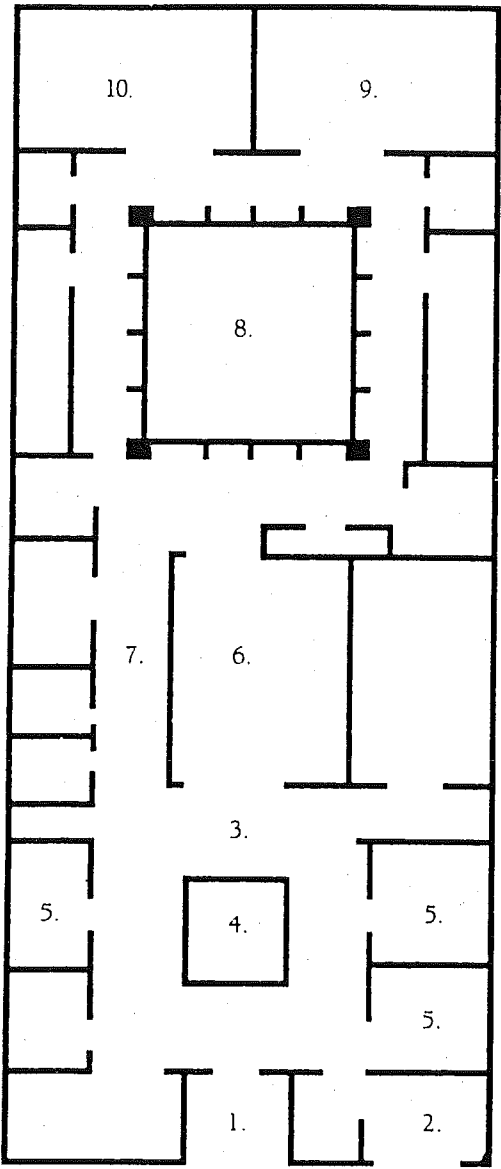
The Implications for Social Structures

Given Paul’s basic theological stance, and its impact on male/female (especially husband/wife) relationships, the question that remains for us is the problematic one: What are the implications of all this for social structures? To get at this issue we need to return to the three sets of structures singled out in Galatians 3:28, that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.” It is clear from several passages in Paul that he is not arguing that the new creation eliminates the fallen structures in

Figure 1:
A typical *domus*.

- Key:
- 1. fauces
 - 2. shop
 - 3. atrium
 - 4. impluvium
 - 5. cubiculum
 - 6. tablinum
 - 7. andron
 - 8. peristyle
 - 9. triclinium
 - 10. oecus

(Drawing by Deborah Wells.)



which some of the differences exist. What Paul does with those structures is to radicalize them by putting them into the context of the cross. Everything is moderated by the fact that the cross rules over all.

Take slavery as an example. On the one hand, in Colossians 3:22–4:1 and Ephesians 6:5–9 Paul calls on both masters and slaves to live as brothers and sisters in Christ, without urging that the structure itself be eliminated. On the other hand, in Philemon he radicalizes the relationship in such a way that it no longer carries significance. Paul does not say, “Philemon, stop having slaves”; what he says is that now “you have Onesimus back for

good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a beloved brother” (vv. 15–16). How, one wonders, can the old structures carry their former significance in this context—where the slave who has stolen and run away, and who in Roman law merited death, is now accepted back as a dearly loved brother in Christ? And remember that both the letter to the Colossians and to Philemon were read publicly in the gathered community, where both Philemon and Onesimus were present together to hear what God had established through the cross. The old distinctions may still exist in a sociological way, to be sure, but they cease to have meaning

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when both master and slave own the same master, Jesus Christ.¹³

When we turn to male and female relationships (in a culture where this primarily had to do with wife and husband in the home), we find the same thing. The problem for us in reading the texts (especially the "house codes" in Colossians 3:18–4:1 and Ephesians 5:18–6:9) is that we have scarcely an inkling as to how much Paul was in fact radicalizing the Greco-Roman home. Thus before looking at the Ephesians text, one needs to have a sense for the sociology assumed by the passage. And here architecture says a great deal. Although the early believers lived in other kinds of settings—tenements; shopkeepers, who lived above their shops; etc.—this passage assumes a larger household of a kind shown in figure 1,¹⁴ which included wives, children, and slaves.

The basic sociological model for this kind of household is that of patronage, meaning a communal relationship between unequals. In this kind of relationship each of the unequals benefits the other. The master of the house benefits the rest of the people in the household by providing for them; they benefit him by doing his bidding (slaves, in particular). The wife would benefit by the fact that she could now exist in a home besides that of her father, and of course the householder benefited because hopefully she would bear him male heirs.¹⁵

By law, the man was the master of his household (thus the patron). In Maxine Hancock's introduction, she talked about the extreme form of patriarchy known as totalitarian patriarchy. Paul's text, you must realize, is written into a context where such patriarchy was absolute, and sustained by law.¹⁶ Usually, but not always, he required the household to serve his gods. Unlike our understanding of home, such a household was not a place of consumption, but of production; not a private refuge, but often semi-public. (His was the only public role, and the atrium often served as a place to do business and was basically open to others. The women, especially daughters, lived in the

rear and were not permitted to stray into the public domain of the house—for the reasons Rikk Watts pointed out in his lecture: the fear of her becoming abused or a seductress. Much of this is described in a passage from Philo of Alexandria:

Market-places and council-halls and law-courts and gatherings and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maidens as their boundary, and the outer door by those who have reached full womanhood.¹⁷

What did it mean for a woman to enter such a household as wife? We know from a large number of census lists from Egypt that the average age of the man when he married was 30, of the woman, less than 18. The reason for marriage was not "love" in our usual sense, but to bear legitimate children, to keep the family line going; indeed, failure to bear children, especially sons, was often cause for divorce. Moreover, almost all men were (from our point of view) promiscuous. As Demosthenes says in an off-handed, matter-of-fact way: "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children."¹⁸ Wives, therefore, were often promiscuous as well—although they tried to be more discreet, since their infidelity was a matter of shame!

The idea that men and women might be equal partners in marriage simply did not exist, evidence for which can be seen in meals, which in all cultures serve as the great equalizer. In the Greek world, women scarcely ever joined their husbands and his friends at meals; and if they did, they did not recline at table (only the courtesans did that), but sat on benches at the end. And they were expected to leave after eating, when the conversation took a more public

turn. It is especially difficult for most of us even to imagine our way back into such a culture, let alone to have any sense of feeling for it. Which is what makes what Paul actually says so counter-cultural in every way, without eliminating the structures themselves.

Our difficulty in getting back into Paul's text is that we are heirs of a culture in which two major events in the past three hundred years have radically altered Western culture forever, and turned the basically patronal culture that preceded it completely on its head: the so-called Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. The Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the individual, created a culture in which individual rights came to be regarded as the highest good, so much so that by the late twentieth century the concept of individual rights has finally superseded that of the common good (an idea with a rich history that has now become passé).

But the Enlightenment alone did not create the structural changes in our understanding of home and family (after all, look at the British manor house, with its "enlightened" autocrat, that has got such bad press in a whole series of recent movies). It took the Industrial Revolution to turn things around; and it did so by drawing both men and women out of the home into the marketplace, so that, whereas in 1885 in the United States eighty-eight percent of all goods were produced in the home, by 1915 that was totally reversed.

With these, and all the more so if we add the onset of the "technological age," also came the wonderful opportunities that women now enjoy: equal opportunities for education, including finally the right to vote and to serve in almost every way in the public domain. But it also resulted in our homes being thought of as havens for rest and, until recently, as the place for the nuclear family to exist—a concept almost foreign to Paul's world.

But the Apostle Paul preceded these events by two thousand years, with the message of a crucified Messiah, which was culturally subversive at its core. Indeed, perhaps

the most radical thing was that all people who participated in God's new creation also shared a common meal together and thus celebrated their Lord's death until he was to come again—which, as 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 makes clear, created considerable tension for the traditional household.

When we turn at last to Ephesians 5, we need to begin where Paul's own sentence begins, with verse 18, because "be [keep] filled with the Spirit" is the only imperative in the passage until verse 25 ("Husbands, love your wives"). Thus Paul is urging that believers be filled with the Spirit, and evidence that by singing, giving thanks, and submitting to one another.

In the relationships that follow, three things need to be noted. First, in the ordinary household the husband, father, and master are all the same person, while the wife, children, and slaves were different persons. Second, when Paul tells the wives to submit, and children and slaves to obey, he is not offering some new idea, or countering insubordination, he is merely speaking within the culture. But those who are filled with the Spirit and worship Christ as Lord, do so as those serving their true Lord, not an earthly one.

Third—and here is the truly radical moment—both the structure of the passage and the word count (four words to the husband for every one word to the wife) indicate that the emphasis lies with the householder, the husband/master/father. And the only thing Paul says to him is repeated three times: "Love your wife." Love (*agape*) is what rules, and *agape*, it must be noted emphatically, does not refer either to romance or sex. Rather, it refers to his giving his life in loving service to her for her sake.

One should note especially the regular emphasis on loving his *own wife*. That eliminates the courtesans. Love your wives (v. 25); love your own wives (v. 28); love your own wives (v. 33). She is the one who deserves all of your love and commitment of loving service. The model, as throughout the New Testament, is Christ's love for the church which is expressed in his death of the

cross. The imagery Paul uses is that of a man taking a bride, deliberately echoing language from Ezekiel 16, where God betroths the naked and orphaned teenager and washes her and dresses her in the finest of clothes. Paul now images the husband as treating his wife as just such a bride, adorned and glorious to behold.

It is assumed in this text, of course, that the husband will continue to provide leadership in the household. But such leadership will be radically transformed into caring for the people, not having them around to serve his own self-interests. And that is why Paul goes on to speak of the slaves and the children. In each case, the husband, the master, and the father is the person Paul is after. If he can radicalize the home in light of the cross, the life of the child, of the slave, and of the woman is set into new perspective in the new creation.

So where does that put us hermeneutically? I would argue that the structures are ultimately quite immaterial for believers; that is, first-century households can no more serve as models for Christian homes at the turn of the twenty-first century, than the Roman Empire with its self-serving, destructive economic policies and its insistence on emperor worship, should serve for contemporary political structures. All structures, ours as well as theirs, are predicated altogether on cultural givens. There simply is no biblical structure for the household.

Thus in our culture, structures tend to depend largely on the two people involved with regard to their own giftings, personalities, and how they relate to each other. But whatever the structure, at issue is that we live Christ-like in our relationships with one another in our homes. God calls us to *shalom*, to be filled with the Spirit, thus submitting ourselves to one another in reverence to Christ, to love with Christ's love by self-sacrificial giving of ourselves. And I would suggest that if we do that well, the matter of structures will pale into insignificance.

What About Ministry?

The Pauline texts show a rather consis-

tent view with regard to "ministry," meaning serving the church and the world in a variety of ways. Everyone, man and woman alike, minister within the context of their own gifting by the Holy Spirit. At the crucial point of ministering by verbal gifting, Paul consistently says such things as "all may prophesy" (1 Cor 14:23), to which 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 bears corroborating evidence. Despite some voices to the contrary, Paul made no distinction between men and women in the use of any verbal gifting (prophecy, tongues, teaching, revelation, etc.). Gifting by the Holy Spirit was the only criterion, and the Holy Spirit was obviously gender-blind, since he gifted men and women at will.

When we move to the question of "offices" in the church, of course, we move into an arena where Paul supplies us with almost no evidence. ~~The idea that there are some who serve as "priests," and that they should be males (thus keeping alive the structures of the older covenant!), would be about as foreign to Paul as one could get.~~ In any case, it seems clear that "function" preceded the concept of "position." That is, people functioned as prophets or teachers before they were called that; there were not pre-ordained "offices" that they should step into.

Thus the ultimate question before us in the matter of "gender and ministry" is not whether women ministered—of course they did—but whether, given the cultural norm, they also stepped into roles of leadership (which in itself is a nebulous term in light of the Pauline evidence). That they did so in fact would be consistent with the radically counter-cultural sociology that found expression in the believing community, as outlined above.

Thus, one of the more remarkable moments in Paul's letters (but seldom thought so by us, because we tend to read our culture back into the text) is his greeting at the end of Romans to ~~Priscilla and Aquila~~ (16:3-5). That he mentions Priscilla first, that he praises them because "they [plural] risked their lives for me," and that he greets the church that meets in *their*, not Aquila's, house, is sure evidence that something has

already been transformed by the gospel.

This is also the significance of such passages as Colossians 4:15 ("Nympha and the church that meets in *her* house") and Acts 16:13-15, 40 (where the first believers in Philippi met at Lydia's house). When a church met in this kind of household, where they would gather in the atrium, the semi-public area where business was regularly carried on, the householder would naturally serve as the leader of the house church. That is, by the very sociology of things, it would never have occurred to them that a person from outside the household would come in and lead what was understood as simply an extension of the household. To put it plainly, the church is not likely to gather in a person's house unless the householder also functioned as its natural leader. Thus Lydia would have held the same role in the church in her house as she did as master of the household.

Other passages reflect the same reality, beginning with the evidence from Philippians 4:2-3. Euodia and Syntyche must have had ministry in the church because of the language Paul uses. They laboured side by side with Paul in the gospel, as did the rest of his fellow workers, meaning the others who ministered in the church besides Euodia and Syntyche. Given this language, had these been men, everyone to a person would grant that they were leaders in the church in Philippi; and even now the only ones who think otherwise, think so simply because Euodia and Syntyche were women. Paul's language is decisive here: they were leaders in the church in Philippi.

The well-known sociology of Macedonia¹⁹ corroborates this as well. Despite what was said above about women in public life, Macedonia was well-known as an exception to the norm; from way back women held significant positions in public life. It is therefore not surprising that evidence of their leadership in the church turns up in Philippi.

Similarly, in Romans 16:1-2, Phoebe is the *diakonos* of the church in Cenchrea, meaning she is the servant of the church.

This is the same language Paul uses elsewhere of himself and others, in terms of their giving leadership to the church. In this case he adds that she has also been a *prostatas* to many people, including Paul. There is plenty of good evidence that this word in this case probably means that she has served as the "benefactor" of the church and of others as well.

Finally, in Romans 16:7 Paul singles out Andronicus and Junia, probably husband and wife, who were apostles before Paul himself. Despite attempts on the part of some to turn Junia into a man (only because she is here called "an apostle"), that simply will not do. No such name as Junias is known to exist in the Roman world. She and her husband together served as apostles, pure and simple, although the term in this case, as it almost surely does in 1 Corinthians 12:27 as well, refers to a "function" not an "office."

The only exception to this consistent picture is the *ad hoc*, very case-specific instruction Paul gives in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. And this is clearly the "odd text out," not the norm. In the context of 1 Timothy, the issue is not church order but false teaching. It is equally clear from the evidence of Acts 20 and from the evidence of 1 and 2 Timothy, that the false teachers are local elders who are going astray after false teaching. That is why Paul has such a problem in this letter, and why Timothy is in for such difficulty, because as a younger man he has to stop—even to excommunicate—the elders who are involved in the false teaching. The evidence of 1 and 2 Timothy together makes it further clear, that these straying elders have found fruitful ministry in the households of some younger widows. In 2 Timothy 3:8 in particular, they are said to have wormed their way into the homes of these women, weak-willed and silly women Paul calls them, who are always trying to learn but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

In 1 Timothy 5:13 Paul had earlier said of these younger widows, that they go about from house to house being *phylaroi*, which despite our English translations to the contrary, does not—in fact cannot—mean "gossips,"

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sips," but "speakers of foolishness." This word is used in all kinds of philosophical texts of people who "prate foolishness," meaning, of course, who teach a philosophy different from the author. Thus these younger widows were going around from house to house passing on the foolishness of the false teachings. Paul's admonition to them is singular: Because they have already gone astray after Satan (5:15), they are to marry (v. 14; over against his advice in 1 Corinthians 7:39-40), to manage their households well (assume the woman's role in a married household), and "to bear children."

This last piece of advice picks up from the companion passage in 2:11-15,²⁰ where this is precisely how "they will be saved." Thus in this singular place in the New Testament, these widows, who are in process of repeating Eve's transgression through Satan's deception,²¹ are forbidden to teach or domineer. Rather, they are to get married and bear children.

Finally, I would like to remind those who think that this text controls all the others in the New Testament, that if one thinks verse 11 is a verse for all times and all circumstances, then why not verses 9 and 10 that precede it, and verse 15 that follows it, that says that women will be saved by bearing children.

Paul of course surely does not intend that these younger widows will be given eternal salvation by bearing children. This is simply a "synecdoche; "bearing children" is one activity (to be elaborated in 5:14) that represents his greater concerns. They are to be "saved" in this case by no longer adhering to, and spreading, the false teaching. This is why he gives his later directive for them to get married, because by getting married they come back into a situation where they will not be spreading false teaching and thus fall prey (as Eve did before them) to Satan's deceptions. What he does later in chapter 5, of course, is to have Timothy excommunicate the elders who are responsible for all this, thus indicating that the two groups in chapter 5 (widows and elders) are the ones

causing the trouble for the church.

The point in all of this is that this one text,²² which has clear case-specific reasons for existing, should not be used to set aside the rest of the evidence. If we do not have more such evidence, we must remember that these texts were written in the first century, into a context like that described above. The wonder is that we have as many such texts as we do. What is significant about them is that the texts that do exist are not trying to "teach" or "correct," they are simply stating what was in place, all of which was the result of the new creation.

Conclusion

The net result of all this seems clear enough: that Paul does not tear down existing structures, but neither does he sanctify them. Everything for him begins with Christ, his death and resurrection, whereby he established the new order, the new creation. In the new creation, two things happen: the relationship between man and woman in the first creation is restored, but that relationship must be lived out under the paradigm of the cross. In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, not meaning that differentiation has ceased, but that both alike enter the new creation on the same footing, and thus serve one another and the rest of the church in the same way their Lord did—by giving themselves to the other(s) out of love. Ministry is thus the result of God's gifting and has nothing to do with being male or female, any more than it has to do with being Jew or Gentile, or slave or free. ✠

Endnotes

*The original "lecture" was not written out, but was given from notes. In this "written" edition, I have kept much of the flavor of the oral presentation (while removing many of the colloquialisms) and added a few notes for further reference.

1. I do not mean to imply that I am free from such; but just a glance at the literature reveals how much of the exegesis is predicated on what a person was expecting to find before coming to the text.

2. The NIV's "counsel" is much too soft here. The verb Paul uses, "I want" them to, is precisely that used in 2:8 about men and women in prayer; and it is clear

in this passage that "want" has all the authority of apostolic command.

3. The second is 4:1-7, which picks up the themes of "sonship"/slavery under the imagery of the pedagogue from 3:24-25 (NIV "guardian," the educated slave to whom the children were entrusted for education) and of the life of the Spirit from 3:1-5, thus tying up the whole of the argument from 3:1.

4. An illustration over Peter's (not to mention Barnabas's) reneging on the Jerusalem agreement over keeping food laws (2:11-14) is what kicks off the rest of the argument of the letter; the matter of "days" is denounced in 4:8-10 as a reversion to slavery. The same three "boundary markers/identity symbols" make up the argument of Romans as well. Circumcision is argued against in ch. 4, while days and food laws come under scrutiny in 14:1-15:4.

5. It has often been argued against this point of view that this is a soteriological text, having to do with people from all of these categories coming to Christ on the equal ground of faith. So it is, but to divorce soteriology from ecclesiology in Paul is theologically disastrous. Salvation in Paul's view has not to do with God's populating heaven with countless individuals, but with creating a people for his name through Christ and the Spirit. It is in the creation of a people for his name that one finds the continuity with the former covenant. Thus, the present text is ecclesiological by the very fact that it is soteriological. The certain evidence for this is the companion passage to this one, 1 Cor 12:13, which is expressed in soteriological categories but is ecclesiological to its core. See G. D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994):178-82.

6. This is one place, it should be pointed out, where change could take place in that culture, because slavery was not based on race as it was in the tragic history of the United States. Rather, it was based primarily on war, captivity and economics, so that people could change status; e.g., in economically hard times people could sell themselves into slavery, and masters often manumitted slaves.

7. 1.33 (Loeb Classical Library).

8. Talmudic tractate *Menahoth* 43b (Epstein translation).

9. This view stems from several realities in the letter, especially the fact that directly following a passage where Paul forbids the men to go to the prostitutes (6:12-20), he takes up the issue of some who are rejecting sex within marriage, on the grounds that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman." When he comes to the issue of divorce (v. 10)—the logical corollary of their position—he does the most non-cultural thing: he argues that a woman should not separate from her husband, and then, almost as an afterthought, says that the same holds true for husbands as well, of course. For the full argument supporting this view, see G. D. Fee, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987):10-13, 267-70.

10. Based primarily on a reading of v. 3 that suggests that "head" equals to be "over the other" in some way. But this sentence is created by Paul as a kind of

word play on the word "head," based on the problem lying literally on the wife's head, so that he can establish a point of reference for the issue of shame. The meaning of "head" is much debated, of course, but the so-called "Greek" view, which seems to make the most sense of all the data in the passage is expressed in the interpretation of Cyril of Alexandria (*Arcad.* 5.6): "Thus we say that 'the head of every man is Christ.' For he was made by him ... as God; 'but the head of every woman is the man,' because she was taken out of his flesh.... Likewise 'the head of Christ is God,' because he is of him by nature."

11. For the evidence of this see Fee, *First Corinthians*, 519. There is no known instance in the language where the combination of "subject," the verb "have," the object "authority," and the preposition "over" are passive with regard to the subject, i.e., in which the subject is under someone else's authority, rather than exercising authority over the object of the preposition. There is not a reason in the world to think it is otherwise here, especially so, when Paul immediately qualifies the woman's authority over her own head (with regard to wearing or not wearing the head covering) by insisting that "in the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman" (v. 11).

12. For the evidence see Fee, *First Corinthians*, 5:10-12. It has often been asserted that the shaved head was a sign of prostitution in Corinth; but there is not a known piece of evidence for such in the literature of antiquity. For Paul same-sex intercourse is a matter of denying the differentiation and mutuality of creation, which is what lies behind Paul's strong denunciation of homosexuality in Romans 1:24-27. Those who have exchanged the truth about God and have believed the lie, Paul says, have expressed their denial of the truth of creation, what God has done, by same-sex intercourse. And God has given them over because they have refused to believe the truth about God. This, of course, sounds like a very harsh word to people who are oriented toward same-sex relationships, but the fact is, "male and female, God created them," and Paul sees very clearly that the obliteration of that created expression is in fact an elimination not only of what God has created but what is also being restored in the new creation. Why else, one wonders, would he single out these two relationships—men with men and women with women? Notice also the language of shame that is persistent in that text.

13. This truth should have brought all the nonsense in North American Protestant arguments in favour of slavery over the past three hundred years to its knees in absolute repentance. What has gone on in my own country (the United States) on this matter is sheer craziness, since Philemon is the clear evidence that "brother in Christ" means that black and white *must* eat together at the same table; the table of the Lord, eaten in the context of a meal, is the great equalizer. Otherwise the gospel of our Lord is betrayed at its core.

14. For this diagram and much of the description that follows I am indebted to Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World, Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster

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John Knox Press): 8 and throughout.

15. In the Greco-Roman world, girl babies were very often "exposed," put in the dump and left to die. It is the males who count because they carry on the family line. Enough females were obviously kept for the purposes of the male, but a female baby was absolutely chattel and was at the total discretion of the father whether he wanted to keep it or not—and I mean the father, not the parents.

16. We need also to appreciate, of course, that in all such situations where the law allows the most despicable kind of behaviour, there are always people who function as beneficent dictators; and we know of many of these from Greco-Roman culture. My concern is not to paint the picture as utterly bleak, but to point out that a thoroughly totalitarian patriarchy was simply assumed under the law itself.

17. Philo, *The Special Laws* 3.169 (trans. by F. H. Colson in the Loeb Classical Library, 7.581).

18. *Oration* 59.122.

19. For this matter see W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1952): 98-99.

20. The only two uses of the word *teknogon* (to bear children) word group in the New Testament occur in these two verses (2:15 and 5:14).

21. Although Paul says that "Adam was created first, then Eve" in v. 13, his point is not that this makes only men qualify as teachers, but that the one who was created second was first in transgression. And it is not her teaching that he takes up, but her "salvation."

22. On the inauthenticity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, see Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 272-81.

Selected Reading for Further Study

1. **Belleville, Linda L., et al., eds. *Two views on women in ministry*. Zondervan, 2005.**

This book provides Scriptural reasoning for the two major competing views on women in ministry in the church. 4 copies of this book are available in the MCA Church Library. Books can be borrowed for 1-week.

2. **McKnight, Scot. *The blue parakeet: Rethinking how you read the Bible*. Zondervan, 2018, Parts 1-4.**

This book provides information about a central issue related to making a decision on women serving as elders, namely how we read and understand the Bible. We are recommending Parts 1-4 of the book. There are 4 copies of this book are available in the MCA Church Library. Books can be borrowed for 1-week.