

# ***WOMEN, MINISTRY, AND LITURGY***

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## **Introduction**

The role of women in the church has been a hot topic for some time now. For centuries, virtually all Christians agreed on several basic convictions concerning men and women. It was never disputed that men and women were created in the image of God, and therefore equal in worth. It was not controversial to assert that men and women were fundamentally different in constitution, and therefore God had ordained differing roles for them, in accord with their differing natures. There was a wide and deep consensus among Christians that men were generally to be the leaders in church, home, and society and that women were prohibited from holding authoritative and pastoral offices in the church. However, in the last couple of centuries, and especially in the last four decades, all of these traditional convictions have been called into question, and in many cases openly rejected. In Western culture at large, so-called women's liberation movements have fought for parity between the genders in the home and in society. The mainline Protestant churches have quickly capitulated to this cultural trend, and now it is common – even mandated in some instances – to have women holding authoritative and pastoral offices in the church. Feminists and egalitarians<sup>1</sup> who want to maintain some connection with the Bible and historic Christianity claim their new practices are actually more consistent with the gospel than the traditional limitations on the role of women. It is argued that, while the New Testament may not have overturned patriarchy overnight, it did set a time bomb beside traditional male superiority. The bomb has finally gone off and now women are sharing in what is rightfully theirs in Christ – namely, full equality with men in every respect.

Certainly, the church has struggled with chauvinistic tendencies in her past. Thomas Aquinas admitted the woman was created as a helper for Adam, “but she was not fitted to be a help to man *except in generation*, because another man would prove more effective help in anything else.”<sup>2</sup> John Calvin said the woman was created as an “inferior aid.”<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther said, somewhat caustically, “If women get tired and die of bearing [a child], there is no harm in that; let them die as long as they bear.”<sup>4</sup> Certainly any chauvinistic sentiments discovered in our heritage should serve as a call to repentance and remind us that the church is very capable of error on this point of role relationships. In addition, it means we must listen to what the egalitarians are saying and test everything

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<sup>1</sup> For the most part, I will use ‘feminist’ and ‘egalitarian’ interchangeably in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Foh, *Women and the Word of God*, 60 (emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> Comm. on Gen.

<sup>4</sup> Dan Doriani points out that this quotation in context is not as chauvinistic as it sounds. See *Women in the Church*, edited by Andreas Kostenberger, 237.

by Scripture. Egalitarian arguments cannot be hastily dismissed without a careful hearing. A blind traditionalism is no better than a blind acceptance of the newly formed egalitarian status quo. We must know what we are doing and why. What then does Scripture actually teach?

### **The Biblical Witness**

The issue of women's roles, particularly in the church, stands at the intersection point of several equally complicated issues: hermeneutics, cultural relativity, the relationship of creation to redemption, the weight of ecclesiastical tradition, church polity, the regulative principle of worship, how to interpret and use general revelation, the nature of personhood, etc. The biblical texts addressing the issue are numerous and often (especially in the NT) very complex. Our purpose here will be to give a basic overview of the biblical teaching, though not every relevant text will be brought into the discussion. Our focus will be on the roles of women in an ecclesial setting, but we cannot avoid commenting on familial and social contexts as well.

It is best to begin at the beginning, and Genesis 1 clearly affirms what must be the controlling presupposition throughout our study, namely, that male and female are created in the image and likeness of God.<sup>5</sup> Because God is a Triunity, in which the one and the many are equally ultimate, we may affirm that God's image is found in each individual human being and in humanity as a whole, as a male-female community. In fact, as we will see, the Trinity itself provides a basic pattern for understanding the role relations of men and women as they personally and corporately image their Creator. The first hint that the male will rule these two equal<sup>6</sup> sexes is found in the language of 1:26-27: *Man* is made male and female. In other words, the man is the representative member of the human family, the one from whom the race derives its name.<sup>7</sup>

In Genesis 2, the creation of man and woman is recorded in more detail. Adam was created first. Primogeniture will bring with it certain responsibilities, as we will see. Just as the woman follows her husband in the order of creation, so she is to follow his lead in their life together. Adam was to rule over the garden the Lord put him in, tending and guarding it. But after naming the animals, Adam realized he was incomplete. It was not good for him to be alone. So the Lord caused him to fall into a deep sleep and fashioned from his side<sup>8</sup> a "helper<sup>9</sup> comparable to him" (2:18). Upon meeting his newly formed

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<sup>5</sup> See John Piper, editor, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* ch. 12 for a full discussion.

<sup>6</sup> 'Equality' is the modern term used to express the truth that men and women share the same worth and dignity before God. The biblical emphasis, however, is not so much on the equality of men and women as on their unity.

<sup>7</sup> This representative/authoritative/leadership role will generally be referred to as headship in this paper. Richard Gaffin refers to this equal-but-hierarchical relation as 'asymmetrical mutuality.'

<sup>8</sup> "Eve was not taken from Adam's head that she should rule over him, not from his feet to be trampled underfoot, but she was taken from his side that she might be his equal; from under his arm that she might be protected by him; near his heart that he might cherish and love her" Foh 61. The narrative of Gen. clearly points out that the woman is needed to complete the man. In marriage, Adam is reunited with his missing rib, so to speak, and made whole in a much greater way than he was before.

helper, Adam burst out in joyous song: “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man” (2:23).<sup>10</sup> Here was one strangely like him, yet mysteriously different. She is his companion and completer, yet under his authority since he names her, as he did the animals.<sup>11</sup> God joined the couple together in a paradigmatic marriage, as the generic wording of 2:24 indicates:<sup>12</sup> “Therefore *a man* shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh.” Here again, the man’s role as leader is asserted: it is the man who takes the initiative in *leaving* his old family unit to form a new one<sup>13</sup> (cf. Mt. 24:38: the words of Jesus, “marrying and giving in marriage,” indicate that men and women approach marriage in different ways: the man leaves one family to form another, while the wife is transferred from the headship of one man to another; this is preserved in our traditional wedding question, “Who gives this woman to this man?”).

The honeymoon for the first married pair was not to last long, however. In Genesis 3, we find Adam failing in his guarding task. He has not kept the crafty serpent out of the garden. He stands by and watches (3:6) as Satan attacks his bride. The woman is duped by Satan’s cunning. When Adam sees that his wife has eaten of the tree and not died, he too partakes of the forbidden food. As many commentators have pointed out, this sequence of events has completely overthrown and reversed the created order: the man and the woman together were to rule the animal creation (1:26-28), the man was to rule the woman (as implied by the fact that the race as a whole takes its name from him, that he has priority in the order of creation, and that he named her), and the two of them together were to obey the word of the Lord. But in this case, the woman has submitted herself to the lower creation, the man has followed rather than led and protected his wife, and neither of them has obeyed God.<sup>14</sup> Everything has been turned upside down, and as a result, the Lord curses them and their whole realm (the earthly creation). The curses the Lord pronounces on the disobedient threesome (serpent, woman, man) are instructive, not just in their form (which again reflects the role reversal of the original, God-ordained authority structure) but in their content. The woman is cursed in what is presumably her primary sphere of activity, the home.<sup>15</sup> She will feel the effects of the curse most intensely in childbirth and marriage.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the man is cursed in what is presumably

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<sup>9</sup>“Helper” in no way implies ontological inferiority. In fact, the name “helper” is applied most often to God! See Werner Neuer *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* 69-70.

<sup>10</sup> Neuer 67ff.

<sup>11</sup> When a woman is married she takes her husband’s name because she is now under his authority. This is not just an empty Western tradition, but is firmly rooted in a biblical theology of marriage. Ironically, feminists who refuse to take their husband’s name do not escape male headship; rather they keep their father’s name!

<sup>12</sup> Mitchell (2) says that the church fathers saw in Adam and Eve “Everyman” and “Everywoman.”

<sup>13</sup> This archetypal pattern also means polygamy and homosexuality are sinful aberrations.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Neuer 75 and James Jordan *Rite Reasons* #41.

<sup>15</sup> I suppose this means it is God himself who is the first to stereotype the sexes!

<sup>16</sup> Gen. 3:16 is a highly disputed verse. There is no need to survey all the basic interpretive options here as that is done very capably elsewhere. The key to interpreting Gen. 3:16 is noting its parallel with Gen. 4:7. The fallen wife will now seek to control and manipulate her husband, just as sin will desire to master and control Cain. The curse, in other words, is the “battle of the sexes.” The woman will be tempted to usurp

his primary sphere of activity, labor outside the home. He will deal with the curse in his work as he fights against the now fallen creation for survival.

The uniform testimony of Scripture is that Adam is responsible for the fall.<sup>17</sup> In Genesis 3:9, the Lord calls out to Adam – not the woman, not the two of them together, but the man alone. He must answer for what has happened. The buck stops with him. He tries to blame shift in 3:12, accusing the woman and even God himself (“the *woman* whom *You* gave me...”). The woman, on the other hand, truthfully confesses that she was deceived (3:13; cf. 2 Cor. 11:3, 1 Tim. 2:14). One might think that since God tried male headship and it didn’t work that now the woman would have a shot at playing the role of leader. After all, Adam failed to protect his bride from the serpent. He failed to teach her effectively the Lord’s word. He abdicated his leadership role, standing by and passively watching as the woman fell for Satan’s deception. Why not give the woman a turn and she if can do a better job? But God had something much better in store. Rather than overthrow the principle of male headship he had embedded in his creation, he chose to graciously work to restore it and perfect it.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, he would provide a new head, a new husband, Jesus Christ, to do for the bride what the first head failed to do.

Thus, throughout the OT and on into the NT, the general pattern continues to be one of male headship. Husbands continue to be heads of their wives, as seen immediately after the Lord’s post-fall interrogation and cursing of Adam and his wife. In Gen 3:20, Adam again names his wife, and in doing so not only exerts authority over her but shows that he accepts the Lord’s promise of a redeemer made in 3:15.<sup>19</sup> Through his sin, death has entered in, but through the woman, the life-giving seed will come. The Lord continues to use masculine representative language in 3:22-24, indicating the man is still head of the relationship. This is the norm throughout the whole of Scripture.<sup>20</sup>

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her husband’s role as ruler; her husband will be tempted to rule over her in illegitimate ways (usually either abdication or tyranny).

<sup>17</sup> See Rom. 5:12ff, 1 Cor 15:21ff, etc. See Mitchell 25ff and James Jordan, *Biblical Horizons* #32; *Rite Reasons* #41.

<sup>18</sup> It must be strongly emphasized that the role relationships between men and women are not punishment for sin, but inherent in the created order. If punishment were in view, certainly the man, who committed the far greater sin, would have been demoted. In terms of the Torah, her sin was committed in ignorance, his with a high hand (see, e.g., Lev. 5:14ff).

<sup>19</sup> ‘Eve’ means ‘living.’ Adam trusts that God will make her the mother of the living. Eve expresses her faith in 4:1.

<sup>20</sup> In fact, much of the Bible is addressed specifically to men. Consider Ex. 20 (e.g., “Do not covet your neighbor’s wife”); Prov. 1-9, 30 (instruction to sons); Acts 2:29, 1 Cor. 10:1,14:6 (references to “brothers”), etc. Of course, these portions of Scripture nearly always have application to women and children, as well, but the fact of explicit male headship is still worth noting. Teachers and pastors should often find themselves addressing the whole congregation through the men. At the same time, we often find Paul (especially in his pastorals) and other biblical authors singling out various groups (younger men, younger women, older men, older women, children) for special instructions in accord with their peculiar situations. Such age and gender specific teaching would be a good practice to follow in our own preaching and teaching today as well. Our instruction should be tailor made to fit the various classes of people we address.

In Eph. 5:22ff, Paul's teaching further explicates the meaning of the early chapters of Genesis for marriage. Here, Paul indicates that the husband's headship<sup>21</sup> and the wife's submission are rooted in something much greater. Paul understands Adam and Eve (and all subsequent married couples) to be types of Christ and the church. Human marriage is founded upon the covenantal relationship of Christ to his people. Christ is head of his church and his church is to submit to his rule. Marriage, therefore, was created to be a living metaphor of the gospel.<sup>22</sup> The life story of a husband and wife together is to be a gospel-shaped story, an enfleshment of the gospel narrative.<sup>23</sup> Man and wife are to replicate, or re-enact, the drama of the gospel for all the world to see.

How is this to happen? A husband is to take his cue from Christ, who loved his bride to the point of dying for her. A man's love is to be sacrificial, forgiving, and efficacious. He is to do for his wife what Jesus has done for him. The wife is to take her cue from the church, and submit to her husband "in the Lord." She is to obey her husband and define herself in terms of him and his calling. For Paul, these roles are irreversible and, in some sense, inescapable.<sup>24</sup> He does not tell husbands to *try to be* heads in the marital relationship, but that *they already are* and so they must act like it. His statements about headship are indicative, not imperative. A husband may be a wonderful head or a lousy head, but he cannot help being the head. He takes the leading role in this drama, whether or not he plays it well.<sup>25</sup>

Paul's teaching here of husbandly headship and wifely submission *may* be qualified by the mutual submission he requires of all Christians to one another in 5:21.<sup>26</sup> But this cannot be used to overthrow his plain teaching about the husband's authority over his wife and her duty to obey him. Nor does it reduce the husband's headship to mere 'tie-

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<sup>21</sup> For a complete study of headship, see James Bordwine's *The Pauline Doctrine of Male Headship*.

<sup>22</sup> This helps us see what is at stake in preserving the biblical teaching on marital roles. To confuse the relationship between the husband and wife is to preach a false gospel.

<sup>23</sup> When husbands and wives try to do marriage their own way, they end up preaching a false gospel story, a story that all too often has a very unhappy ending. God has written the script for marriage. We need to play our parts faithfully if we are to find true joy.

<sup>24</sup> These duties are also unconditional in that each spouse is to obey Paul's directives even if the other doesn't. A man is to love his wife with a strong, Christ-like love, even if she is unlovely. A wife is to respect the office her husband holds, even if he acts in a manner unworthy of respect. See Mitchell 121. Of course, she is not to follow him into sin, and may even have recourse to others in the church if he needs to be disciplined. But ordinarily, she will obey even though he is a fallen, imperfect ruler.

<sup>25</sup> In other words, some husbands preach a true Christ, others a false Christ, but they all preach something.

<sup>26</sup> A good argument can be made that Eph. 5:21 is only teaching submission to those actually in authority, such as husbands, parents, and masters, rather than mutual submission of all Christians to one another. If it does teach we are all to submit to one another, then this submission obviously must take varying forms: Husbands submit to their wives by loving them as Christ loved the church, while wives submit to their husbands by respecting and obeying them. Fathers submit to their children by lovingly disciplining and training them, while children submit to their fathers by honoring and obeying them. Masters submit to their slaves by treating them kindly, while slaves submit to their masters by obeying them. Mutual submission does not rule out hierarchical relationships. Within the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit each submit to one another, yet the form that submission takes varies according to the nature of the relationship. See Neuer 126, Piper 493.

breaking' authority. Rather, it means headship and service are compatible,<sup>27</sup> just as equality and submission are compatible. Each spouse is to serve and submit to the other, albeit in different ways. Christ is head over his church, yet he asserted his headship by serving; husbands must do the same. Other NT passages on marriage, such as Col. 3:18-19 and 1 Peter 3:1-7, confirm this pattern.<sup>28</sup>

In the modern West, we tend to either trivialize marriage (i.e., no fault divorce, serial polygamy, casually entering into pre-marital sex and normalizing adulterous relationships rather than honoring the marriage bed, redefining marriage to include abominable homosexual unions, ridiculing traditional marriage as enslaving and confining, etc.) or idolize marriage (overdosing on marriage books and seminars, hoping my spouse will meet unrealistic demands, putting too much pressure on my marriage to make me happy, etc.). As Christians, we must learn to avoid the trivialization of marriage as well as marriage-olatry. We must cherish our marriages, without worshipping them. To do this, we must understand why God has ordained marriage. God's wise and holy purposes in marriage include:

- Revealing the gospel. As we have seen, marriage is to be a living, public embodiment of the gospel. The temporary<sup>29</sup> institution of human marriage is to reflect the eternal marriage of God to his people. As a husband continually dies for his wife, giving himself to her, and as a wife finds her fulfillment in respecting and obeying her husband, the gospel is proclaimed.
- Imaging God. Man and woman image God individually, but also in fellowship with one another (cf. the plural pronouns used of God in Gen. 1:26ff). Marriage in particular reveals the Trinity of God. 1 Cor. 11:3 teaches the man is the head of the woman, even as God (the Father) is the head of Christ (the Son). As a (S)pirit of love, joy, and glory passes back and forth between a man and his wife, the inner life of God is revealed for all to see.
- Dominion. Man and woman were created to be co-rulers, as king and queen, over the creation.<sup>30</sup>
- Multiplication. God ordained marriage to raise up "godly offspring" to fill the earth with his image bearers (Mal. 2:15). Husband and wife partner together in passing on the blessings of the covenant to a new generation.
- Companionship. Adam existed alone briefly on the sixth day of creation. As he named the animals, he discovered no subhuman creature was a suitable mate for him. God declared, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen. 2:18). In marriage, our deepest cravings for friendship,

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<sup>27</sup> See the teaching of Jesus on leadership and service in Mk. 10:35ff, Mt. 20:20ff, etc. In the Bible, the king is always servant (cf. Phil. 2:1-10). If the husband/father is king of his household, he all the more reason to assume the posture of a servant.

<sup>28</sup> See Neuner 123ff, 128. There are many excellent books on these topics. See, e.g., *Each for the Other*.

<sup>29</sup> If marriage is so glorious, why is it only a temporary, sub-eschatological relationship? Remember, the woman was created to be the man's helper in taking dominion over the earth and filling it with God's image bearers. When this program is complete (1 Cor. 15:20-28), the marital relation will no longer be needed. Only the church's marriage to Christ will continue.

<sup>30</sup> See Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* 88f.

including sexual intimacy, are fulfilled (cf. Gen. 2:23, Prov. 5:15ff, Song of Solomon, 1 Cor. 7:1ff). Husbands and wives find completion in one another.<sup>31</sup>

It is sometimes thought that OT marriage laws strongly favored the husband and left the wife (or wives, as the case often was) with few if any rights. Actually, the law of God embodies perfect justice, compassion, and wisdom.<sup>32</sup> The OT certainly does not leave wives unprotected. The Mosaic statutes included numerous provisions for the woman. Ex. 21:7-11 guarantees a wife the basic privileges of the marriage covenant and texts such as Dt. 24:1ff regulate and discourage divorce. The OT dowry system provided the wife with divorce insurance. Num. 5:10ff granted wives protection against jealous husbands: the wife couldn't be convicted of adultery on mere suspicion, but had to undergo trial by ordeal.<sup>33</sup> Women captured in war were to be treated with dignity (Dt. 21:10-14). The NT goes even further in granting marital rights to women. Jesus emphatically prohibits divorce<sup>34</sup> and Paul teaches marriage partners to maintain complete equality in the sexual relationship in 1 Cor. 7:1ff.

Male headship finds its specific focus in the marital covenant, but also functions in a more general way. The Abrahamic covenant presupposed and necessitated male headship since only males could receive the covenant sign; the circumcisions of their fathers, brothers, and sons covered women. The Mosaic covenant allowed women to participate in the three major annual festivals, but their attendance was not required as it was for adult males. Women could draw near to God in the tabernacle and offer sacrifice (Lev. 12, 15) and they were allowed to eat of the peace offerings (1 Sam. 1:4ff, 2:19). Interestingly, though most sacrificial animals were male, the peace offering could be male or female, indicating God invited women to fellowship with him just as he did men (Lev. 7:11ff). Women were made ceremonially unclean by their monthly period and by childbirth, limiting their participation in Israel's liturgical life. If a woman gave birth to a son, however, her time of uncleanness was cut in half because of the cleansing effect of his circumcision (Lev. 12).

Male headship is seen in other ways. For example, fathers and husbands were given veto power over vows that their daughters and wives made, though widows and divorced women were autonomous in this area (Num. 30). Fathers were responsible to oversee their daughter's romantic interests and preserve their sexual purity (Ex. 22:16-17; Dt. 22:12-21; note that the daughter committing sexual fraud<sup>35</sup> is executed at her father's house). The Levirate law (Dt. 25; Ruth 1-4) indicates male inheritance was more

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<sup>31</sup> The amazing implications of Gen. 2:18 are often neglected. Adam was created in perfect fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And yet he was still lonely! Somehow, God wasn't enough for him. God, in humility, apparently created man so that all his needs would not be met through God, at least not directly. God created man in such a way that only other humans can fully satisfy his relational needs. See my essay, "God Is Not Enough."

<sup>32</sup> See Mitchell 8.

<sup>33</sup> See Foh 69ff on these provisions.

<sup>34</sup> There are biblical grounds for divorce in the NT, but these are somewhat of an afterthought in the teaching of Jesus. The emphasis is clearly on marriage as a life-long commitment.

<sup>35</sup> Fornication was a sin but not a capital crime in the OT.

important (because men carried the family name), though women were allowed to be heirs in certain circumstances (Num. 27:8, 36:6-9; Job 42:15).<sup>36</sup> According to Lev. 27, males were valued more than females, probably because they could do more physical labor.<sup>37</sup>

Scripture consistently teaches men are the leaders of their homes. Noah's family as a whole is saved on the ark because of *his* representative faithfulness. Job acts as a priest even for his grown children (Job 1:5). Joshua declares his whole family's allegiance to the Lord (Josh. 24:15). Household baptisms in the NT (e.g., Acts 16, 1 Cor. 1:16) indicate male headship carries over into the new age. But Lydia shows us a woman who functioned as representative of her house, probably because she was a widow. Also, the apostle Paul indicates that even one Christian parent – father *or* mother – is enough to include a young child within the sphere of the covenant promises (1 Cor. 7:14). So male headship in the family is the norm, but is also nuanced.

The vast majority of leaders in the state of Israel are male, though on occasion we find women holding public office. There are good female rulers (Deborah)<sup>38</sup> and evil ones (Athaliah). Deborah's role as judge even involves military leadership, though she does not serve in combat.<sup>39</sup> Solomon's wisdom apparently did not require the Queen of Sheba

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, we also need to reckon with the fact that the Levirate has been fulfilled in Christ, so now men and women are co-heirs of God's redemptive blessings. The point of the Levirate law – to raise up a male heir and maintain the family's stake in the promised land – has been definitively realized in Christ. "We need to consider whether or not there is a shift in emphasis in the New Testament. The Great Commission is not phrased in terms of physical children but in terms of disciples...[yet] it is the same as the original commission to Adam and Eve. God wants the world filled with disciples, not with human flesh *per se*. The Old Covenant concept of blessedness is closely tied to the land and to seed. For this reason, if a man died without children, his brother was to raise him up one male heir to take his name *and* his land. In the New Covenant, the land has become the Church and the seed has become all believers. The Levirate marriage no longer applies in the New Covenant for this reason. *Land and children are relatively less important in the New Covenant*" Jordan CM No. 9.

<sup>37</sup> This would also explain why one's monetary value is related to age.

<sup>38</sup> The story of Deborah and Jael in Judges 4-5 is often pointed to as "an island of feminism in the Bible's patriarchal sea." But that is a severe misreading of the story. Deborah herself acknowledges the oddness of the situation in 4:9. There was clearly some shame involved for Barak since he was not able to fully shoulder the responsibility of the battle himself. Clearly, there is something exceptional about the situation, even beyond the fact that Deborah is the only female judge in the book. Yet, Judges 4-5 still preserves the basic division of labor between the sexes since the only woman involved in the actual combat is Jael, and that in a very covert kind of way that presupposed her domestic calling and skills. If anything, this story is the exception that proves the rule of biblical gender norms. Moreover, it should be noticed that Deborah is portrayed not only in her public roles as judge and prophetess, but also as a wife and mother (4:4, 5:7). Jael was a tentkeeper, a role that Deborah appears to assume as normal for women (5:24).

<sup>39</sup> Deborah holds court just like the male judges, but interestingly she is not a traveling judge like her male counterparts (Jdg. 4:5). She does not go to Israel, rather Israel comes to her. In this way, she exercises a kind of feminine leadership without usurping male headship. When she goes to battle with Barak, he leads, not her. Deborah's role is somewhat ambiguous, but she is not the one in final authority.



to resign her post. But when female rule becomes common, Isaiah 3:12 indicates it must be seen as the judgment of God.<sup>40</sup>

While male headship continues to function as the norm throughout the Scriptures, we see women engaged in all kinds of important activities. Women who perform their domestic roles are lavishly praised (Ps. 128:3; Prov. 31). Paul continues this tradition, especially in his pastorals. The worthy widow is the one who has raised children and been hospitable (1 Tim. 5:9ff). Younger widows are counseled to remarry, bear children, and manage their homes (1 Tim. 5:14). In Titus 2:3-4, Paul tells older women to teach younger women. The content of that teaching is suggestive – they are to admonish the younger women to love their husbands and children. Clearly Paul placed a high premium on the woman’s role as homemaker.

We also see God defending and exalting the place of mothers. The great privilege of bearing children is so commonly seen in the OT, there is no need to provide references. God requires mothers to be honored just as fathers are (Ex. 20:12) and sons are told to heed their mother’s teaching just as they do their father’s (Prov. 1:8, etc.) Striking or cursing one’s mother is punished the same way as striking or cursing one’s father (Ex. 21:15, 17; Dt. 21:18-21). Mary is the model of femininity and is highly exalted because she humbly submits to the role of bearing the God-man (Lk. 1:26ff). She plays a crucial and honorable role in redemptive history, a role no man could fulfill. This is what Paul has in view in that often misunderstood text, 1Tim. 2:15. Given the themes from Gen. 2-3 woven into Paul’s teaching in this section of 1 Tim., it is natural to see the statement “she will be saved in *the* childbirth” as referring back to the promise of Gen. 3:15. Eve sinned first (2:14), but it is through another Eve, Mary,<sup>41</sup> that the remedy for sin will come. It is through Eve’s seed, Jesus Christ, that the woman is saved<sup>42</sup> (as well as the man). Thus, the childbearing role of the woman was absolutely necessary to the fulfillment of God’s redemptive program. The whole purpose of Israel, as well as numerous social institutions God established for her, concerned the motherly task of bringing this promised seed into the world.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> On the mixed attitudes of the Reformers towards women in politics, see *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 6:2 89ff.

<sup>41</sup> This is why Mary is sometimes referred to as a generic woman, i.e., Jn. 2:4, Gal. 4:4, Rev. 12. See *For the Life of the World* 85f.

<sup>42</sup> Note Paul’s shift from the singular construction “*she* will be saved” at the beginning of 2:15, to the more general plural construction at the end of the verse, “if *they* continue...” Women are saved not through having their own children (this would make every child a kind of messiah; besides not all women are called to have children), but through *the* childbirth, the birth of Jesus Christ to the representative woman, the new Eve, Mary. Paul is moving in a redemptive-historical universe in 1 Tim. 2.

<sup>43</sup> James Jordan, following Jeff Meyers, gives a more complete interpretation than my terse summary above: “Meyers writes, ‘Paul is not discoursing on the fundamental nature and calling of man and woman in the abstract, but rather he is reviewing the history of the creation, fall, and promise of salvation in Genesis 2 and 3. In fact, Paul follows the flow of these two chapters in Genesis rather closely. He is giving an inspired commentary on that passage as it pertains to women’s role in church worship. Earlier in 1 Timothy 2 he gave instructions concerning the duties of men (v. 8). Then he proceeds to discuss the function of women in the Church (vv. 9-15). After ruling that women may not ‘teach or have authority over a man; she must remain silent’, Paul seeks to justify this command by appealing to the Genesis narrative, especially woman’s

But women contribute with their gifts and talents in all kinds of non-domestic settings as well. The Bible teaches a woman's priority will ordinarily be the home (i.e., her husband and children; cf. Titus 2:4) but by no means is the woman confined to the home. Women, through out the history of God's people, have played vital roles in church and society. Two ecclesiastical roles in particular need to be examined here: prophetess and deaconess.

Prophetesses are found in the OT and NT. Miriam is called a prophetess in Ex. 15:20. She sings a song celebrating the Lord's victory over Pharaoh in the exodus. Two features of her song and its context are important for our purposes. First, her song comes after that of Moses. The man has primacy, and the woman follows. Second, we are explicitly told she led the women in song and dance, whereas Moses led *all* the Israelites (15:1, 20). Miriam in no way usurped male leadership.

Hannah and Mary are not called prophetesses but both, like Miriam, sing prophetic songs (1 Sam. 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-55). Though they sang these songs in relative privacy,<sup>44</sup> the

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role in it. Both the creation order ('Adam was formed first, then Eve') and the way in which sin entered the world ('Adam was not deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner') teach us that women are to be in submission to men.' Meyers continues, 'Having pointed out that it was through the deception of *the woman* that sin entered into the world, and having said that *the woman* 'became a sinner' (the very end of v. 14), Paul immediately feels constrained to remind his readers of the *remedy* for sin and the central role of Eve (in fulfillment of 'the woman' theme in Old Covenant typology) played in this redemption. Verse 15a would be better translated: 'But she will be saved through the childbirth...' The plural 'woman', often inserted as the subject of the verb *sothesetai*, does not occur in the original text. The verb *sothesetai* is feminine singular, not plural as many translations have inaccurately rendered it (singular: KJV, NKJV, NEB, etc.; plural: NIV, NASV, etc.). Who is the subject of this verb? Clearly, from the context, it is 'the woman' (Gen. 3:15), fulfilled in Eve. Salvation will come through the childbearing of 'the woman.' It is 'the woman' who will be saved in this way.' Meyers goes on to point out that it is 'not just generic 'childbearing' but 'the childbirth' (*dia tes teknogonias*)' that saves the woman. 'The noun is definite, and refers to the childbirth of the Christ promised to Eve in Genesis 3:15.' Paul is following the text of Genesis 3. 'It was the woman who was deceived ... she will be saved through the Childbirth' (1 Tim. 2:14-15); compare: 'The serpent deceived me ... I will put enmity ... between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel' (Gen. 3:13-15). Meyers points out that there is a transition from Eve ('the woman') to women in general ('if *they* continue'). Women (plural) will be saved 'if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with submission.' 'Women in general are not saved through bearing children..., they are saved through faith in the fruit of 'the childbirth,' Jesus Christ.' Thus, Paul's argument is that Eve was saved through The Childbirth, and women (and men) are saved through The Childbirth also, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with submission to those in authority over them... Paul clearly is not addressing married women, but women in the Church in general.'" *Contra Mundum* No. 9. For an alternative reading, see Kostenberger 151f. Jordan's interpretation also helps us better understand the grand patriarchal narratives of Genesis. Why does each matriarch (Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel) struggle with barrenness? From one angle, we may say Satan has stopped up their wombs in order to prevent the promised Seed from coming into the world. On more than one occasion he tries to steal the bride for himself in order to raise up his own seed through her (e.g. Gen. 12:14ff, 20:2ff). From another angle, God prevented these women from conceiving so their sons would clearly be the products of divine grace, not human effort. The promised Seed would only come through the special work of the Spirit, not the strength of the flesh.

<sup>44</sup> There is no indication either sang their song in gathered worship, though they may have done so at the temple.

fact that these songs have been included in the canonical Scriptures means they are useful in teaching all members of the church. Huldah presents an interesting case because Josiah sent for her after the book of the law (i.e., Dt.) was rediscovered, even though male prophets such as Jeremiah and Zephaniah were available (2 Kings 22).<sup>45</sup> Anna in Luke 2:36ff is a unique example in that her prophetic ministry seems to be more public in nature, though it also seems to have been specially related to the birth of Christ. As a representative of the Lord's bride, she announced the coming of the promised redemption.

Joel 2:28 promises that the coming of the Spirit would result in a new out breaking of prophetic activity by men and women. Peter points to Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel's words (Acts 2:17). Thus, it is not surprising to find numerous women prophesying in the post-Pentecost church. Philip's four daughters are mentioned in Acts 21:9 and Paul refers to women who pray or prophesy in 1 Cor. 11:2-16.

The Corinthian passage is very hard to interpret, but is obviously one of considerable importance. A full study of the passage will not be undertaken here, but we can summarize some of its details in bullet point form:

- All too often, a discussion of women's headcoverings or women speaking in church is allowed to overshadow two very important points Paul is making in this passage: first, male-female relationships are ultimately patterned after the economic Trinity; second, men and women are mutually dependent upon one another.<sup>46</sup> In verse 3, Paul says every woman is under the headship of some man (such as husband, father, brother, or elders of the church). This does not mean women are inferior to men. After all, Paul says that Christ is under the headship of God (the Father) as well, yet Christ is not inferior to his Father.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, Paul says the man's glory is the woman (or women) under his care.<sup>48</sup> Just as man (and especially the perfect man, the Last Adam, Jesus Christ) is the visible manifestation of God's glory, so the woman is the glory of the man (11:7).<sup>49</sup> Apart from the woman, the man is unglorious, just as apart from a man the woman is headless. Remember, Adam was not complete when he was alone. God created the woman from his side for his sake. Thus, for Paul, the man and the woman need one another – the woman needs the man to be her head; the man

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<sup>45</sup> Huldah, like Deborah (another prophetess), did not usurp male headship. The leaders of Israel came to her; she did not put herself in a position of leadership. Some have speculated that Huldah was consulted because her husband's position as keeper of the wardrobe made her more easily accessible to the royal court.

<sup>46</sup> Paul does not specifically have in view marriage in this passage, as some commentators have imagined, though the marriage relation most obviously exhibits these truths.

<sup>47</sup> This also proves submission per se is not feminine. Everyone – male or female – is called to submit to God-appointed authorities, and ultimately to God himself.

<sup>48</sup> If a man has no woman under his headship, presumably the church (the bride of Christ) is his glory.

<sup>49</sup> There is an interpretive problem with v. 7: If Paul is saying the man depends on the woman for glory, is he saying God depends on man for his glory? No, strict parallelism simply cannot be at work here, for it would also force us to conclude that woman is not the image of God, contrary to Gen.1. The rest of scripture implicitly nuances Paul's position. The analogy is this: man was made for God, the woman for man. Man comes forth from God and exists for his glory, just as the woman comes forth from man and exists for his glory. See James Hurley *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* 163ff.

needs the woman to be his glory. She covers him with her beautiful hair, which Paul calls her glory (11:15) – but because it is her glory, it is her head’s glory (i.e., her husband’s). Just as she covers him as his glory, he covers her with his protective and authoritative headship. Arguments over whether it is better to be another’s head or another’s glory will obviously be fruitless.<sup>50</sup>

- This mutual interdependence between man and woman is most explicit in 11:7-9, 11-12. Verses 8-9 are an obvious reference back to the creation of Eve from Adam’s side. She was made for him. But now all men come forth from women. So men are just as dependent on women as women are on men.<sup>51</sup> Again, equality without equivalence is asserted. Ontological equality does not necessitate economic equality. Men and women are equal in worth, but vary in function. Men and women need one another, albeit in differing ways.<sup>52</sup>
- What are the implications of this passage for the liturgical role of women? Did Paul actually advocate that women pray and prophesy in church? Is it possible he was trying to shut down the Corinthian practice of women doing these things in church? Or is he dealing with some other kind of meeting, besides the church’s official liturgical gatherings? All of these questions can only be answered in conjunction with a study of 1 Cor. 14:33-35, where Paul forbids women to speak in church. How are these two passages to be put together in a way that does justice to them both? Let’s consider a couple of options:
  - The traditional interpretation<sup>53</sup> claims that 1 Cor. 11:2ff deals with small fellowship groups, not public worship. Paul allowed women to pray and prophesy outside of the liturgical gathering, as we see elsewhere in the Bible. On this reading, Paul begins to deal with matters of public worship in 11:17ff.<sup>54</sup> In 14:33ff, Paul explicitly forbids women to speak publicly in church. The kind of speaking in view here has already been described in 14:1-31, and it excludes just the kind of speaking that Paul allows in 1 Cor. 11.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the traditional position of the church: Women could pray or prophesy outside worship, but women -- *even inspired women* -- are forbidden liturgical leadership in the assembly.
  - Another view assumes 1 Cor. 11:2ff deals with a liturgical context. On this reading, the section dealing with gathered worship (the “traditions”) runs from 11:2-14:40, not 11:17-14:40. Paul says his instructions here concern a uniform practice in “the churches of God” (11:16), and “church” in this

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<sup>50</sup> See Neuer 110-12 for a fuller discussion of these relationships.

<sup>51</sup> See Calvin *Men, Women, and Order in the Church* 47ff.

<sup>52</sup> 11:7 does not mean that women do not bear God’s image. That would contradict Gen. 1:26ff, Col. 3:10, etc. Paul’s point is that she does not image God *in relation to her husband/head*. In the marital relation, the man images God/Christ and the woman images the church. In other senses, though, she too is the image of God. She is both the image of God and the image of the image of God. See Hurley 173, 206.

<sup>53</sup> I believe it is safe to claim this is the majority view in the history of interpretation. It is taught by Origen and virtually all the patristic theologians (Piper 275, Doriani 222f, Mitchell 11), as well as Lenski, Grosheide, Neuer, Waldron, etc.

<sup>54</sup> Note in 11:17ff the multiple references to “coming together,” i.e., as an assembled body, and in v. 18 the reference to “first of all,” as though this was the first matter to be addressed in a new section of the epistle.

<sup>55</sup> I will argue just below that both prayer and prophecy in this context are inspired forms of speech.

context is a reference not just to the institutional church but specifically to church assemblies. Plus, prayer and prophecy everywhere else in 1 Cor. take place in the liturgical gathering, so why not here as well? Most importantly, Paul makes mention of “angels” in 11:10 and throughout Scripture angels are associated with gathered worship and God’s special presence (cf. Heb. 12:22ff; Eph. 3:10; references to angels in the temple are also significant here, e.g., Ex. 25:18ff, Isa. 6, etc.). Noel Weeks argues from this text that praying and prophesying are leadership functions that could only be performed by someone with an uncovered head.<sup>56</sup> Thus, if a woman were to engage in these functions she would have to uncover her head as well. But this would bring shame upon her and her husband.<sup>57</sup> 11: 5 could best be translated, “Every woman who praying or prophesying by means of uncovering her head, dishonors her head.” To pray or prophesy – which requires an uncovered head – brings shame on a woman (cf. 1 Cor. 14:35). Therefore, Weeks concludes that Paul was actually forbidding women to speak publicly in the gathered assembly.<sup>58</sup> Weeks’ solution has the advantage of making 1 Cor. 11 easily reconcilable with other NT passages about the silence of women, especially 1 Cor. 14:33-35.<sup>59</sup>

- While it may be very difficult to decide between these two views, their practical application is probably not all that different in our own day. On both readings, women are ordinarily forbidden a leadership role in the church, something affirmed by several other clearer Scriptures. We will say more about 1 Cor. 14:33-35 below.
- Is Paul requiring women to wear some sort of headgear in public worship or an informal group, or at least while they pray and prophesy? Nobody seems to know for certain what the covering referred to in these verses is. Hats, veils, hair bound up on the head,<sup>60</sup> and other suggestions have been offered, but we simply do not have enough information to say for sure. Paul does, however, make an issue of hair length.<sup>61</sup> It is natural (i.e., in accord with the design of creation and general

<sup>56</sup> *The Sufficiency of Scripture* ch. 18.

<sup>57</sup> It is doubtful that men were actually wearing head coverings when they prayed or prophesied so perhaps what Paul says about women praying and prophesying in this passage is also hypothetical.

<sup>58</sup> *Tabletalk* July 26 agrees with Weeks: “And even though Paul refers to women prophesying in 1 Cor. 11:5, there is no indication that he approves of the practice. If anything, his exhortation for them to cover their heads as a sign of submission would keep women from exercising authoritative gifts. In other words, if they were to teach and have authority over a man, it would be contradictory for her to wear a sign of submission on her head. But since she is supposed to have this sign, she cannot take a position of authority by teaching in the public assembly.” To oversimplify, the logic runs like this: If a woman were to pray or prophesy, she would need to uncover her head; but uncovering her head is a disgrace to herself and her (male) head; therefore she is to not pray or prophesy.

<sup>59</sup> Hurley (186) argues against Weeks that Paul seems to approve of women praying and prophesying in public, provided their heads are covered. Why would Paul give instructions about how to do something he forbids? Of course, for Weeks, Paul is not giving such instructions, but pointing out the incongruity of the woman’s sign of submission on her head and the public exercise of authoritative gifts.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Num. 5:18. See Bordwine 47ff.

<sup>61</sup> Hurley translates 11:15, “Her long hair is given her *instead of* a veil” (163) and concludes that long hair is a sufficient sign of her submission. No hat, shawl, veil, etc, is needed. It seems her hair is a natural covering for her.

revelation) for a woman to have long hair and a man short hair (11:14, 15).<sup>62</sup> Her long hair, ultimately, is her covering, the sign that she is her husband's glory and under his headship.<sup>63</sup> Her own head is covered because her husband is her head. The man, however, is not to cover his head while praying or prophesying, and he is not to have long hair, because this dishonors his head, Christ. A woman with an *uncovered* head attempts to be her own head, thereby dishonoring her true head, her husband.<sup>64</sup> A man with a *covered* head dishonors his head, Christ, by denying that His headship covers us before the Father.<sup>65</sup> A man with long hair is attempting to glorify himself and cover himself. Paul's play on the word 'head' is essential to his argument, as he moves back and forth between the head as a part of the human body and the head as an authority and protector.

- It is important to understand that the prophecy and prayer Paul has in view are inspired, revelatory forms of speech. According to the near unanimous testimony of the Reformed church these modes of revelation have now ordinarily ceased (WCF I.1).<sup>66</sup> We have the completed canon of Scripture and no longer need these partial, incomplete forms of revelation (1 Cor. 13:8ff). The argument that Corinthian prophecy was on par with biblical revelation is argued convincingly by many theologians and need not be repeated here.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the only kind of prayer mentioned in 1 Cor. is prayer in tongues,<sup>68</sup> which is simply prophecy in another language, and therefore also inspired speech. Even if both the church's traditional reading and Weeks' reading are wrong, 1 Cor. 11 does not warrant women taking on roles of liturgical leadership. "If 'prophesy' means speak revelationally [in 1 Cor. 11:5], then the role of women in the church today is clarified. Only so long as the revelational gift of prophecy remained alive in the church could women serve as instruments of the divine word. But if the prophetic word of God has found its

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<sup>62</sup> Paul may also be alluding to Ezek. 44:20, applying Ezekiel's description of the restoration temple to the church. Ezekiel's priestly instructions about hair length would then be normative for all the men of the congregation (though it should be remembered Ezekiel's temple is not identical to the new covenant temple). Of course, there were occasions when these norms concerning hair length were lawfully set aside. Men who took Nazirite vows were to let their hair grow into locks (Num. 6; Jud. 5:2) and women who were taken as war-brides shaved their hair completely off (Dt. 21:2). But Paul is describing a more ordinary situation in 1 Cor. 11. Why is hair associated with glory? It's hard to say, but perhaps there is a chain of relationships: What comes forth from God is his glory (the Son/man); what comes forth from the man is his glory (the woman); what comes forth from the woman is her glory (her hair). Of course, in verse 12 Paul says that ultimately all things come from God so ultimately all things are for his glory.

<sup>63</sup> Biblically, the question is not simply, Who wears the pants in the family? (cf. Dt. 22:5), but, Who has the shorter hair? The sign or badge of her submission to God's social order is her long hair. She hides her head because her man is her head. See Doug Wilson *The Federal Husband* 40-50 and Bordwine 202.

<sup>64</sup> This explains 11:5: Paul is basically saying that if women take glory from their husbands by praying or prophesying with an uncovered head, then glory should be taken from them, i.e., their hair should be shaved off. It's eye for eye, tooth for tooth, glory for glory.

<sup>65</sup> The contrast here is with the old covenant high priest who did pray before God with a head covering (Ex. 28:36ff; cf. 2 Chron. 26:16ff). Now that Christ has turned God's wrath away, men no longer need to cover their heads as they come into God's presence. Our uncovered heads are a sign that Christ has covered us by his atoning death and now we worship God face to face (2 Cor. 3; cf. Mt. 27:51).

<sup>66</sup> See Bordwine 42.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., O. P. Robertson *The Final Word*.

<sup>68</sup> See 1 Cor. 13-14 for scattered references.

perfection with the completion of the new covenant Scriptures, then the role of women as instruments of divine revelation has now ceased.”<sup>69</sup> This will be explored more fully later.

- It is critical to understand Paul is not making a concession to ancient Greco-Roman culture in these matters. Paul’s appeal is to the Trinity, the order of creation, nature<sup>70</sup> (i.e., general revelation/creation ordinance), and the uniform practice of all of the churches established by the apostles.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Weeks, trained in both theology and Mediterranean studies, points out that there is no evidence that women in the first century wore veils or head coverings in public anyway.<sup>72</sup>
- We cannot provide an exhaustive application of this passage for our own day, but at the very least the passage teaches that gender distinctions remain relevant for church gatherings, including worship.<sup>73</sup> We worship God not as neutered individuals; men worship as men and women as women. When we enter the worship assembly, we don’t leave our gender behind. While men and women share the most important things in common in regard to salvation (Gal. 3:28), there are still differences. The sexes should be visibly differentiated in worship in what they wear<sup>74</sup> and how they conduct themselves. This is part of the Spirit-generated orderliness that must characterize Christian worship (cf. 1 Cor. 14). There is to be a public, symbolic manifestation of God’s creation design.

What generalizations can we draw from these prophetess passages? It is important to keep in mind the sporadic nature of the gift of prophecy. The Spirit’s gift of prophecy came intermittently. Thus, prophetesses would have had at most an occasional teaching ministry. The regular office of teaching was held in the old covenant by priests and in the new covenant by pastors. These offices are prohibited to women. If we believe along with the Reformed tradition as whole that the gift of prophecy ceased with the closing of the canon, we should not expect any new prophetesses to be raised up because the gift of prophecy is no longer operative.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, there were no prophetesses who had a writing ministry comparable to male prophets.<sup>76</sup> When the prophecies of women are recorded in Scripture, they are included in books penned by male authors.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Robertson, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. the use of the same word ‘nature’ in Rom. 1:26.

<sup>71</sup> If anything, Paul has in view an apostolic, not a Greco-Roman, custom. He is describing what is true of the church’s culture, not the world’s culture.

<sup>72</sup> 131f, 140ff. See also Bordwine 46f and Mitchell 80ff.

<sup>73</sup> We could offer an *a fortiori* argument here to make the traditional reading applicable to gathered worship: If women were to show a sign of submission to male leadership even in an informal gathering, how much more must they do so when the church draws near to God in the Most Holy Place?

<sup>74</sup> See Dt. 22:5, 1 Tim. 2:9.

<sup>75</sup> This is not to deny the prophethood of the whole church. But the miraculous gift of inspired speech has ordinarily ceased.

<sup>76</sup> I realize the authorship of some biblical books is disputed, but I see no reason to reject the church’s tradition on this issue.

<sup>77</sup> It is also note worthy that women who prophesy often did so in song (though none of the Psalms, the official hymnbook for Israel’s gathered worship, were written by women as far as we know).

Second, we see women serving in a role I will label ‘deaconess.’ We find women ministering at the tabernacle in Ex 38:8. They reappear in 1 Sam. 2:22. We are not told what they were to do (though they certainly were not to be sleeping with the priests!), so we have to speculate a little. These women probably assisted the priests in caring for the tabernacle and doing chores necessary to the maintenance of the sacrificial system. Or, perhaps, they assisted female worshippers at the temple. Their role was one of service, but not leadership. They are clearly distinguished from the male priests.<sup>78</sup>

Deaconesses reappear in the NT. Just as the old covenant tabernacle was staffed with female servants, so the new and true tabernacle, Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:14) had an entourage of women who traveled with him and ministered to him (e.g., Lk. 8:2-3). Paul seems to refer to a woman named Phoebe as a deacon(ess) in Rom. 16:1-2.<sup>79</sup> 1 Tim. 3:11 seems to give qualifications for female deacons.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps the list of widows mentioned in 1 Tim. 5:3ff form a special subclass of deaconesses. What would female deacons have done in the early church? Most likely, they would have engaged in mercy ministry, especially forms of ministry to women that would have been inappropriate for male deacons.<sup>81</sup> It was ministry by women to women.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> I would argue for a variety of exegetical reasons that Jephthah’s daughter was a tabernacle deaconess as well (Jdg. 11).

<sup>79</sup> Phoebe is called a ‘deacon of the church in Cenchrea.’ This language seems to indicate she held some kind of official post in her church. Part of her role as deaconess might have been to deliver Paul’s letter to the Romans (i.e., running an errand for an apostle). Certainly Paul valued her help in his ministry.

<sup>80</sup> I do not think 1 Tim. 3:11 can be read as a reference to the wives of deacons. Paul does not give qualifications for the wives of elders so to give qualifications for the wives of deacons (the lesser office) would be very odd. Moreover, 3:11 is sandwiched between qualifications for male deacons so it seems natural to read it as describing qualifications for their female counterparts. (Of course, deacons’ wives may often be very good candidates for deaconesses.)

<sup>81</sup> “What tasks deacons carried out at this time can only be guessed at. It certainly did not involve public proclamation of the word, teaching, or leading the church. Perhaps it involved serving the congregation, by bringing material help to the needy (Rom. 16:2), in serving women, the sick, and strangers....” Neuer 121.

<sup>82</sup> Jordan summarizes the evidence: “We must do justice to the ‘office of women’ in the Church as the Bible sets it out. What the Bible teaches is that women are radically different from men. For this reason, men often do not know how to deal with women’s problems. Other, older women are, however, able to do so. Thus, the office... as I propose it, is to be filled by older women who advise and counsel other women. Does the Bible show some women set apart for ministry in the Church? Yes. First, there were deaconesses who assisted women at the Tabernacle, such as Jephthah’s daughter and the women mentioned in Exodus 38:8 and 1 Samuel 2:22. Second, the gospels call attention to women who served as deaconesses to the Lord Jesus Christ, along with the apostles. And third, the epistles mention such women and their appointed roles. In 1 Timothy 3:11, when discussing deacons, Paul gives instruction to women. Some have said that this refers to the wives of the deacons, but if that is the case, why is nothing said about the wives of the overseers in verses 1-7? Clearly, the reference is to deaconesses, women who serve *as women* in the Church. Phoebe is referred to as such in Romans 16:1. Paul refers to older widows who have a ministry of prayer and hospitality in 1 Timothy 5:5 & 10. The ministry of older women to younger is described in Titus 2:3-5. The former passage refers clearly to some kind of ‘office’ because the woman is put on a roll and supported by the Church, but the latter passage refers to older women in general... Let me sum matters up thus far. First, women always serve under male authority. Second, women cannot be elder-overseers, pastors, or deacons in the Church. Third, there is a ministry of women to women, which is *organized* to some extent, and which has its roots in the Old Testament. For this reasons, it seems to me that it would be good if the Church recognized the office of... deaconess. I believe there are two reasons why the post-Reformation Church has not imitated the early Church in this regard. First, the preaching-centeredness of



Beyond prophetess and deaconess roles, women exercise influence in all kinds of non-official ways. Wives of elders and pastors will always exert a great deal of authority in the church indirectly. Their influence on their husbands gives them a great deal of unofficial power.<sup>83</sup> Abigail is perhaps the pre-eminent model of a non-official exercise of feminine authority. Abigail's husband, Nabal, is a fool. Though David and his men have protected his land, Nabal refused to invite them to the sheep shearing festival, as was customary. David was planning to retaliate with deadly force when Abigail came out to meet him. This wise and beautiful woman persuaded<sup>84</sup> David to relent and he later thanked her for talking sense into him (1 Sam. 25). In the book of Acts, the husband and wife team of Priscilla and Aquilla corrected Apollos in private (Acts 18:26). Paul refers to two Philippian women, Euodia and Syntyche, as co-laborers in the gospel (Phil. 4:2). Paul does not spell out the tasks of these fellow workers, but obviously they had been a great help to Paul.<sup>85</sup> Like Paul, we should thank and praise women who faithfully serve the gospel and the church. The efforts of women are of great value in God's kingdom and all too often have gone unappreciated.

Nevertheless, the Bible does put limits on the ways women can minister. We will look more fully at the rationale for this later, but for now we may briefly survey the biblical prohibitions. All church members should obviously be encouraged to engage in all kinds of ministry, but the actual shape of their ministries will be pervasively qualified by giftedness and gender. These kinds of limitations are nothing new. In the old covenant, no matter how gifted a man was at ruling, unless he was from the tribe of Judah, he could not be king. No matter how qualified a man was to teach and lead sacrificial worship at the temple, unless he was from the tribe of Levi, he was excluded from these callings.<sup>86</sup> Obviously the new covenant pulls off a lot of these old covenant restrictions, but some of them remain because they are embedded in the structure of creation itself and are

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the Reformation Church, and its post-tribal northern European culture, caused the Church to become overly masculine, obscuring the role of women. Second, in the modern age feminists have insisted that there is no difference between men and women and have argued that women should be ruling elders and pastors. Both of these trends, I submit, are destructive. Finally, a caveat: My model suggests that the ministry of women is most closely associated with the role of the Spirit. The Spirit, after all, creates the Bride for the Son, and so He is the sponsor of all things feminine. Women in ministry work with other women to make them better women, and thus their work is closest to that of the Spirit. But at the same time, the Spirit is invisible and untraceable in His work. Unlike the Father and the Son, who stand out as Official Persons, the Spirit is hard to grasp. For that reason, perhaps, the ministry of women in the Church should *not* be made official but should remain unofficial" *Rite Reasons* #41.

<sup>83</sup> Godly men take counsel with their wives (1 Pt. 3:7).

<sup>84</sup> Notice her appeal is humble but highly theological. In an informal sense, she not only gave David a gentle rebuke, but also taught him.

<sup>85</sup> It would be stretching credibility in light of passages such as 1 Tim. 2:11ff to claim Euodia and Syntyche were fellow preachers with Paul. Paul's missionary work required his supporting cast to perform all kinds of functions, such as prayer, lodging, finances, etc. These women could have been useful to Paul in all kinds of ways without violating Paul's limitations on the functions of women specified elsewhere. Romans 16 gives a list of several of Paul's helpers and co-laborers, but its doubtful all or even most of these were preachers. For Paul, there was no contradiction between praising the valuable labors of women and limiting those labors.

<sup>86</sup> Lev. 10:11 and numerous other passages indicate that priests were the primary teachers in Israel.

necessary for maintaining good order in the church. It should be noted that were no priestesses in ancient Israel. Many of the surrounding nations had priestesses, but God made no such provision for Israel. The office of priest was the old covenant forerunner to our office of pastor (1 Cor. 9:13f), an office women continued to be excluded from. The reason for this is easy enough to understand: Priests and pastors represent the husband, Jesus, to the bride, and guard the bride.<sup>87</sup> Thus, they must be male.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Guarding is the primary function of a priest. Cf. Jordan (*Rite Reasons* #41): “May women be priests? Clearly not, at least in the special sense. There are no priestesses in Scripture. Why not? Protestants (and also Catholics) are not clear on why, however. The question is this: What is the kernel of the priestly office that men have, and that women do not? The following answers are inadequate: [1.] The priest offers prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the people. But if the people are the Bride of God, then surely females would make better representatives. It cannot, then, be the case that the priest is simply a representative of the people. Besides, to say this and no more makes the priest the same as the prophet. [2.] The priest represents God in passing judgments on the people. Again, this is not enough....[I]f the Church is our Mother, rearing us as her children, why not have women as rulers in the Church? Besides, to say this and no more makes the priest the same as the king. The correct answer is this: The priest is a guard, and as a guard, he must guard something. What he guards is the Bride, and as the guardian of the Bride, he must be a figure of the Father/Husband/Son. That is, he must be a male. We can go back to Genesis 2 and 3 for more insight into this. In brief we find the following: God gives man two tasks: the kingly task of dressing the garden, and the priestly task of guarding it. First of all, God teaches man about the kingly, shepherding, wisdom task. He brings animals to man, for man to name, acquire wisdom, and so forth. Man learns from the animals that he lacks something, something needed for his kingly task. God provides what man lacks: a helper fitted for him, a queen. Second of all, God teaches man about the priestly, guarding, sacramental eating task. He brings an animal to man, for man to guard against. The animal assaults the wife, offering a demonic substitute for the sacrament. The man guards the wife, rejects the animal, and has a sacramental meal with God, feeding his wife. From this, the man learns that he lacks something, something needed for his priestly task. God provides what man lacks: a robe of judicial authority. Of course, this is not what happened. Man failed the priestly task. He stood by and permitted his wife to interact with the serpent. He failed to guard her, or the garden. He permitted her to partake of the table of demons. He received instruction from her mouth, and food from her hand, the reverse of the proper order. Now, the important thing to note at this point is that the woman was not present when the man entered into the kingly task. She was brought in to help him with it, making her a queen. But, when the test regarding the priestly task came about, it was precisely in terms of whether or not the man would guard his wife. We have to note that the Bible repeatedly says that Eve was deceived (1 Tim 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:3). She was not constitutionally created to be able to guard the garden, and she is not blamed for the fall. But, when Adam is called on the carpet, he advances from failing to guard his wife, to attacking her openly. In this, Adam totally reverses the relation he should have, and becomes the precise antithesis of what he was to symbolize: God’s relation to His Bride. Are women priests then? No, at least not in this ultimate, special sense. But what about the ‘priesthood of all believers?’ What the Reformers meant by this phrase is that any person can and should approach God without having to go through any mediator except Christ alone. (More accurately, they meant that any believer can be an intercessor for another; it is not necessary to have a special priest as one’s intercessor.) In terms of what they meant, they were right. But, what they should have called it was not ‘universal priesthood,’ but ‘universal Bridehood.’ The privilege of approaching God is not a priestly privilege, but is the privilege of the Mother/Bride/Daughter. (More accurately, they should have called it ‘universal prophethood,’ since the office of intercession is prophetic, not distinctly priestly.) All the same, women do perform priestly tasks. They do guard the home. They do instruct their children (and informally they can instruct men). They do prepare meals and serve them. Are these not ‘priestly’ tasks? Certainly, but we have to make two distinctions. The first is the same one we have already made concerning prophecy and rule. Women are never priests, but priestesses. A priestess can only guard under the authority of a priest. Second, we have to distinguish between the general and the special. There is a special meal, and special office, in the Church. In connection with these, the priestly task must be performed in an exclusively masculine fashion, in order that the relationship between God and His Bride may be set out clearly.”

It is also significant that Jesus chose only males to be his disciples.<sup>89</sup> These men later became the apostles, the foundation layers for the new covenant church (Eph. 2:20). These men had an authoritative role. Our pastors and teachers today continue to build upon their work. The replacement candidates for the fallen apostle, Judas, were exclusively male. Women in the early church carried on all kinds of ministry, as we have seen, but never authoritative, apostolic or pastoral ministry. It is impossible for a woman to represent the husband to the bride, yet this is just what pastors must do.<sup>90</sup>

An important and much disputed text that addresses very specifically the place of women in the life of the church, and especially in worship, is 1 Tim. 2:8-15. We have already addressed 2:15, but the rest of the passage deserves further comment. Paul's instructions here unquestionably concern role relationships and behavior in gathered worship (cf. 3:15).<sup>91</sup> Note that Paul specifically commands the men to lead in prayer (2:8).<sup>92</sup> By

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<sup>88</sup> C. S. Lewis (in *God in the Dock*) explains as only he can do: "I am crushingly aware how inadequate most of us are, in our actual and historical individualities, to fill the place prepared for us. But it is an old saying in the army that you salute the uniform, not the wearer. Only one wearing the masculine uniform can (provisionally, til the *Parousia*) represent the Lord to the Church: for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him. We men make very bad priests. This is because we are insufficiently masculine. It is no cure to call in those who are not masculine at all. A man may make a very bad husband; you cannot mend matters by trying to reverse the roles. He may make a bad partner in dance. The cure for that is that men should more diligently attend dancing classes; not that the ballroom should henceforth ignore distinctions of sex and treat all dancers as neuter." Elsewhere he says, "Since God is in fact not a biological being and has no sex, can it matter whether we say He or She, Father or Mother, Son or Daughter? But Christians think that God himself has taught us how to speak of him. To say it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable: or, if tolerable, it is an argument not in favour of Christian priestesses but against Christianity."

<sup>89</sup> Neuer 98. Peter affirmed this after the ascension in Acts 1:21.

<sup>90</sup> Simply put, the Bible stands in the way of feminism and its desire to open all church offices to women. Harald Risenfeld explains: "Inasmuch as the man, as a householder, reflects in his relations to the church bride and to the congregation-household, it must have seemed self evident to the Early Christian mind that the officer presiding over the assembled congregation, and therefore at the Eucharist, should be a male. Even without this, ministerial duties as outlined in the New Testament could to a great extent be called masculine, particularly as regards authoritative governing and judicial functions. These, after all, are where the ministers act on Christ's behalf, and it is in full conformity with the idea of representation that the officers who founded churches and led congregations were men. Thus it is no mere chance that we find in the New Testament unanimous pronouncements as to the different functions of the two sexes, and can establish that the ministers of the church were invariably men, namely the apostles sent forth will full authority by Christ, missionaries who founded churches, and the heads of the local congregations. It is unlikely that the absence of female ministers should be due to any consideration paid by Christ and the early church to the socially inferior positions of the woman at that time. For one thing, there were priestesses in a number of Hellenistic cults; for another, Christianity was from the start no stranger to radical reassessments, in eluding those of social nature, and not least as regards women's status in marriage and their equal worth as human beings" Quoted in Jeff Meyers *The Lord's Service* 106.

<sup>91</sup> "In every place" in 2:8 is probably a reference to various house churches.

<sup>92</sup> We might ask why women are not included in the command to pray as well, in light of 1 Cor. 11. Of course, for Weeks, the solution is simple: 1 Cor. 11 actually forbids women to lead in prayer, and so it is easily harmonized with 1 Tim. 2:8. If we follow the traditional reading, there is also a simple solution: 1 Cor. 11 addresses a situation outside of gathered worship, where women may engage in public prayer. If we go with those who do believe Paul allows for women to pray and prophesy in church in 1 Cor., we should

contrast, women are commanded to learn in silence and submission (2:11). Both parts of this command to women need emphasis in our day. Women are commanded to *learn*. Paul is concerned that women grow in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. In sharp contrast with many of the rabbis of his day, he has no interest in holding women back from their full intellectual potential. But they are also commanded to do their learning *in silence* -- in other words, without taking on the role of leader or asking questions in the assembly (per 1 Cor. 14).<sup>93</sup>

Paul has given the positive command that women are to learn in silence in verse 11. But lest anyone draw the conclusion that Paul wants them to learn so they can *eventually* become teachers of the church, he follows it up with a negative command in 2:12: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man." A variety of fallacious arguments have been offered to try to undo Paul's teaching here.<sup>94</sup> But the rationale for prohibiting women from offices/positions of teaching and ruling is clear. Paul does not appeal to anything cultural or temporary, but to something that transcends culture and is of permanent significance: he takes us all the way back to the early chapters of Genesis, to the accounts of creation and fall. Adam was formed first, then the woman, so the man is the head and authority. Primogeniture brings with it headship and the right for qualified men to teach and rule in the church (cf. Col. 1:15-18). Paul's appeal to the order of the fall is a little more enigmatic.<sup>95</sup> The woman was deceived and fell into transgression first. Does this mean she is really the one responsible for humanity's fallen condition, contra Rom. 5:12ff? Does it mean women are naturally more gullible than men, and therefore unfit to teach?<sup>96</sup> We must answer No to both questions. But what, then, is Paul's point in appealing to the sin of the woman? It is important to remember that in the original creation situation, Adam was his wife's teacher. Paul specifically mentions the fall here, but the pre-fall situation is his constant presupposition. The woman had not yet been created when God gave the command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fall shows us what happens when men fail to teach, when they abdicate. Paul does not want Timothy's church to recapitulate this great disaster.<sup>97</sup> The men must not do what Adam did; they must not relinquish their teaching responsibilities. The men must be proactive in teaching their women lest they be led astray by Satan's wiles again; they are responsible to protect them from theological

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remember that these were revelatory forms of speech (prayer in tongues, inspired prophecy). 1 Tim. 2 (along with the other pastorals) addresses a much more 'normal' situation, where apparently tongues and prophecy are no longer an issue (or at least are fading into the background).

<sup>93</sup> See Hendriksen Comm. 109-110.

<sup>94</sup> Some claim Paul was only concerned with women who were abusing authority over men and teaching false doctrine. But then why would Paul prohibit *all* women from holding authority or teaching? Why not simply correct the erring women, as he does with men? Others claim Paul's prohibitions are limited to the particular situation in Ephesus. But the reasons Paul gives are universal and permanent.

<sup>95</sup> While mysterious in some respects, Paul's appeal to Gen. 3 makes good sense since the fall took place in the sanctuary-garden (the place of worship) on the Sabbath and Paul is in the midst of giving instructions about worship.

<sup>96</sup> This was the opinion of Luther and countless other interpreters. Schreiner and Doriani are modern examples. See Kostenberger 144ff, 265-7.

<sup>97</sup> Bordwine 185ff, *Rite Reasons* #41.

error.<sup>98</sup> For men to submit themselves to the teaching of women would be to repeat the same kind of role-reversal that brought about the fall in the first place.<sup>99</sup> Of course, the primary responsibility for teaching falls especially to the men who have been ordained to church office, as Paul spells out in the next chapter.<sup>100</sup>

1 Cor. 14:33b-35 echo Paul's teaching in 1 Tim. 2:8-15. 1 Cor. 14 meshes well with 1 Tim. 2; in fact it gives an even stronger prohibition against women speaking in public. Paul uses a much more forceful verb here to instruct women to be silent. The word "shameful" in 14:35 is used frequently to describe grossly immoral actions.

However, as we have already seen, there does seem to be some difficulty in reconciling 1 Cor. 14, where women are commanded not to speak in church, with 1 Cor. 11, where they seem to pray and prophesy, perhaps even in church. We have already presented the two most compelling solutions to this problem. Traditionally, the church has considered 1 Cor. 11:2ff to address gatherings outside of liturgical worship. 1 Cor. 14:33-35, then, require silence of women in worship. All the kinds of speech discussed in chapter 14 – tongues, revelation, interpretation, exhortation, etc.-- may not be performed by women in the assembly. Weeks, as we have seen, gives a more subtle interpretation, though with similar results. He applies 1 Cor. 11 to gathered worship, but claims the passage actually forbids women to pray and prophesy unless they uncover their heads like men – thus, shaming themselves. Weeks says 1 Cor. 11 really teaches the same thing as 1 Cor. 14, namely that women are not to be public speakers in church.

A few other interpretations have been proposed that should be briefly mentioned. It can be quite entertaining to see some commentators grasp for a solution to the apparent tension between 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Cor. 14. Gordon Fee argues 1 Cor. 11 proves Paul believed women could exercise speaking leadership in the church. Then he claims the verses that silence women in 1 Cor. 14 are not genuinely Pauline. Of course, this claim is easily reversible depending on one's preferences: why not remove 1 Cor 11:2-16 from the canon instead, if one so desires? There is no evidence either passage is unauthentic.<sup>101</sup> Calvin says Paul acknowledges women were speaking publicly in 1 Cor. 11, but waits a few chapters before expressing his disapproval of the practice. This seems

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<sup>98</sup> If women are more prone to "be deceived" theologically, it is not because they are intellectually inferior to men, but because they are usually more compassionate than men and therefore, perhaps, more likely to compromise in order to keep the peace. See Kostenberger 140ff, 265-7.

<sup>99</sup> "Because the teacher of the congregation must call for obedience, the office of teacher is not open to a woman according to Paul, as she would otherwise step outside her divinely intended subordination to men. As Schlatter says: 'A woman who taught would give orders to a man, and that Paul does not permit, for she should not rule over men.' If, then, a woman desires the office of teacher or leader, she has, the apostle is convinced, 'deserted God's order and is thereby unfit to bear witness to his will.' 1 Tim. 2:12 shows (just like 1 Cor. 14:33ff) that Paul, exactly like Jesus, entrusted the functions of leadership and direction in the church exclusively to men. 'This involves no downgrading of women, indeed no value judgment at all. It rather defines the areas of their rights and activities in a way which corresponds to the differences in their natural endowments'" Neuer 120. Cf. Hendriksen Comm. 110.

<sup>100</sup> Thus Adam and his wife were prototypical in another way: besides being the first and paradigmatic married couple, they are also the first church – Adam is the first pastor and she is the first congregation.

<sup>101</sup> "The textual evidence for such a view [of the inauthenticity of 1 Cor. 14:33b-35] is nil" Hurley 185.

unlikely, since Paul is not known for holding off on giving his own convictions on important matters. A popular solution posed by Hurley and others is that the silence required in 1 Cor. 14 only pertains to the so-called judging of the prophets. Presumably, women were not allowed to test prophecies because this might involve them in judging their own husband's prophecies. During other parts of the liturgy, however, they were free to speak. But this interpretation seems very strained.<sup>102</sup> Paul has already used the verb "to speak" to refer to numerous kinds of speech in this chapter. Why put a sudden restriction on its scope in verses 33-35? Paul tells women to ask their husbands *at home* and specifically requires women to not speak *in church* (i.e., in the service as a whole, 14:35b). The contrast is not between a portion of the liturgy in which women can speak and a portion in which they cannot, but between the liturgical gathering itself, and the privacy of one's home.<sup>103</sup> Besides, why wouldn't Paul at least allow women to test the prophecies of other women? Finally, if asking a question really means testing a prophet, why are women allowed to test their husband's prophecies at home? Isn't this a challenge to his headship over her, albeit in the privacy of the home? It seems better to say that 1 Cor. 14 deals with rules for speaking in the assembly as a whole.<sup>104</sup>

At this point, we need to deal with a few practical problems posed by this text. I do believe the silence required by Paul in 14:33b-35 is qualified, not absolute. I think Paul is generally forbidding women from addressing the worship assembly as a whole, but not from participating with the rest of the assembly in antiphon (responsive readings, songs, and prayers), congregational singing, the corporate "Amen," etc. (cf. Ex. 15:20-21, Ps. 148:12, Col. 3:16, etc.). It is verbal leadership that is forbidden. Women are to be taught, not teachers, in the church. They are to join in prayer, but not lead in prayer. They should not ask questions in the gathering, but wait till they get home.

Paul says this teaching is rooted in the law (14:34), but oddly does not tell us what passage from the law he has in mind. We see here that for Paul, the coming of Christ did not completely overturn OT teaching on men and women. True, there has been a radical change and elevation in the status of women (Gal. 3:28), but gender distinctions have not

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<sup>102</sup> See O. Palmer Robertson *The Final Word* 99-100.

<sup>103</sup> Paul's distinction here between the worship assembly ("in the churches") and other contexts ("at home") is very important. In liturgical gatherings, unique rules apply because we enter the heavenly sanctuary and the special presence of God. However, the special rules governing special worship are not arbitrary; rather, they are an intensification and specification of patterns that apply to men and women in all of life.

<sup>104</sup> "The fact that in no Christian church was public speaking permitted to women was itself a strong proof that it was unchristian, i.e., contrary to the spirit of Christianity. Paul, however, adds to the prohibition the weight of apostolic authority, and not of that only but also the authority of reason and Scripture. 'It is not permitted to them to speak.' The speaking intended is public speaking, and especially in the church. The rational ground for this prohibition is that it is contrary to the relation of subordination in which the woman stands to the man that she appear as a public teacher. The Scriptural ground is expressed in the words 'as also saith the law,' i.e., the will of God as made known in the OT. The desire for knowledge in women is not to be repressed, and the faculties for its acquisition are not to be denied them. The refinement and delicacy of their sex, however, should be carefully preserved. They may learn all they wish to know without appearing before the public. 'For it is a shame for women to speak in church.' The word used is 'shame,' which properly means 'ugly, deformed.' It is spoken of any thing which excites disgust..." Charles Hodge comm. 1 Cor. 304-5.

been completely erased. Even in the new age, we can go back to the OT to learn about the proper functions of women. Paul may have in mind the OT as a whole, since ‘law’ is sometimes used this way. The OT consistently teaches male headship, so there was no need to single out one or two specific passages. But most likely Paul has in view primarily the early chapters of Gen., since this is where he usually goes to ground his teaching on men and women (and he has already done so a few chapters earlier, in 1 Cor. 11:8-9). As we have already seen in our discussion of 1 Tim. 2, in the beginning, the man was the woman’s teacher.<sup>105</sup> Adam received instruction from God *before* his wife was created. Thus, by necessity, he would have to be her instructor. There are other hints in the law that men act as teachers of their wives. For example, only men were required to be at the three annual feasts in Jerusalem. Women would often not attend because of their frequent uncleanness and because of their domestic duties with small children, etc. No doubt, the men who attended the feasts (which included readings from and expositions of the Scriptures) would teach their families what they learned.

Finally, we should examine 1 Peter 3:1-8, for it reinforces all the conclusions we have drawn to this point. In verses 1-7, Paul emphasizes the submission of the wife. Even in a mixed marriage between an unbelieving husband and a believing wife, the wife is not to be the spiritual leader, but is to take a posture of humble service before her husband, even calling him master as Sarah did Abraham. She is not to become his teacher just because she has embraced the gospel and he has not. Nor is she to try to impress him with mere outward beauty.<sup>106</sup> Rather, she is to win him without a word, simply by her godly conduct.<sup>107</sup>

Peter then turns to Christian husbands and commands them to live with their wives in understanding. Why does Peter need to tell men to be understanding? Because women are more complex than football or car repair. Good husbands are patient students of their wives, learning how to care for them and lead them effectively. Peter reminds husbands that their wives are the weaker vessel in the marital relationship. Wives are weaker not simply in that they are less physically strong or more emotionally sensitive. Yes, the woman is more fragile in these ways. But most especially Peter has in mind the vulnerable position of the woman. After all, in marriage she has promised to submit to her husband, come what may.<sup>108</sup> He is to not take advantage of her obedience. Rather he must remember she is his co-equal in grace and salvation, and therefore worthy of respect, honor, and tender nurture. Peter caps off his instruction by reminding husbands that caring for their wives is essential to having their prayers answered. It’s as though God says to men, “If you don’t listen to the pleas of your wife, I won’t listen to your prayers!”

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. Eph. 5:26, which also implies the husband is the wife’s teacher. A wife must trust God to lead her through her husband (1 Pt. 3:5).

<sup>106</sup> 1 Pt. 3:3f is not a Platonic rejection of outward beauty. Rather Peter is teaching that inner beauty of character is more important and longer lasting.

<sup>107</sup> See Doriani in Kostenberger 243-4.

<sup>108</sup> She is not to follow his lead into sin, but is to obey in every other way (Eph. 5:24).

Our overall impression of the biblical teaching, then, may be summarized in this highly nuanced way: Men and women are equally God’s image bearers in creation and redemption. Thus ontological inferiority and superiority need never enter the discussion. However, God made men and women different, and calls them to roles suited to their genders. These role distinctions find their basis in the inter-trinitarian relationships and the covenant between Christ and his church. The fall means we distort these roles, but in Christ they are restored. Men, in general, exercise headship, which is loving authority and service.<sup>109</sup> In the Bible, leadership always means servanthood, so men are to rule by self-crucifixion, not lording it over their female subjects. This headship does not mean every man is the head of every woman, but it does mean men will generally – and in some cases always – fill leadership roles. The man’s headship is concentrated in the marriage relationship. Thus, a wife is to respectfully submit to her husband in the Lord. God gave her a husband to lead her, protect her, and provide for her. If he does anything else, it is an abuse of headship.<sup>110</sup> He is to treat her as his own body. Her husband is not to stifle her growth, but to provide the secure conditions in which she can be free to truly flourish. In the church, women share *general* priestly privileges with men and share in the same blessings of salvation (Gal. 3:28), but they may not fill the *special* priestly offices of teaching or rule (1 Tim. 2:12).<sup>111</sup> Apostle, pastor, elder, and teacher are offices filled only by men.<sup>112</sup> Women can informally teach and evangelize, but not in such a way as to usurp male leadership.<sup>113</sup> In the trans-epochal apostolic age, women were given the gifts of prophecy and prayer in tongues, but these gifts have ordinarily ceased. Women typically will not be leaders in the church’s liturgy but can certainly participate with the rest of the congregation. Women can serve alongside men as deacons and can teach children and other women regularly. Whatever male headship means, it does not mean that women are useless or restricted from employing their gifts and talents. Rather, it means the gifts and talents God gives them will always be uniquely suited for the roles he

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<sup>109</sup> For further nuances, see Wilson *Federal Husband* 61ff.

<sup>110</sup> So, for example, if he fails to provide for her physical needs, he is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8).

<sup>111</sup> Consider T. F. Torrance (*The Royal Priesthood*, 81) on the distinction between the general and special (or royal and servant, as he calls it) priesthoods: “In the Old Testament Church there was a twofold priesthood, the priesthood of the whole body through initiation by circumcision into the royal priesthood, although that priesthood actually functioned through the first-born. Within that royal priesthood there was given to Israel an institutional priesthood in the tribe of Levi, and within that tribe, the house of Aaron. The purpose of the institutional priesthood was to serve the royal priesthood, and the purpose of the royal priesthood, that is of Israel as a kingdom of priests, was to serve God’s saving purpose for all nations. So with the Christian Church. The real priesthood is that of the whole Body, but within that Body there takes place a membering of the corporate priesthood, for the edification of the whole Body, to serve the whole Body, in order that the whole Body as Christ’s own Body may fulfill His ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the Gospel among the nations. Within the corporate priesthood of the whole Body, then, there is a particular priesthood set apart to minister to the edification of the Body until the Body reaches the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Thus in the time of the ascension, in the eschatological reserve between the beginning of the Christian Church at Pentecost and what the Apocalypse calls ‘the Marriage-supper of the Lamb’ (Rev. 19:9; cf. 20:1f; 22:17) the Church is served by a ministry in Word in Sacrament. This ministry is as essential to the Church as Bible and sacramental ordinances, but like them, this order of the Ministry will pass way at the parousia, when the real priesthood of the one Body, as distinct form the institutional priesthood, will be fully revealed.” Cf. *Rite Reasons* #41 p. 4.

<sup>112</sup> See the extended argument by Neuer 172ff.

<sup>113</sup> 1 Pt. 3:1-7 is the classic example of how to evangelize without usurping headship.



calls them to perform. In church, home, and society women should be encouraged to use their gifts to the fullest extent, to the glory of God, in accordance with his Word. Women can do almost everything men can do, though in many cases they do these things much less regularly or in a different form.<sup>114</sup> The woman has been given a special role by God – different from the man’s role in many respects – but nevertheless, a role full of glory and honor.<sup>115</sup>

### **Feminist Hermeneutics**

Feminists have two basic interpretive strategies they employ in seeking to overturn the historic reading of Scripture. The first is rather predictable. Feminists argue that the Bible’s patriarchal bias is the result of its cultural milieu. While Paul came to a great insight about the equality of men and women in Christ (Gal. 3:28), he couldn’t quite break free of his patriarchal cultural conditioning, and thus puts limits on what women can do in the church. Gal. 3:28 represents Paul’s great breakthrough in his understanding of gender, but in passages like 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Tim. 2, Paul had a failure of nerve.

Feminists who argue that the Bible’s teaching on men and women is culturally conditioned need to take another look. If anything, it’s the feminists, not Moses, Paul, or Jesus, who are the products of their culture. In the NT, we find Paul and Jesus upsetting cultural convention all the time. They are fearless in going against the grain of surrounding society.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, when Paul gives us his rationale for limiting the role

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<sup>114</sup> Here’s where we must be ever so careful to nuance our position. For example, women, like men, may teach, but their teaching is especially for other women (Titus 2:3-4 ). Women, like men, may rule, but their rule is focused in their homes (1 Tim. 5:14, “manage the house”) and is under their husband’s overarching authority (Eph. 5:22ff). We cannot absolutely prohibit women from civil rule, as the case of Deborah proves, but women rulers will be far less common in a Christian civilization than male rulers (Isa. 3:12). A woman married to a wealthy, prominent man would exercise influence on him and therefore indirectly rule over the men under her husband’s authority. She would possess a more direct form of authority over any slaves they might have and in this sense would ‘rule’ over a man. There is no biblical objection, per se, to women serving as managers or executives in the business world, though we should never expect (or desire) that to be the norm. And on and on we could go with these kinds of qualifiers. Women may have all the same gifts and talents as men but exercise those gifts and talents in a different context and in a different fashion.

<sup>115</sup> For an excellent and brief summary of the biblical teaching, see Neuer 180-182.

<sup>116</sup> For example, many ancient pagan religions had priestesses. One can imagine some of Paul’s converts desiring to bring this feature of their old religion with them into the church. But Paul withstood this pressure. Similarly, many ancient religions had goddesses. But the biblical writers never refer to God as ‘Mother’ or with any other female name. Michael Novak, a Roman Catholic scholar, takes up this culture-shock argument as well, and shows why the church must not cave in to its fallacious reasoning: “Again, one hears that Jesus chose only men as His Apostles in order not to shock the people of his time. Since He did not hesitate to shock them in many other matters-calling the bread of the last supper His body, for example - this explanation sounds more bourgeois than biblical. *Jesus never shrank from shocking the conventional wisdom, priestly classes, customs, traditions, or even common sense of His time.* If today it shocks our own generation of ‘enlightened’ Westerners that Jesus did *not* choose women to become priests, why would He have been afraid to shock *His* generation by choosing women priests? Nonetheless, a former U.S. Congressman, a wise leader and devout Catholic, said to me as he listened to my views, ‘Even if you are correct, what you say will not be credible. In a day when women fill every position held formerly by men, no one will accept the claim that women can’t be priests. It’s just not credible.’ The heart of the matter, then,

of women, it is always rooted in something culturally transcendent, such as the creation account (1 Tim. 2), the Trinity (1 Cor. 11), or the gospel itself (Eph. 5:21ff).<sup>117</sup> Unless we are willing to dismiss the whole Bible as the work of mere fallible men, we must accept its teaching on men and women as binding in all times and places.

Jesus and Paul did indeed give women a much higher place than the surrounding culture.<sup>118</sup> Jesus, unlike the rabbis of his day, spoke with women (Jn. 4), protected women (Jn. 7-8), and even included them in his teaching (Luke 10). Jesus performed miracles for women (e.g., Mt. 15) and made them the first witnesses to his resurrection – surprisingly so, because a woman’s testimony would not have had standing in a court of law in that day. Jesus redefined what it meant for a woman to be blessed (Lk. 11:27ff): Now that the promised seed had come, women would no longer find their greatest blessing in faithful childrearing, but in keeping the word of God (though of course these things usually go together for women).<sup>119</sup>

Paul continued to work out this revolutionary teaching on women.<sup>120</sup> The feminists are right to point to Gal. 3:28 as the key text: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is neither male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” But have feminists properly understood this verse? Paul’s universe of discourse in Gal. 3-4 has nothing to do with the specific roles of men and women in family, church, and society. He is dealing with membership in the new covenant, in the worldwide family promised to Abraham. In baptism (3:27), the polarities of the old world are washed away.<sup>121</sup> In God’s new creation,<sup>122</sup> one’s race, gender, and social status are completely

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is that the ‘advanced’ culture of our age thinks of itself as normative. The pressure of today’s culture is immense, since many persons do not wish to sit still for theological argument. *Nonetheless, the only serious question concerns fundamental theology, not the pressures of contemporary culture.* Those who really believe that the Catholic tradition is not credible will find many available alternatives close at hand. If the Catholic Church abandons its tradition because of social pressure, and without sound theological reasons, why should it be credible at all? *Would it not then simply show itself to be yet another human institution subject to human power and passively conforming to the spirit of the age?*” *First Things* April ’93, emphasis added.

<sup>117</sup> See Neuer 141-146 for an excellent discussion.

<sup>118</sup> To be fair to the ancients, we must acknowledge that women were not always relegated to second class citizens. See Weeks 147.

<sup>119</sup> For a summary of Jesus’ treatment of women, see Hurley 110ff.

<sup>120</sup> Paul’s teaching was indeed revolutionary. It was hardly cultural in Paul’s day tell to tell men to live lives of self-sacrifice for their wives (Eph. 5:22ff)! There is simply no way that Paul was trapped in his culture the way feminists imagine.

<sup>121</sup> See Neuer 101, 107ff for excellent insights into Gal. 3:28. It is critical to understand the system of graded holiness that existed in old covenant Israel “under the law” and had its parallel in ancient Greco-Roman civilization under the “elementary principles.” In Israel, priests were distinguished from lay Israelites by ordination (Lev. 8) and lay Israelites from Gentiles by circumcision (Gen. 17). Where you stood on this graded continuum determined how near you could draw to God in the tabernacle/temple, what food you could eat from his table, etc. In the antique pagan order, society was rigorously divided into citizens and outsiders, or patricians and plebs. These divisions, of course, were deeply religious, or priestly, in character. In Christ, the people of God are reconfigured, a new social order is created, and priestly privileges redistributed. Now all the baptized – Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free -- serve as priests inside the veil of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 10:19-22). Leithart explains: “The formal similarities

irrelevant as far as the blessings of salvation are concerned. We all wear the same priestly clothing – Christ Jesus – and in him we are all one. We all have the same Spirit (Gal. 4:6) and the same inheritance (Gal. 4:7).<sup>123</sup> However, it is indisputable from the rest of Paul’s writings that distinctions built into the creation (such as gender) do continue to have relevance to *some* aspects of life, including some aspects of church life.<sup>124</sup> Leithart explains Paul’s point in Gal. 3:28: “The specific issues at stake in Galatians revolve around Israel’s priestly standing...Judaizers [such as those Paul is attacking in the letter to the Galatians] who enforced food laws and required circumcision were implicitly claiming that Jews continued to have a standing that Gentiles did not have. This helps us to specify the sense in which the dualisms of Gal. 3:28 are dissolved in baptism. He

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between the antique order of Greece and Israel are striking. Both were internally structured by the distinction between priest and non-priest. In the Greek city, the citizens exercised ‘priestly’ functions and enjoyed priestly privileges, while non-citizens were excluded. Originally (and always mythically) citizenship was inherited from founding clans. Within Israel, the Aaronic priests alone served in the house of Yahweh and only the circumcised participated fully in the community and its worship. In both Israel and Greece, the gradations of priesthood extended to encompass the entire political world: Greek/barbarian echoes Jew/Gentile. In both, the divisions within the community were displayed in access to or exclusion from sacred places and holy food...It was...the rise of Christianity that finally destroyed the hereditary principle of priesthood and with it the graded holiness of the antique order. Medieval cities were, Weber argues, still ‘cultic,’ but clan ties no longer dominated the social order...Remarkably, for Weber, it was Paul who first challenged the ancient city and pointed the way to the medieval when, in the event of Gal. 2, he insisted that Peter return to table fellowship with Gentiles. Paul grounded his reformation of table fellowship in the priestly investiture of baptism. Baptism of the Greek city reconstructed its foundations, rearranged the seating at the civic table, and remodeled its social order. So we return to Paul, and Gal. 3:27. For Gentile converts to submit to Jewish regulations of holiness would be to revert to a variation of the same old dualistic system ‘under the elementary principles.’ In baptism, the Galatians have become citizens of a new *polis* where the ‘one seed’ of Jew and Greek share the Abrahamic blessing, where none are forced outside the city walls, where the marginal are welcomed to the *agora* and its joyful assembly...According to Paul, Christ has fulfilled the Abrahamic promise of the Spirit to the ‘one seed,’ and the Spirit wars against the enmities, strife, jealousy, disputes, dissensions, factions, envy of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). Given the use of ‘the flesh’ elsewhere in Galatians, it seems Paul considers life both ‘under the law’ and ‘under the elementary principles’ as ‘fleshly’ forms of existence that promote rivalry and dissension (3:3, 6:12). Our discussion suggests that the priest/non-priest dichotomy is one feature of both forms of the fleshly organization of life, and that the Spirit opposes the flesh by removing the veil that established this dualism. That is, the Spirit’s work condenses into enduring institutional structures that inhibit the flourishing of fleshly life. As the hovering Spirit formed the divisions of the original creation, so the Spirit of Pentecost destroys religious and cultural boundaries, draws new lines, and makes the world new. Against this background, baptismal induction to priesthood is one of the Spirit’s weapons to destroy vanity, enmities, and factions” (*Priesthood of the Plebs* 176ff). For our purposes, this means that where the Spirit is at work, the hostility (cf. Gen. 3:16) between man and woman should be overcome. It does not mean that the Spirit neuters us, but enables us to function as man and woman in community as God intended. Baptized men and women are both members of the same royal priesthood with access to the same holy space and holy food (Heb. 10:19ff, 12:22ff, 13:10)

<sup>122</sup> Note that Gal. 6:15 sets the new creation not simply over against circumcision, but against the whole circumcision/uncircumcision polarity. It’s not simply circumcision that has been done away with; a whole new world order has been born.

<sup>123</sup> We must be careful to not reduce these blessings that are poured out equally upon all believers to merely ‘spiritual’ blessings in a Platonic or Gnostic sense. See *Common Practice* 1:5 p. 1ff.

<sup>124</sup> Interestingly, 1 Pt. 3:7 makes both of these points. Peter combines the truth of Gal. 3:28 (that women are co-heirs with men in Christ) with the truth of passages such as 1 Cor. 11, 14 and 1 Tim. 2 (that women are weaker, i.e., they are different than men and in a submissive role). Peter blends in one verse two ideas that the feminists find absolutely contradictory.

certainly did not believe ‘there is neither male nor female’ *tout court* (cf. 1 Tim. 2:12-15), he assumed that slavery would continue (Eph. 6:5-9), and Donaldson persuasively argues that even the Jew/Gentile distinction remained relevant for Paul’s mission. At the center of the gospel, however, is the declaration that there is no more Jew/Gentile (or male/female, slave/free) *with respect to* access to God, standing in his house as sons, seating at his table, or inheritance of Abrahamic righteousness and the Spirit. Hence, Paul wraps Jew and Greek in common *priestly* robes. Since the distinction of priestly Jew and non-priestly Gentile forms a fundamental coordinate of antique religious topography, Paul’s gospel of the ‘one’ seed, symbolized and enacted in baptism, announces the beginning of a new creation. Here, again, baptism is the ‘washing of regeneration’ [Tit. 3:5].”<sup>125</sup> The fact that in the new order females receive the covenant

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<sup>125</sup> *Priesthood Plebs* 171-2, emphasis added. See also Hurley 126ff. Hurley concludes that the point of Gal. 3:28 is to give us “the apostolic equivalent of Jesus’ welcoming of the outcasts and the Samaritans, and the Canaanite women. The gospel is for all persons.” But this does not mean all positions of leadership are open to all persons! After all, Jesus welcomed women into his ministry but did not include them in the apostolate. Calvin gives a similar exposition: “If anyone asks why he [Paul] distinguishes here between male and female, when it says in other passages such a distinction is not to be made: *the answer is, that regarding our eternal salvation it is true that one must not distinguish between man and woman, or between king and shepherd, or between German and Frenchman. Regarding policy however, we have what St. Paul declared here [in 1 Cor. 11:11-16]; for our Lord Jesus did not come to mix up nature, or to abolish what belongs to the preservation of decency and peace among us. Therefore let us note both things carefully [i.e., equality and hierarchical order].* So, as to being children of God, and being governed by his Holy Spirit, and partakers of the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, as to calling upon God, being baptized and coming to the Supper, one must not make a difference between male and female, between a prince and a poor working man, as we said. For the brother whom the world despises must glory because God has exalted him and united him with the greatest and most excellent people in the world. The one who is noble must humble himself, because God has been pleased to associate him with such as were contemptible and had no stateliness. Since this is the way it is, *we must know that regarding our salvation, and regarding the Kingdom of God (which is spiritual), there is no distinction or difference between man and woman, servant and master, poor and rich, great and small. Nevertheless, there does have to be some order among us, and Jesus Christ did not mean to eliminate, it as some flighty and scatterbrained dreamers have taken this passage we cited [Gal. 3:28], and have dragged the Holy Scriptures by the hair (as the saying goes)...*” *Men, Women, and Order in the Church* 19-20, emphasis added. Compare also Donald McLeod (*The Place of Women*, 7): “Women no less than men, have access to God through Jesus Christ. They share in the full privileges of justification, sanctification, adoption. They may have the same assurance of God’s love, the same peace of conscience, the same joy in the Holy Spirit. Equally, certainly, they may serve. Indeed, they must serve. They have their own ministry...the spontaneous and natural result of salvation. They are caught up, equally with men, in the work of redemption, in the sequence of election, salvation, and service. In response to divine mercy, they must present themselves as living and holy sacrifices to God.” McLeod goes on to argue women are not to fill authoritative ecclesiastical offices. One more witness, Herman Ridderbos (*Paul* 460-1), writes: “The position the woman occupies in the upbuilding and equipment of the church constitutes a separate question...Generally Paul’s pronouncements on the place of women in the church exhibit the same two viewpoints we have already been able to observe in his precepts for marriage: on the one hand the woman shares fully in the salvation given in Christ, and there is complete equality between man and woman in that respect, just as between Jew and Greek, master and slave, etc. (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; cf. 1 Cor. 11:11, 12); on the other hand, fellowship in Christ does not remove the natural distinction between man and woman. Considering the place women occupied in Paul’s day, both in antiquity in general and in Judaism in particular, the first point of view certainly meant nothing less than a revolution for the position of women in the church as well. This equality of man and woman in Christ emerges in a great many ways in his epistles...On the other hand, Paul imposes certain restrictions on women, particularly so far as their behavior in the meeting of the church is concerned....”

sign of baptism along with males points to their status as co-priests in Christ's church. It does not follow from this that gender now becomes irrelevant to other functions in the church.<sup>126</sup> The feminist case is a *non sequitur*.<sup>127</sup>

The second interpretive strategy is more sophisticated, and even very useful, though I would contend feminists themselves misuse it. We may call it the 'trajectory hermeneutic' or 'narrative hermeneutic.' N. T. Wright is probably the best-known proponent of this model of biblical authority. Wright suggests the Bible as a whole is narrative – it is the story of creation, fall, and redemption, of Adam, Israel, and Jesus. But how can a story be authoritative? How can a story generate an ethic?<sup>128</sup> Wright asks us to consider the Bible in analogy to an unfinished five act Shakespeare play in which the first four acts have been preserved, but the fifth act has been lost.<sup>129</sup> "The first four acts provide, let us suppose, such a wealth of characterization, such a crescendo of excitement within the plot, that it is generally agreed that the play ought to be staged. Nevertheless, it is felt inappropriate actually to write a fifth act once and for all; it would freeze the play into one form... Better, it might be felt, to give the key parts to highly trained, sensitive and experienced Shakespearian actors, who would immerse themselves

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<sup>126</sup> Luther pushed the equality of all priests in the church to an extreme, yet still maintained only men should be ordained to the ministry for reasons of propriety and order. See Paul Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* 106f.

<sup>127</sup> Feminists sometimes speak as though the church ignored Gal. 3:28 till recently. This is not true. Christianity has effected great cultural change over the past two millennia, though without destroying sexual differentiation. Christianity greatly ennobled gender relations, but is gravely threatened by egalitarianism: "The widely accepted notion today that any position of responsibility or field of action open to males is also by right and justice to be open to females might at first seem highly plausible [in our day]. And yet such a notion ultimately rests on rejecting the transvaluation effected by the Christian faith [in the past].... For it was Christian faith that first taught the male warrior a code of courtesy, compassion, and charity, whose first expression was Christian chivalry, whose later expression was the ideal of the Christian gentleman, and whose underlying ideal has been the equality of women and men in baptism, in faith, and in the promises of God. The Christian ideal of equality before God not only did not erase sexual differentiation, but, on the contrary, rested upon that reality as its foundation. Before God, there is neither male nor female, yet male and female for His inscrutable and unchangeable purposes He made them. And through this separation of the sexes He parted the veils of mystery that necessarily mask His essence, in order to offer us such insight into His inner life as He thought would best serve us: that we should pray to Him as 'Our Father,' and receive His Son into our mouths and hearts and minds, and worship Him as 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,' three-in-one. Made in His image as we are, it is through our complementarity as male and female that we piece together such fragments of His reality as we are vouchsafed to come to know. Christian marriage itself, mirrored in the liturgical worship of His people, gives witness to the intimate and profound role of sexual differentiation in our knowledge of, and union with, God. A male and a female, united through the sacrament of marriage with the Triune God, embody a human communion of persons mirroring the divine. One cannot, in short, yank the thread of sexual differentiation from the Christian faith without unraveling the whole. A weakening of the integrity of the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Church, Christian marriage and family life, and much else besides, must inevitably follow" Michael Novak *First Things* April '93.

<sup>128</sup> Many conservatives argue – foolishly in my opinion -- that narrative portions of the Bible cannot be used to establish ethics (or theology). But this is patently false. Most of the Bible is narrative, and the parts that aren't (such as the Pauline epistles) are grounded in narrative. The rejection of narrative-based theology and ethics is rooted in the Enlightenment's futile quest for timeless, abstract truth.

<sup>129</sup> Or we could take the analogy of an unfinished Beethoven symphony.

in the first four acts, and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, *and who would then be told to work out a fifth act for themselves.*"<sup>130</sup>

This model need not undermine the sufficiency of Scripture we Reformed folk are so concerned to protect.<sup>131</sup> After all, the first four acts continue to function as an authority for the development of the fifth act. Everything the actors did would need to be consistent with the earlier parts of the play. The question is, In light of acts one through four, where is this story supposed to go? If we follow out its trajectory, where will it take us? This narrative hermeneutic releases us from thinking we must recreate ancient culture or slavishly copy every detail of life from Biblical times. This would be impossible anyway, since history is always moving forward and our society is vastly different from theirs. This interpretive model means biblical application is a kind of Spirit-led 'improvisation,' as we seek to be faithful to the Bible's story line while living it out in ever new and changing circumstances. This hermeneutic is simply the outworking of biblical theology, paying close attention to the Bible's own developing plot threads.

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<sup>130</sup> "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 18.

<sup>131</sup> I would argue, in fact, that Calvin's most mature statements regarding covenant theology point towards some kind of narrative hermeneutic. See especially Calvin's development of Gal. 3:23ff in *ICR* II.11.13: "God ought not to be considered changeable merely because he accommodated diverse forms to different ages, as he knew would be expedient for each...[I]f a householder instructs, rules, and guides his children one way in infancy, another way in youth, and still another in young manhood, we shall not on this account call him fickle and say that he abandons his purpose. Why, then, do we brand God with the mark of inconstancy because he has with apt and fitting marks distinguished a diversity of times? The latter comparison ought to satisfy us fully. Paul likens the Jews to children, Christians to young men (Gal. 4:1ff). What was irregular about the fact that God confined them to rudimentary teaching commensurate with their age, but has trained us through a firmer and, so to speak, more manly discipline?...[Through the course of redemptive history, he] has accommodated himself to men's capacity, which is varied and changeable." See also II.11.2, 5 and Comm. on Gal. 3:23ff. Calvin's biographical illustration is analogous to Wright's unfinished play illustration. Paul likens Israel to a child, and the church (the new, mature Israel) to a full-grown man. God governed his people one way in their infancy and youth, another way in their adulthood. The old covenant was the covenant of childhood; the new is that of maturity. Just as a parent will alter his way of raising his child, appropriate with the child's maturing nature, so did God with his chosen people. Or, to put it another way, the relationship of old covenant Israel to the new covenant church is like the relationship of who you are now as an adult to who you were when you were 12 years old. Are you the same person? Yes and no. Everything about you that is the same is still somehow different -- it's matured. Everything about you that is different is somehow rooted in who you were then. It's an organic, transformative relationship, and not simply a matter of continuity/discontinuity. *ICR* II.11.13 is brilliant because it encapsulates a Christian philosophy of history. History is linear and progressive. History is going somewhere; it's dynamic, not static. And what is the goal of history? God is maturing his daughter, humanity, into a bride for his Son. This, then, is the key to a narrative hermeneutic. The Old Covenant is relevant to New Covenant believers the same way the lessons we all learned in kindergarten continue to be relevant throughout life. No, we are not under the authority of our kindergarten teacher any longer (i.e., the tutorship of the Mosaic law), but that is because we have (hopefully) internalized the principles we were taught back then (i.e., the law is now written on the heart). A narrative hermeneutic, therefore, will seek to translate Old Covenant teachings into New Covenant categories. The entire law is instructive for us (even the 'abrogated' parts, such as the liturgical, ceremonial, and penal portions), though the law must be interpreted through the grid of Christ's finished work. God has not given detailed instructions to New Covenant believers in every area of life. But since we are adults now, we should be able to reflect on things God taught us earlier in history and make proper, mature application. I would suggest that those who want to ordain women to positions of church leadership have forgotten some of the basic lessons taught to the church in our 'kindergarten class.'

Egalitarians are attracted to this paradigm of biblical authority because it seems to grant them liberty to break free from the Bible's 'time bound' or 'culture bound' restraints on women. Egalitarians simply claim the *trend* in the Bible's unfolding plot is towards liberation and equality and, therefore, while Paul's limitations on the roles of women may have still been appropriate for the first scene of act of five, they are now passing away. But is this really a good 'improvisation'? I think not. The egalitarians have overlooked something critical: The story at every point along the way has had two kinds of characters, male and female. Only if the egalitarian mistakenly assumes that male headship is part of the curse, rather than the original design for creation, does his conclusion follow. The trend in the Bible *is* one of increasing liberation – but it's the liberty to be what we were originally created to be, not the liberty to overturn God's design for the creation.<sup>132</sup> In other words, the trajectory of the Bible is not the destruction of creation structures, but their fulfillment. Even in the resurrection state, when there will be no marriage, we will still be masculine and feminine creatures.<sup>133</sup> Only by misreading the earlier acts of the play can we make the biblical narrative take an egalitarian turn. If one starts with the assumption that God intended male headship from the start, one can accept the insights of the trajectory/narrative hermeneutic, but arrive at a different destination. This is the track I think we should follow.

We conclude that the feminists have selected the right text on which to do battle (Gal. 3:28), but have wrongly interpreted that text. Gal. 3:28 is a glorious truth – it has been called the Magna Carta of humanity. But the feminists force it to bear a load it was not designed to carry, and thus it collapses under the weight of their bad presuppositions. Gal. 3:28 cannot be used to overturn the basic, explicit biblical teaching about the roles of men and women; in fact, properly interpreted, it harmonizes beautifully with everything else the Bible says to these issues.<sup>134</sup>

### **The Metaphysics of Gender: Differing Roles, Differing Souls**

Do the differing roles that God assigns to men and women reflect differing masculine and feminine natures? Or are men and women essentially the same under the skin, so that roles are basically arbitrary? Dan Doriani helps us distinguish these two positions: "To speak in archetypes, there are Thomist and Scotist views of order. The Thomist says God's order must and does have a reason, and readily propounds natural and theological

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<sup>132</sup> Thus, liberation in Christ for a woman is not freedom from a man's headship, but freedom to serve and grow under his headship.

<sup>133</sup> The fact that Jesus was raised with a masculine body, not a neutered body, proves this. Gender is so basic to one's identity that a true resurrection must be gender specific. See Foh 179ff. Neuer (122, 91) says, "Jesus and Paul agree that creation and redemption do not conflict with each other; rather they constitute an inseparable unity since both nature and grace are the work of God. For this reason Jesus and Paul do not abrogate the created order of the sexes in the kingdom of God, or the church, but expressly acknowledge it...Against the assumption that after the resurrection human sexuality is completely put aside it may be objected that the redeemed retain their identity in their resurrected state...the dual sexuality of mankind continues into God's eternal realm."

<sup>134</sup> Feminist abuse of Gal. 3:28 is nothing new. See Mitchell 21.

reasons why women may not teach and exercise authority in the church. The Scotist says we know God's will, but cannot explain it, for God orders the world as he wills, whether with, against, or beyond reason. The Thomist expects and examines a coherence between natural and divine law; the Scotist does not."<sup>135</sup> These two positions represent deep differences in worldview.<sup>136</sup> Traditionally, the church has rooted complementary roles of men and women in a Thomistic understanding of nature.<sup>137</sup> But modern complementarians have generally taken a Scotist view. For example, Foh rejects the Thomistic view as an unfair stereotyping. She says the differences found between men and women might not be innate, but the result of socialization. Thus, the *only* differences between men and women are functional, not metaphysical.<sup>138</sup> Contrast this with Mitchell: "The problem with [modern] complementarity, judged by ancient standards, is that it does not express key aspects of the relationship between the man and the woman that feminists are keen to deny...Indeed, for many proponents of complementarity, the concept means little more than blue for boys and pink for girls, even while boys and girls muscle each other on the basketball court and soccer field. The difference of gender becomes a matter of mere style, rather than an order of being."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> 218. Dorinai uses two medieval philosophers, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, to represent the poles. See my thesis paper "The Logic of Faith" for more on a Thomistic view of nature/order/congruence (though in this case, taught by Anselm). See Doriani 230ff for the actual views of Thomas and Scotus.

<sup>136</sup> The deep differences are seen in how the two positions would handle the so-called Euthyphro dilemma. Plato's dialogue forces the question upon us: Is God's creation order right because it is fitting and appropriate according to some ideal forms that exist outside of God himself? Or is God's creation order right merely because God, the highest authority, declared it to be so? The Thomist must be careful to not posit reasons that are more ultimate than God himself, while the Scotist must somehow show that God is not whimsical or arbitrary. The best solution is a truly theistic Thomism: God has his reasons; he is not irrational or capricious. But those reasons are not external to his own being. The 'nature of things' is ultimately rooted in God's own nature. This seems to be included in the *imago Dei* of Gen. 1:26ff. Again, see my paper "The Logic of Faith" for a fuller explanation of the relationship between God's nature and the order of creation.

<sup>137</sup> The church fathers, Luther, Calvin, Hodge, Schlatter, etc. Modern examples include Neuer, Mitchell, and Doriani. Piper chapter 1 attempts to define masculinity and femininity, but does so primarily in terms of roles, not natures. Piper's discussion is valuable, but incomplete for this reason. See Doriani 260-1 for a brief evaluation. Also worth examining on the nature of masculinity is Leon Podles *The Church Impotent* ch. 3. Podles shows gender is a matter of relating to others and the world in particular ways, as much as anything else. Or to take another perspective that Podles hints at, a masculine person is one whose life story develops in a particular way. The masculine and feminine stories take differing trajectories; their life narratives have differing shapes. For example, he says, "The masculine is a pattern of initial union, separation, and reunion" (45). The feminine pattern (in my reconstruction) is one of reception, adaptation, and communion (84f).

<sup>138</sup> Hurley is another modern day Scotist complementarian. See Doriani 259.

<sup>139</sup> 148f. See also Doriani 256ff on present day Scotism.



Who is right, the Thomists or Scotists? It seems the great majority<sup>140</sup> of the historic church has correctly embraced some variety of Thomism.<sup>141</sup> Otherwise, we are forced to conclude the roles God has ordained are arbitrary or even irrational. Clearly, all the scientific, psychological, and sociological data is on the Thomist side. Neuer gives numerous examples demonstrating the physical, intellectual, and emotional differences of men and women.<sup>142</sup> In fact, there is so much data pointing to deep, innate differences between the sexes, we will not even begin to try to catalog it here.

This empirical data meshes well with the biblical picture.<sup>143</sup> According to Scriptural teaching, a human being is a unified whole, an integrated unity. Thus, sexuality cannot be merely peripheral, a matter of just the body. We must utterly reject the idea of an androgynous soul in a gendered body. Neuer explains: “A person is a total unity of body and soul which cannot be split into a sexual corpse and a sexless psyche. The indivisible unity of the inner and outer life, of body and soul, is a fact which is daily experienced, is demonstrated by science, and is borne witness to by the Bible. Body and soul stand in very close relationship to each other and mutually influence each other. Since soul and body form an inseparable unity, being male or female characterizes the whole person and

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<sup>140</sup> See Mitchell 13, 140ff, on the early church, which rooted the division of labor in the distinctive natures of each sex. I know of no pre-modern Christian interpreters who were Scotists. Even Scotus himself was something of a Thomist in the end! See Doriani 232-3. I also know of virtually no non-Christian Scotists from the pre-modern period either. Plato’s *Republic*, assuming a straight-forward reading, probably comes the closest (Mitchell, 143). Virtually everyone acknowledged the deep, innate differences between the sexes until quite recently. Scotist egalitarianism seems to be a genuine novelty. For slight Scotist tendencies in Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine (due to their mild Platonism, no doubt), see Mitchell 31.

<sup>141</sup> Robert Louis Dabney is fairly representative of the dominant Thomist point of view: “In order to ground human society, God saw it necessary to fashion for man’s mate, not his exact image, but his counterpart. Identity would have utterly marred their companionship, and would have been an equal curse to both. But out of this unlikeness in resemblance it must obviously follow that each is fitted for works and duties unsuitable for the other. And it is no degradation to the woman that the man can best do some things which she cannot do well, than to the man that the woman has natural superiority in other things...” (*Discussions* II, 111). Consider also the words of C. Hodge: “But although the obedience of the wife to her husband is of the nature of a religious duty, because determined by religious motives, it has, in common with all other commands of God, a foundation in nature... The ground of the obligation [to submit], therefore as it exists in nature, is the eminency of the husband; his superiority in those attributes which enable and entitle him to command. He is larger, stronger, bolder – has more of those mental capabilities which are required in a leader. This is just as plain from history as that iron is heavier than water... The superiority of the man, in the respects mentioned, thus taught in Scripture, founded in nature, and proved by all experience, cannot be denied or disregarded without destroying society and degrading both men and women, making one effeminate and the other masculine” (*Ephesians* 228). See also Doriani 255f. I think Doriani miscategorizes Hodge. It should be noted, the Thomist position does not mean the masculine virtues are actually better than the feminine virtues, only different and better suited for leadership. On Calvin’s Thomism, see Doriani 239ff. On the Puritans, see 243ff. On nineteenth century Reformed thought, see 253ff.

<sup>142</sup> See 26, chapter 4. See also Piper chapters 16-18 (ch. 16 is especially good on the nature-nurture debate) and Carolyn Graglia *Domestic Tranquility* 173f, 202, 242. Obviously, these are generalizations (of the sort “men are taller than women”). On so-called crosstypes, see William Mouser.

<sup>143</sup> Of course, as Neuer (56, 147) himself recognizes, the final authority for the Christian is not scientific study but the Bible. However, a Thomist expects congruence between Scripture properly interpreted and nature properly interpreted. As we take in more and more data from the world, we are able to widen our circle of reasoning and avoid an unpersuasive biblicism. Cf. John Frame *Apologetics to the Glory of God*.

not only his or her body...A person only exists as a man or as a woman. A person does not just have a male or female body, he is a man or she is a woman. Sex is not just one personal characteristic, but a mode of being which determines one's whole life."<sup>144</sup> Other scholars agree: "Our sexuality penetrates to the deepest metaphysical ground of our personality" and "conditions every facet of one's being."<sup>145</sup> Thus, the roles God has ordained for men and women to fill are intrinsic, not extrinsic, to their natures.<sup>146</sup> The roles are suited to their differing personal qualities. A man's psychology and physiology match his God given function. A woman's psychology and physiology are congruent with the calling God has assigned her. Role and nature, function and design, are correlative.<sup>147</sup>

This is a real challenge to feminism, especially in its more extreme forms. For example, Simone de Beauvoir, a leader in the twentieth century feminist movement and long time associate of Jean-Paul Sartre contested every naturally given difference between male and female, claiming these differences were the result of social conditioning intended to subjugate women.<sup>148</sup> In 1970, Kate Millet claimed "the sexes are in everything alike." Germain Greer declared, "the 'normal' sex roles that we learn to play from infancy are no more natural than the antics of the transvestite."<sup>149</sup> But clearly, those who want to be faithful to Scripture cannot agree. Biblically, the differences between men and women are not merely social constructs. This is not to say socialization makes no contribution to the precise shape masculinity and femininity take in a given culture. But human culture is never autonomous; it can never escape the way God made the world. In humanity's various forms of life, our social constructs are always hemmed in and impinged upon by the nature of things as designed by God. There are always certain divine 'givens' that provide the raw material for human culture but also put certain constraints on the possible variety of human culture.<sup>150</sup> Thus, "Every known society, past or present, assigns to the men a primary responsibility for the government of the larger groupings within society, and assigns to women a primary responsibility for the daily maintenance of the household unity and the care of younger children."<sup>151</sup> We simply cannot redesign the creation

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<sup>144</sup> 26-7.

<sup>145</sup> Quotations from Emil Brunner and Paul Jewett, cited in Piper 34. See also *Radical Orthodoxy* 151f: "The male body is male throughout, right down to each cell of which it consists, and the female body is utterly female; this is also true of their whole empirical experience and ego-consciousness..."

<sup>146</sup> Or, to state this same truth in a different way, being a man or woman is not simply a matter of playing certain roles; rather a person *is* a man or a woman, and that sexual nature determines one's role.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. 1 Pt. 3:7 and all those places in Scripture where men and women are given differing commands. Why did Paul have to tell women, and not men, to dress modestly? Why does he tell husbands to love their wives and wives to respect their husbands? These kinds of gender specific instructions presuppose, it seems to me, differing strengths and weaknesses, differing interests and needs, in men and women. For a fascinating quasi-Thomistic look at the differences between men and women in various cultures, see Vlahos "Generic Male, Endangered Gender" *First Things* Feb. '93.

<sup>148</sup> Neuer 16.

<sup>149</sup> Quoted in William Mouser.

<sup>150</sup> For more thoughts along these lines, concerning the intermeshing of creation and culture, see my article "The Nature of Convention," *Princeton Theological Review*, forthcoming.

<sup>151</sup> Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ*, quoted in Mouser. Piper 282 agrees: "Anthropologists find similar kinds of universal sex-specific behaviors in virtually all human cultures. Of 250 cultures studied, males dominate in almost all. Males are almost always the rule makers, hunters, builders,

according to our own ideologies. Feminists insist on going against the grain of creation, and so they are bound to get splinters.<sup>152</sup>

Neuer gives an excellent summary of the Thomistic view: “The Bible sees the man as the head of the woman. This corresponds to empirically determined characteristics of the male, his greater drive to lead and direct, his markedly dominating behavior, his strength of will and his greater aggressiveness. In Gen. 1-3 the man is specially commissioned to subdue the earth, to open it up and organize it. This fits in with his stronger and more robust physique, with his greater capability for abstract thinking, with his particular capability for creative and pioneering achievements in all areas of intellectual life, and with his more pronounced interest in the world of things. On the other hand, Scripture characterizes the woman as the man’s helper. This also fits in with the scientific characterization of woman: she is more ready and capable of adapting, she has a greater capacity to sympathize. Her superior imitative ability, including linguistic ability, and her stronger interest in people destine her for the role of completing the man by being his companion. These characteristics also help her to fulfill the task of motherhood which the Bible and her physique assign her.”<sup>153</sup>

Dorani calls his variety of Thomism the Congruent Creation View: “[M]en lead in home and church because God desired an ordered creation. He sovereignly chose to order it through male headship, a headship given to them without a view to any merit on their part. *Yet God established a coherence or congruence between his decree and his creation.* Congruence thinkers affirm that God shaped the minds, proclivities and perhaps even the bodies of humans to reflect his decree...It is not popular, today, to propose that men and women have equal gifts but different interests. Yet past traditionalists said such things as they attempted to explain God’s decision to appoint males as leaders of the church, and current traditionalists generally do not. The great theologians of the past did not appeal to God’s raw decree and then fall silent...[T]he Scotist tendency in recent complementarian thought suffers from its refusal to give reasons...Do twentieth century traditionalists want to affirm that God has ordered men to

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fashioners of weapons, workers in metal, wood, and stone. Women are primary care givers and most involved in child rearing. Their activities center on maintenance and care of home and family. They are more often involved in making pottery, baskets, clothes, blankets, etc. They gather food, preserve and prepare food, obtain and carry firewood and water. They collect and grind grain. The fact that these universals transcend divergent animal groups and cultures suggests that there must be more than a cultural basis for these sex differences. The data point to biological predeterminants of gender-related behavior. Indeed, as we survey the biology of mammals and humans in particular, we find sex-related differences in all of the organ systems, including the brain and nervous system.”

<sup>152</sup> Let’s face it: Has anyone ever known a cheerful feminist?

<sup>153</sup> 147. For Neuer, the differences between men and women are relational at least as much as metaphysical. Being masculine is constituted by relating to the world in a certain way. Cf. what was said about Podles in a footnote above. This approach opens up many possibilities to understanding human persons. See *Biblical Horizons* #100 p. 96f; Peter Leithart “Modernity and the Merely Social” in *Pro Ecclesia* 9:3, p. 328; Leithart, *Priesthood of the Plebs* 143ff; Thomas Weinandy *Does God Suffer?* 114ff, 127ff; and especially Anthony Thiselton *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*. Of course, we do not have to ultimately choose between metaphysical, relational, and even narrational, understandings of the human person. Some combination of these perspectives may provide the best self-concept.

lead the church, and then give no reason for it? Has he fashioned no difference whatsoever, to fit men to lead and women to receive their guidance? Throughout the ages, the church has preferred to affirm that God has engraved reflections of his sovereign decree into human nature...It seems to me the Congruent Creation View best explains Paul's thinking."<sup>154</sup> Doriani recognizes this Thomistic view is open to abuse from those who would denigrate women and consider them to be inferior because they are different. But, as he says, we must "recognize variety in human nature, without labeling anything inferior or superior."<sup>155</sup>

Several qualifications on this Thomist view need to be made. First, it should be noted that a Thomist can still insist that what men and women have in common is greater than their differences. Rejecting metaphysical androgyny does not necessarily make the sexes antithetical. Rather, as Neuer puts it, "Being a man or a woman constitutes a different

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<sup>154</sup> 263-6. Doriani applies his Thomistic view to 1 Tim. 2:13-14 in an interesting discussion on 265-7. For Neuer's Thomism, rooted in the creation account, see 57-8, 70. With less restraint, but more wit, Chesterton says, "[T]he differences between a man and a woman are at the best so obstinate and exasperating that they practically cannot be got over unless there is an atmosphere of exaggerated tenderness and mutual interest. To put the matter in one metaphor, the sexes are two stubborn pieces of iron; if they are to be welded together, it must be while they are red-hot. Every woman has to find out that her husband is a selfish beast, because every man is a selfish beast by the standard of a woman. But let her find out the beast while they are both still in the story of 'Beauty and the Beast.' Every man has to find out that his wife is cross – that is to say, sensitive to the point of madness: for every woman is mad by the masculine standard. But let him find out that she is mad while her madness is more worth considering than anyone else's sanity" (103). Chesterton defended the equality of the sexes, while fully acknowledging their deep differences: "The title of the book before us is *Woman: A Scientific Study and Defence*. It never occurred to us before that woman stood in need of a defense of any kind; and what the woman of our acquaintance would think of being made the subject of a 'scientific defense' we shudder to conceive... Instead of attempting to base the quality of the sexes on the domestic habits of some wretched amoeba in the primeval twilight, the author should have turned on the men of science and told them, with all possible respect, that they have nothing whatever to do with questions of superiority and inferiority. Whether a woman is structurally different to man is a matter of physical science, whether she is superior or inferior or equal is not a matter of physical science; it is a question of what you happen to want. Science does its duty in saying that monkey have tails and men have not; but as for saying that it is better not to have tails, that is a matter of taste and imagination, and by no means certain at that... Now the old human family, on which civilization is built, meant this when it talked about its 'head.' It has nothing to do with detailed despotism or the control of other's people's daily lives. That is quite another idea arising from out of the crazy complexity of all high civilizations. If authority means power (which it does not), I think the wife has more of it than the husband. If I look around any ordinary room at all the objects – at their color, choice, and place – I feel as if I were a lonely and stranded male in a world made wholly by women. All the same, if a canvasser comes to urge the cause of the Conservative-Radicals, or of the Radical-Conservatives, it is I who ought to see him. If a drunkard has wandered into my front garden and lain down on the principal flower bed, it is I who ought to inspect him. If a burglar wanders about the house at night, it is I who ought to parley with him. Because I am head, I am the tiresome excrescence that can talk to the world" (117). See also 118, 143.

<sup>155</sup> 265. Foh argues that men and women cannot really be that different since they have the same goal in their sanctification, Christ-likeness. But this ignores the very obvious ways in which Christ-likeness is different in men and women. See Neuer 170f for a discussion of how the life of faith can take different shape in men and women. See also Podles 45, 89f and Neuer 147. See Wilson *Federal Husband* 94ff and Piper 294 for the metaphysics of gender applied to raising godly sons and daughters. See also Vlahos *First Things* Feb. '93 p. 2-3.

way of expressing *the humanity both share equally.*"<sup>156</sup> Second, while the Thomist affirms against the Scotist that God has his reasons for making men and women different and for assigning them different roles, these reasons may not always be apparent to us. In fact, they might always remain somewhat mysterious.<sup>157</sup> Claiming God has his reasons and claiming to know for certain what those reasons are are two different things.<sup>158</sup> Third, the role of metaphysics in understanding gender should not be overplayed. Personhood is not simply some static Cartesian substance.<sup>159</sup> Rather, masculine and feminine may also be distinguished by the way they relate to other persons and things,<sup>160</sup> as well as by the differing ways their life narratives work out.<sup>161</sup> Metaphysics, relationality, and narrative-shapes are all important avenues to arriving at an understanding of the human self, including masculinity and femininity.<sup>162</sup> Unfortunately, these topics are far too expansive to treat here. I have chosen to focus on the metaphysics, or nature, of gender, because I think it is still the most common-sensical form of self-understanding for people today.<sup>163</sup> Finally, to claim that men and women have differing natures (or relationships or stories) is not necessarily to say that there are distinct lists of masculine and feminine virtues. On the whole, godly men and women probably manifest the same kinds of virtues (i.e., the fruit of the Spirit). But the way those virtues come to expression will always be deeply qualified and influenced by one's gender.

In our day, the question of the metaphysics of gender has become intertwined with the question of God's gender. Certainly, the masculine or patriarchal language applied to God in the Bible is in some sense anthropomorphic or metaphorical. Sexual distinctions are a part of the created order, and therefore God transcends them. However, there must be something deeply masculine or fatherly about God's character because this is how he has chosen to reveal himself.<sup>164</sup> The fact that his people always relate to him as feminine

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<sup>156</sup> 31. In other words, the sexes are not quite 'opposite' as we sometimes say. See Mitchell 32f.

<sup>157</sup> Would anyone really claim to have any member of the other sex figured out?

<sup>158</sup> See Neuer 57-8.

<sup>159</sup> Its unfortunate that a Cartesian model of personhood has dominated theology, including Reformed theology, for so long. Thankfully, there are signs this is changing.

<sup>160</sup> Neuer 147.

<sup>161</sup> See Stephen Crites, in *Why Narrative?* edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory Jones, on the narrative quality of all human experience. A simple example of how this might apply to gender: It's been said that for a woman, her whole life story is about love and marriage, whereas for the man, this is only one chapter in his story. I'm not sure that's right, but it gives some idea of how masculine and feminine narrative identities might be differently constructed. See *Priesthood of the Plebs* 142ff on narrative and identity in general. If we changed the metaphor slightly, to movies, we could say every woman's life is a romance and every man's life an action movie.

<sup>162</sup> Ultimately, I would claim these three dimensions of metaphysics, relationship, and narrative, are all needed and all presuppose and interpenetrate one another.

<sup>163</sup> Numerous important studies on the nature of personhood have been published in recent years. See, e.g., Anthony Thiselton's *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, David Ford's *Self and Salvation*, Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Who Are We?*, Henry Isaac Venema's *Identifying Selfhood*, Alan Torrance's *Persons In Communion*, Stanley Grenz's *The Postmodern God and the Relational Self*, and so forth.

<sup>164</sup> Neuer 152-162 for an extensive discussion of the gender of God and its implications. Neuer points out the overwhelming and irreversible masculine images of God and shows that the whole creation is feminine in relation to him. See also Podles ch. 4-5, especially 74ff.

(i.e., as his bride) reinforces this conviction. The masculine God has a feminine object of love.<sup>165</sup> God has named himself in masculine ways, and we must speak of him accordingly.<sup>166</sup> To give God a feminine name (e.g., Mother, Sophia) is idolatry. Israel, for all her sin and apostasy, resisted this temptation, despite the fact that many surrounding cultures had female deities.<sup>167</sup> Feminine *imagery* is used of God in Scripture (Ex. 19:6, Num. 11:12, Dt. 32:11, Job 38:3-9, 28:29, Ps. 17:8, 131:2, Isa. 46:3-4, 49:15-16, 66:13; cf. Mt. 23:37, where Jesus uses a feminine image for his ministry), but this proves nothing since a male apostle used similar imagery for himself (Gal. 4:19, 1 Thess. 2:7). Ironically feminists latch on this language, not realizing it implicitly reinforces the very gender stereotypes they want to deny!<sup>168</sup>

What is the cash value of this discussion of the metaphysics of gender? It is so important in our clashes with contemporary feminists that we not be afraid to insist that sexuality is both something *we are* as well as something *we do*. To say only men can hold authoritative positions in the church without giving any explanation is suicide in our culture. It makes us apologize for the Bible's teaching rather than confidently proclaiming it and living it. Egalitarianism is now an unargued presupposition for most Westerners. It needs no defense. How have complementarians replied? Scotists make gender a matter of function (*doing*), Thomists make it a matter of both nature and function (*being* and *doing*). Only the Thomist position is strong enough to withstand the egalitarian onslaught and even push it back.<sup>169</sup> Only the Thomist position gives us something positive – and even beautiful – to say to our culture. Only as Christian men and women joyfully embrace their masculinity and femininity, and the roles that flow out of their differing but complementary natures, can we turn back the tide of egalitarian culture. Only as men recover sacrificial love, broad-shouldered responsibility, tender initiative, and humble chivalry, can we expect to win this battle. Only as women recover respectful submission, beautiful modesty, godly contentment, and gentleness of spirit will we be victorious.

### Gender and Trinity

We have already said a great deal about gender and the nature of God, but the connections here are so deep and so important to challenging the feminist movement within the church, that a few separate comments should be made. There can be no question that humanity as a community of men and women is patterned after the divine community of Father, Son, and Spirit. This is implicit in the creation account itself (note the plural, “let

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<sup>165</sup> Podles 64.

<sup>166</sup> For Aquinas' insightful explanation on why we must call God Father (and not simply Begetter), see Podles 75f.

<sup>167</sup> C. S. Lewis says, “If all these supposals were ever carried into effect [naming God as mother and Jesus as daughter, as some feminists desire], we should be embarked on a different religion...a child taught to pray to a Mother in heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child.” Quoted in Neuer 153.

<sup>168</sup> *New Horizons* 458. Contrary to feminism, there are certain virtues that belong more fully to each sex. But contrary to masculinism (chauvinism) the feminine virtues are not inferior, just different.

<sup>169</sup> See Doriani 260f for excellent insight into the need for a Thomistic complementarianism.

us,” in Gen. 1:26-27). It becomes explicit in 1 Cor. 11:2ff, where the God-Christ relation is used to explicate the man-woman relation, as we have already seen.

It must be understood that feminism is a Trinitarian heresy. Within the Godhead, we find personal distinctions. The Father, Son, and Spirit share a common divine nature, yet are relationally distinguished from one another, so that the divine nature comes to expression differently in each person. Feminists who claim there are no real distinctions between men and women have fallen into a form of Sabellianism (modalism).<sup>170</sup> By blurring the lines between men and women they have implicitly blurred the personal distinctions within the Godhead.

But masculinism (the view that men are superior to women) is also a Trinitarian heresy. Within the Godhead we find ontological equality and functional subordination existing in harmony. The Father and Son are equal, yet the Son submits to the Father. Male chauvinists who claim subordination implies inferiority have fallen into a form of Arianism (making the Son less than God). If the Christ-church relationship teaches us headship and sacrifice are compatible for the husband, the Father-Son relationship teaches us equality and submission are compatible for the wife.<sup>171</sup>

A number of trendy contemporary feminist theologians have argued that the Holy Spirit is the feminine member of the Trinity. Rom. 8:22ff speak of the Spirit groaning through the creation, as if in labor pains.<sup>172</sup> The Wisdom of God in Prov. 8 is depicted in feminine categories, and elsewhere in Scripture the Spirit is associated with God’s wisdom. There are several obvious problems with this approach, as well as some more subtle difficulties. The Bible nowhere actually refers to God as female, though, as we have already seen, feminine imagery is sometimes applied to the masculine God, just as it is used of masculine humans (Jesus and Paul).<sup>173</sup> Moreover, while Paul in Rom. 8 uses a neuter pronoun for the Spirit, Jesus emphatically used masculine pronouns in Jn. 14-16. It is the Spirit who impregnates the virgin Mary, obviously a masculine task. No member of the Godhead is ever actually given a feminine name or pronoun, so we must resist this politically correct temptation.<sup>174</sup> The Spirit may be especially associated with things feminine, but he retains his masculinity. We are simply not free to perform a ‘sex change operation’ on a member of the Godhead.

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<sup>170</sup> For feminists, the essence of equality is sameness of nature and role interchangeability. See Piper 294.

<sup>171</sup> Wilson *Federal Husband* 15-16.

<sup>172</sup> E.g., N. T. Wright *The Crown and the Fire* 89 and Podles 136.

<sup>173</sup> Basically, the feminine language applied to God is always in the form of a simile (“God is *like* a mother...”in some respect) but the masculine language is direct (“God *is* our Father”).

<sup>174</sup> See especially 82ff in Podles.

Father, Son, and Spirit are all masculine.<sup>175</sup> It is the church that is the feminine member of the divine family (not that she is divine, but she is drawn into the Trinitarian circle of love and fellowship as the daughter of God and the bride of Christ; Jn. 17, Eph. 5:22ff). The Triune Creator is always masculine; the creation (represented by the church) is always feminine in relation to him. In addition, the church is feminine in relation to individual believers. A classic patristic saying, picked up by the Reformers,<sup>176</sup> was, “You cannot have God for your Father, unless you have the Church for your mother”<sup>177</sup> (see, e.g., Isa. 1:21-26, 46:13, 47:1-15, 48:1-22, 52:2, 54:1-8, 61:10-11, 66:7-13, etc.; Jer. 3:6-14; Gal. 4:21ff; Rev. 12).<sup>178</sup> Sadly, we have neglected developing this notion of the church’s corporate femininity. Perhaps if we had done so, the impetus to refer to God in feminine categories would have never arisen.<sup>179</sup>

### Church Tradition

Obviously, it would be impossible to give a full overview of the church’s teaching on the role of women over the last two thousand years. Attempts at this by Doriani, Weinrich, and Neuer<sup>180</sup> are greatly appreciated and we do not need to rehash their fine summaries. All we will do is here is show in brief compass how consistent the church’s teaching has been on the status and function of women until very recently. There is a strong consensus on these matters, and if we value our ecclesiastical heritage, as we ought, this will carry great weight with us. The best theologians have always recognized that tradition is a critical, albeit secondary, norm for the church’s belief and practice. A tradition so well and widely established as that of the woman’s role in church life should only be overturned on very, very compelling grounds. Who are we to think we are wiser than our elders?

There is no question a radical shift in the function of women has taken place in most churches over the last century. “The differences between the sexes that are explicit in the Bible, and their unique differentiation of tasks within the church, remained uncontested,

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<sup>175</sup> For an interesting Trinitarian counterpoint, see Podles 86. There is no question that the Godhead contains within himself the archetype of femininity, so that feminine qualities reflect the Triune Lord as much as masculine ones. But the three persons of the Godhead are each given exclusively masculine names and we must be faithful to revelation at this point. We speak of God as feminine in a metaphorical way, but may not call he ‘she’ or give him other feminine titles.

<sup>176</sup> Calvin: “There is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, and nourish us at her breast...Away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation.”

<sup>177</sup> The church fathers were not afraid to draw out the full soteriological implications of this. While salvation is wholly a work of God’s grace, the church as Mother has an instrumental role to play. In her womb, the infertile unbeliever is impregnated with by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word. For example, the Spirit through the church gives birth to 3000 on the day of Pentecost. The church then nurtures the new convert, first feeding him pure milk, then solid food. She becomes his teacher (Cf. Prov. 1:8b) and discipler, bringing him to maturity.

<sup>178</sup> In Mt. 12:46-50, Jesus indicates the church – the whole assembly of believers – is his mother and brothers. This is the key to unlocking the imagery of Rev. 12. See also Jn. 16:21-22.

<sup>179</sup> See Podles 84ff.

<sup>180</sup> Doriani 218ff focuses especially on the interpretation of 1 Tim. 2 in church history. Weinrich in Piper 263ff is also very helpful. Neuer ch. 9 is a short overview.



(with only a few trivial exceptions) until the twentieth century. This is most obvious in the way that Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christendom followed the NT by limiting teaching and leadership functions in the church to men. In the early church this practice was disregarded only by heretical movements such as Montanism,<sup>181</sup> Quintillianism,<sup>182</sup> [Priscillianism],<sup>183</sup> and Gnosticism.” However, Neuer goes on to say, “The exclusion of women from the office of preaching and teaching by no means condemned them to inactivity.”<sup>184</sup>

In the early church, women were used in various capacities as servants but never as leaders.<sup>185</sup> For example, there is strong testimony to an order of deaconesses (and widows) in the East and West.<sup>186</sup> These women were fervent in prayer, hospitality, the evangelization and instruction of other women, and mercy ministry to the poor and sick. Sometimes these women were charged with taking communion to female invalids. In the West, this office began to fade away somewhat after the fourth century, but it remained strong in the East until at least the twelfth century.<sup>187</sup> In the medieval church, the office of deaconess was generally absorbed into the convent.<sup>188</sup> The Reformers, especially Calvin,<sup>189</sup> sought to reinstate this feminine office. Westminster divines such as Rutherford, Goodwin, and Gillespie also affirmed biblical warrant for an order of women deacons. McKee recounts Governor Bradford’s remarkable story of a deaconess in the pilgrim refugee congregation in the Rhineland: “She honored her place...and was an ornament to the congregation. She usually sat in a convenient place in the congregation, with a little birchen rod in her hand, and kept little children in great awe from disturbing the congregation. She did frequently visit the sick and the weak, especially women, and as there was need, called out maids and young women to watch and do them other helps as their necessity did require; and if they were poor, she would gather relief for them of those that were able, or acquaint the deacons; and she was obeyed as a mother in Israel

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<sup>181</sup> See Piper 274f, Doriani 261.

<sup>182</sup> Piper 275.

<sup>183</sup> Piper 275f. This heretical proto-feminist group was condemned by the Council of Saragossa (380) and the Council of Nimes (396). Saragossa forbade Christian women from attending their services because women were allowed to teach publicly. See also Doriani 222.

<sup>184</sup> 138.

<sup>185</sup> See Mitchell ch. 3.

<sup>186</sup> Aime Georges Martimort’s *Deaconesses* is a very helpful study. Martimort (wrongly, in my opinion) believes the deaconess is not found in the NT. In his historical reconstruction, the office arose out of ecclesiastical necessity around the third century, first in the East, then in the West. He demonstrates from early church documents that these women were used primarily in mercy ministry, teaching women, and assisting in the baptisms of women (which was important because by that time, baptisms were done in the nude).

<sup>187</sup> See Neuer 138, Piper 264. Customs varied as to the ordination of these women. See Piper 264, 276f and Martimort

<sup>188</sup> Basically, deaconesses became nuns or abbesses. It is important to note abbesses never had formal ecclesiastical power (i.e., the power to excommunicate or administer the sacraments). Piper 271.

<sup>189</sup> “Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor” ICR 2:1067. Calvin says Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2) was “the bearer of the epistle [to the Romans], first on account of her office, because she exercised a very honorable and holy ministry in the church” Comm. On Rom. Calvin interpreted the widows in 1 Tim. 5 not as nuns, as was traditional in the medieval church, but as a special order of deaconesses. At one point he expressed regret that Geneva had no widow deacons (McKee 77).

and an officer of Christ.”<sup>190</sup> There was also a significant revival of the office of deaconess in the nineteenth century (especially in Germany and England).<sup>191</sup> In addition to traditional duties, many of these deaconesses assisted missionaries or taught school.

Women have, on occasion, functioned as ad hoc teachers in the church, almost always outside of liturgical contexts.<sup>192</sup> Close study of the ministries of these women would force us to give them mixed reviews – they were often used by God, but at times overstepped their bounds.<sup>193</sup> Occasionally their ministries even became an excuse for engaging in deep sin, such as deserting their husbands. In general, however, they did not hold formal offices and did not take charge of congregations or challenge male leadership. Women throughout the history of the church have also been enabled by God to carry on fruitful writing ministries and compose great hymns for the church to sing.<sup>194</sup> Women have even attended synods and councils from time to time, as spectators and informal advisors, though they never possessed official ecclesiastical power until very recently, with the rise of feminism.<sup>195</sup>

Occasionally we also find that women were allowed minimal liturgical roles, such as serving communion (especially to women).<sup>196</sup> Women were generally not used as Scripture readers in church.<sup>197</sup> In the early church, women were not allowed to publicly address the assembly<sup>198</sup> and women were always forbidden to become priestesses.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Elsie Anne McKee *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today* 85.

<sup>191</sup> Piper 265.

<sup>192</sup> On the liturgical silence of women in the early church, see Mitchell ch. 4, especially 71.

<sup>193</sup> See Doriani 233ff, 261 and Podles 108ff.

<sup>194</sup> Piper 266, 269.

<sup>195</sup> Piper 271.

<sup>196</sup> Piper 265, 276. On those very rare instances when medieval women actually presided at the Eucharist, they received harsh ecclesiastical censure.

<sup>197</sup> Very early on, the church developed an order of readers, those trained in how to publicly read the Scriptures. Readers were always male. See Piper 265, Mitchell 71.

<sup>198</sup> Tertullian’s comments are representative: “It is not permitted to a woman to speak in church. Neither may she teach, baptize, offer, or claim for herself any function proper to a man, least of all the sacerdotal office” Piper 273. Likewise Cyprian: “A woman ought to be silent in church” Doriani 221. And the Apostolic Constitutions: “We do not permit our women to teach in church, but only to pray and hear those that teach...for our Master and Lord, Jesus himself when he sent out the twelve to make disciples of the nations, did nowhere send out women to preach, although he did not want [lack] such...If the head of the woman be the man, it is not reasonable that the rest of the body should govern the head...It is not just to abrogate the order of creation...[Female priestesses are] one of the ignorant practices of Gentile atheism” Doriani 224. On the similar views of Jerome and Theodore Balsamon, see Mitchell 46, 52.

<sup>199</sup> Photius, from the ninth century, is representative: “A woman does not become a priestess” Piper 274.

Aquinas and Bonaventure concluded that women were not to teach in church or be ordained to authoritative offices, following along with the well-established medieval consensus (Doriani 230ff, 233ff). Consider also Weinrich’s summary of the viewpoint of the Reformers: “Luther habitually combines 1 Cor. 14:34 with Gen. 3:16 to assert that women are excluded from the public exercise of the common priesthood. In view of the ‘ordinance and creation of God’ that women are subject to their husbands, Paul forbade women ‘to preach in the congregation where men are present who are skilled in speaking, so that respect and discipline may be maintained.’...John Calvin also understood Paul’s prohibitions as excluding women from speaking in an ‘ordinary service where there is a church in a regularly constituted state.’... ‘It is therefore an argument from things inconsistent -- If the woman is under subjection, she is, consequently, prohibited from authority to teach in public’.... ‘[Paul] excludes women from the office of teaching, which God committed

This exclusion was never merely a matter of culture. In truth, during the early centuries of the church's history, the social position of women was quite high in some places, particularly Asia Minor. There were women doctors, philosophers, teachers, and of course, pagan priestesses.<sup>200</sup> Female religious leadership was always practiced in paganism, so there were no socio-cultural barriers to the church doing the same. It was only the biblical hedge that prevented women from entering the ordained ministry.

It would be almost impossible to catalog all the great and godly female saints God has granted to the church. Think of the female martyrs of the early church, Paula,<sup>201</sup> Marcella,<sup>202</sup> Monica, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179),<sup>203</sup> Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), Theresa of Avila (1515-1582), Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957), Corrie ten Boom, and on and on we could go. Time would fail us to recount all the great virgins, wives, mothers, and widows who have excelled in Christian graces and served in all kinds of God-pleasing and church-edifying ways. Without doubt, faithful women have constantly been a powerful force for the gospel and the kingdom in the world.<sup>204</sup>

Does this mean there has been no sexism in the Christian tradition? Sadly, some have believed women to be inferior and treated them as such. Tertullian accused the woman of being the 'devil's point of entry.' Chrysostom at times spoke condescendingly to women, as have many other preachers.<sup>205</sup> Luther occasionally sounded misogynist.<sup>206</sup> Kuyper

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to men only' ....Although Calvin recognizes that some women in the OT were supernaturally called by the Spirit to govern the people, 'extraordinary acts done by God do not overturn the ordinary rules of government, by which he intended that we should be bound.' .... Other Reformation and post-Reformation groups largely concurred with the views of Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. The Anabaptists, the Anglicans, the Puritans, and the Separatists, all prohibited women from the public ministry of preaching and teaching....It has only been in the last half of the twentieth century that the major Protestant church bodies have begun to accept women as regular preachers and pastors....The evidence shows [that until recently] the Pauline statements against women speaking in the church were consistently upheld" Piper 278-9; cf. Doriani 236-247. In the nineteenth century, Fairbairn is representative: "[Women may not] act the part of a teacher in meetings of the faithful...She is not to assume the part of ruling and domineering over man" Doriani 253. Weinrich summarizes the whole testimony of church history up to the rise of modern egalitarianism: "In sum, there never was recognized ordained female ministry in the West (or East) that involved teaching in the assembly or ministering at the altar" Piper 277.

<sup>200</sup> Piper 274.

<sup>201</sup> Doriani 225.

<sup>202</sup> Doriani 225-6.

<sup>203</sup> Doriani 229f.

<sup>204</sup> Athanasius took note of female martyrs in his *On the Incarnation*. Calvin had high praise for women who were willing to face martyrdom. Hear his words of encouragement in a letter to Frenchwomen imprisoned for their commitment to the Reformed faith: "If he [Jesus] so honored women [in revealing his resurrection to them first], and endowed them with so much courage, think ye he has less power now, or that his purposes are changed? How many thousands of women have there been who have spared neither blood nor their lives to maintain the name of Jesus Christ, and announce his reign! Has not God caused their martyrdom to fructify? Has their faith not obtained the glory of the world as well as that of martyrs? And without going so far, have we not still before our eyes, examples of how God works daily by their testimony, and confounds his enemies in such a manner that there is no preaching of such efficacy as the fortitude and perseverance, which they possess in confessing the name of Christ?" JCR 6:2 91-2.

<sup>205</sup> Doriani 227ff. In Chrysostom's defense, he did point out that many women excel their male counterparts in Christian virtues. See also 231f. Sometimes feminists who want to discredit the church will pull out

was criticized for having too low a view of women, perhaps justly.<sup>207</sup> Some Medieval philosophers and theologians unfortunately took the ancient Greek question, “Do women have souls?” as a live debate. Many have interpreted I Tim. 2:14 in a way insulting to female intelligence.

Yet it would be wrong to say with the feminists that the church has been an oppressively patriarchal institution. Patriarchal, yes, provided that term is properly understood;<sup>208</sup> but oppressive, no. In fact, most Christian women through the centuries who raised children and never led a worship service would have laughed at the suggestion that they were being oppressed. They didn’t feel oppressed at all because they knew they were doing what God had created and called them to do.<sup>209</sup> They were content because envy-driven egalitarianism had not yet seeped in. Overall, we must conclude that the church has been greatly beneficial for women. By proclaiming the gospel, the church has liberated women through Christ to live as God intended. In telling women to stick to their divinely prescribed roles, the church has done nothing more than tell fish to stay in the water.

Neuer summarizes the historical data for us: “The equality of the sexes attested in the Bible has not always been maintained in Christendom. Church history contains grave witnesses to the devaluation of women...But at least Christian theologians upheld, with rare exceptions, that the woman is the equal of the man. The high value that Jesus gave to women had an enduring influence on the history of the Christian church and theology. Christianity did away with the religious undervaluation of women once and for all. That women, like men, enjoyed faith access to eternal salvation was never questioned in Christendom. For the conviction of sexual equality is so central to the gospel that its denial would involve a denial of the saving message....Even if Christian reality did not always correspond to Christian convictions, women experienced within the church a quite remarkable respect and dignity.”<sup>210</sup>

Thus, we see the church’s historical position has been to maintain male leadership in church, while still insisting that women share in the blessings of salvation and can serve

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patristic quotations that sound demeaning to women, ignoring the fact that these same theologians and preachers often said equally harsh things about men! See Mitchell 96.

<sup>206</sup> “If women get tired and die of bearing, there is no harm in that; let them die as long as they bear; they were made for that” Doriani, 237, puts this quote in its broader context. Like most everything else Luther said, this must be taken with a grain of salt.

<sup>207</sup> Doriani 254f.

<sup>208</sup> Podles 66f, 74. Mark Horne

([http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/heads\\_of\\_household\\_membership\\_and\\_maleonly\\_voting\\_in\\_the\\_church.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/heads_of_household_membership_and_maleonly_voting_in_the_church.htm)) identifies several senses in which the church is patriarchal: 1. We confess God as *Father*, Son, and Holy Spirit. 2. We read the Bible, a rather ‘non-inclusive’ text. 3. We only ordain men to teaching and ruling ministries. These men are ‘fathers’ to the congregation. 4. We teach wives to submit to their husbands. For further thoughts, see especially Mitchell 150-1.

<sup>209</sup> It’s amazing that the feminist movement, which is supposed to be so sensitive to cultural relativity, could be so culturally imperial as to impose a late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century definition of oppression on women from such different times and places!

<sup>210</sup> 136-7. For proof the patristics understood the hierarchical-but-equal relation between men and women (even before the fall), see Mitchell 23ff.

in very dignified and honorable ways. Should we continue to walk in this tradition? Or has it become outdated? We do not simply want to reprimatinate the views of a past era or a bunch of dead theologians, but we cannot ignore our heritage either. Tradition has an essential role to play in shaping the church's theology and praxis. Granted, tradition is a normed norm, not a norming norm; nonetheless, it is authoritative for us. We must not simply disregard the way the Spirit has led the church through the ages. While we have the freedom to correct our tradition when necessary, we need to remember how uniform the witness of the church has been on this particular issue until very recently. For nearly twenty centuries, it seems the church was faithful in maintaining the woman's God-assigned sphere. Why change, just to go with the flow of our apostate culture? Why break with nearly two thousand years of church practice? The burden of proof is clearly on the egalitarians.<sup>211</sup> Perhaps a further exploration of the nature and effects of egalitarianism will show why the traditional position on women in the church needs to be preserved.

### **The Folly of Modern Egalitarianism**

Perhaps the primary ideology that has wrecked American culture for the last 150 years or so is egalitarianism. The word 'egalitarianism' is from the French term for equality, and the modern egalitarian movement was born out of the bloody and atheistic French Revolution. In politics, education, the family, and, yes, even in the church, the monster of egalitarianism has reared its ugly head. The corollary of egalitarianism is the "rights" movement. Of course, we all do have rights in the sense of legal protections because we are all made in the image of God. Rights, properly understood, are simply the result of obeying God's law in society. But egalitarians have something much more sinister in view when they speak of rights.<sup>212</sup> Egalitarian rights are entitlements, not protections.

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<sup>211</sup> "The shape of current debate would astonish most major theologians from the church's first eighteen centuries, both in the dominance of egalitarian thought and in the Scotist proclivities of current traditionalists" Doriani 256.

<sup>212</sup> See various writings by Robert Louis Dabney. Novak, from a Romanist angle, explains the shift that has taken place in Western culture, and its significance for the question of female priests: "In advanced Western societies, the Catholic tradition of excluding women from the priesthood has come (quite suddenly) to seem *prima facie* unjust. This is doubtless because of the intellectual shift in our thinking from 'natural law' to 'natural rights.' In natural law thinking, natural differences between males and females ('natural' both in the biological-neurological and in the cultural-symbolic dimension) offered sufficient reason for accepting a differentiation of functions and roles. For centuries, the prevalence of organic, role-differentiated thinking allowed the traditional practice of excluding women from the priesthood to seem fitting and right. In the light of doctrines of 'natural rights,' by contrast, according to which equal rights inhere in all persons *qua* persons, this exclusion has come to seem arbitrary, and in the end unjust. There is, then, much more involved in the question of whether women can be priests than ecclesiastical practice. At stake is a profound transformation in the Catholic intellectual tradition, nothing less than a 'transvaluation of values,' a fundamentally new and different arrangement of the intellectual field in which the concept of justice is located. In the tradition, justice is to be found in the field specified by, among other things, love, the sacramental order, the common good, communion, and justification by faith. In the projected new order, it is located in the field of affirmative action. Obviously, profound implications for religion in society follow. If the Catholic tradition of selecting only males should be continued, the Catholic Church will seem to be at fundamental odds with the culture in which it is now implanted, and conversely, if women are admitted to the priesthood, the Catholic Church will have adapted itself to the practices of contemporary Western

Egalitarians separate rights from responsibilities. In this sense, “The notion of ‘rights’ is not a biblical idea. It is a legacy of the European Enlightenment. The notion of rights has been helpful in forming liberal societies, that is, societies formed without reference to God. No one need feel grateful or say ‘thank you’ in a society of rights.”<sup>213</sup>

Rights-mania shows itself in modern culture most clearly in the liberal media (i.e., political correctness) and the welfare state. The utopian vision of the United Nations is an example of thoroughgoing egalitarianism. The 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted “everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security...to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing.”<sup>214</sup> Abraham Kuyper defined egalitarianism in his 1898 Princeton lectures, explicitly linking it with modernism and contrasting it with historic Calvinism: “...Modernism, which denies and abolishes every difference, cannot rest until it has made woman man and man woman, and, putting every distinction on a common level kills life by placing it under the ban of uniformity...Calvinism has derived from its fundamental relation to God a peculiar interpretation of man’s relation to man, and it is this only true relation which since the 16<sup>th</sup> century has ennobled social life. If

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culture. At certain times in history, fidelity to the true faith has required of the Church that it become a counterculture, a *scandalum*, to contemporary culture. At other times, adaptation to the existing culture has been both a sign and an instrument of a deeper penetration into the truth of the Gospels. Naturally such choices of direction have always carried weighty consequences. At present, the arguments for and against ordaining women are formally unequal. The argument *for* women priests is clear, logical, well-stated, and in accord with at least certain contemporary Western sensibilities, whereas the argument for reserving the priesthood to males is still shrouded in tradition, accepted habits of thought, and instinct. For centuries - indeed until the last two decades - practically everyone, females and males alike, took the traditional position for granted, *understood* it preconsciously, accepted its plausibility, felt its legitimacy in their bones. The issue did not even arise, for example, at the Second Vatican Council (1961-65) or, barely so, in the century of theological research and *ressourcement* that preceded it. We have nevertheless to consider that this long tradition might have been insufficiently developed and that, in the fullness of time, a true and wholly acceptable ‘development of doctrine’ is now rising to the surface, revealing a dimension of Gospel truth to which our ancestors were blind.... And because the theological reasons for the reservation of the Catholic priesthood to males have lain dormant and unarticulated over many centuries, and those who disagree with the Church’s tradition have been tempted to mock, simple filial piety would require them precisely to marshal the best possible argument on behalf of that tradition. They should do so in order to save the honor and authority of the Church by showing why what they no longer accept was for so long almost universally taken to be sensible. On the other hand, those who accept the present tradition of the Church as normative are required by a similar piety to give an account of their reasons for holding to so broadly unpopular a position....To grasp clearly the consequences of tearing a piece out of [the tradition] is crucial for any who cherish its integrity. ‘Tradition is the democracy of the dead,’ Chesterton once wrote. We owe it to the faith of those who have handed it on to us to treat it justly, even though today we grope for contemporary words to express what our ancestors felt in their bones...[T]hese two principles [on which feminists rest their case] - the interchangeability of gender in the priestly role and equal representation of the sexes - have no standing either in Scripture or in the Catholic tradition. There is no evidence that in His dealings with humans God acts by an egalitarian principle. Among all humans, He singled out the people of Israel. In every generation, He ‘elects’ His own. God’s choice has never been transparently based upon equal merit (or any merit at all). On the contrary, it induces to wonder and even fear; its workings are mysterious. If this is true of our salvation, why should it be surprising regarding the priesthood?” *First Things* April ’93.

<sup>213</sup> William Willimon in David Hall *Savior or Servant?* 392.

<sup>214</sup> Hall 392-3. The problem with the UN declaration is that it does not take account of 2 Thess. 3:10.

Calvinism places our entire human life immediately before God, then it follows that all men or women, rich or poor, weak or strong, dull or talented, as creatures of God, and as lost sinners, have no claim whatsoever to lord over one another, and that we stand as equals before God, and consequently equal as man to man. Hence we cannot recognize any distinction among men, save such as has been imposed by God Himself, in that He gave one authority over the other, or enriched one with more talents than the other, in order that the man of more talents should serve the mans with less, and in him serve his God.”<sup>215</sup> The modernist wants to impose a bland uniformity on social life by mitigating distinctions. Calvinism, however, rejoices in the God-ordained equalities and inequalities in the creation. Because we rest in the sovereignty of God, we are able to be content in whatever place God has put us.

Egalitarianism has had a massive impact on the church. Podles raises some disturbing trends: “Men think religion, and especially the church, is for women. Why are women the ‘more devout sex’? Modern churches are women’s clubs with a few male officers... ‘If American religion were imaginatively conceptualized as a clothing store, two-thirds of its floor space would house garments for women; the manager’s office would still be occupied almost exclusively by men.’ Men still run most churches, but in the pews women outnumber men in all countries of Western civilization, Europe, in the Americas, in Australia...Something is creating a barrier between Western Christianity and men...Men do not go to church. They regard involvement in religion as unmasculine, and almost more than anything they want to be masculine...Even if men are attracted, they will not long stay in a feminized church whether in its ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’ forms.”<sup>216</sup> The assumption, now, is that for a man to become a Christian, he must become like a woman. For most men, the religion of the stock market and sports has replaced anything the church has to offer.<sup>217</sup> Podles traces the problem back much further than most. He pins the blame for the ‘feminist shift’ in Western theology on Bernard of Clairvaux, who twists the bridal mysticism of Eph. 5 in an individualistic and erotic way.<sup>218</sup> Even if the egalitarian camel got its nose in the tent as far back as the twelfth century, there is no question it was in the nineteenth century, and especially the twentieth century,

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<sup>215</sup> *Stone Lectures* 27.

<sup>216</sup> 3, 196, 208. See especially chaps. 2, 7, 10. Podles notes that only in Eastern Orthodoxy do men outnumber women (11). Perhaps it is because their worship is the most liturgical and therefore the most military-like.

<sup>217</sup> See Podles ch. 9.

<sup>218</sup> See Podles 101 and ch. 6. For masculine counter-currents in the medieval church, see 140ff. Many will probably find Podles argument unconvincing. Perhaps in a Roman Catholic milieu, which would trace its roots back through medieval mysticism and the simultaneous rise of Marian devotion, pointing to twelfth century origins of Western feminism make sense. But within a Reformed context, it is hard to see any straight-line connection between Bernard’s feminized mysticism and modern American egalitarianism. The more direct source of the church’s feminization is the revivalism of the eighteenth, and especially the nineteenth, centuries. The revivalists substituted emotional appeals for reasoned argumentation and sappy hymns for robust psalms. The revivals were, unsurprisingly, more successful among women than men. Later revivalists denounced Calvinism and championed Arminianism. But the Christ of Arminianism is fairly wimpy and feminized himself. Instead of taking the initiative in drawing sinners to himself, he waits passively for the sinner to come to him. It is easy to see how this Arminian Christ radically transformed the way men understood Eph. 5:21ff.

that egalitarianism exploded.<sup>219</sup> For example, Podles examines the feminine traits of New England clergy in the nineteenth century.<sup>220</sup> The clergy were mocked as being “people half-way between men and women.” The sappy, sentimental hymnody of revivalism did nothing to help things. Charles Spurgeon, lamenting the feminine features of Victorian Christianity, said, “There has got abroad a notion, somehow, that if you become a Christian you must sink in your manliness and turn milksop.”<sup>221</sup> This is a world apart from the robust, masculine Christianity of the early church<sup>222</sup> and Reformation.<sup>223</sup>

Where did egalitarianism come from? Why has it so easily swept through our culture? Perhaps it is fitting to hear first from a woman on this issue. Augusta Jane Evans was one of the most thoughtful Southern women of the nineteenth century. Her classic novels and her attempts at education reform for women won her great respect and acclaim. Yet she also argued that “the emancipation of woman [as recommended by the radical feminists of her day] entailed a degradation and would lead to the dissolution of society.”<sup>224</sup> In her novel *St. Elmo*, her main character Edna Earle, battles to save a Christian morality and social order, and manifests a proper understanding of rights: “She addressed herself to the wives, mothers, and daughters of America, calling upon them to smite their false gods, and purify their shrines at which they worshipped. Jealously she contended for every woman’s right which God and nature had decreed her sex. The right to be learned, wise, noble, useful, in woman’s divinely limited sphere. The right to influence and exalt the circle in which she moved. The right to mount the sanctified beam of her own quiet hearth-stone.”<sup>225</sup> Her last novel, *Devota*, was published in the early twentieth century. In it, she claims “that it is treason for a woman to desert her God-given sphere. Along with passionate arguments for a revival of family life, [the book] contains tirades against socialism, humanitarianism, and all efforts to destroy the old standards. But the worldwide impulse to wipe out all distinctions, both those made by nature and those provided by social systems, was answering it with new and more radical theories of equalitarianism.”<sup>226</sup>

Evans was not the only one to see the storm clouds on the horizon about to break loose. R. L. Dabney, one of the giants of nineteenth century Presbyterianism, was almost prophetic in his grasp of where the egalitarian premise, one accepted, would lead. If the

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<sup>219</sup> Especially helpful for the rise of egalitarianism in America is Weldon Hardenbrook’s *Missing From Action*. Hardenbrook especially focuses on the Finney and the Second Great Awakening (ch. 4).

<sup>220</sup> Podles 5ff. See also 30, ch. 7, and Ann Douglass *The Feminization of American Culture* ch. 1-5. Douglass (97) argues the feminization of the clergy was especially aggravated in liberal churches: “The bonds of 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal clergymen with their female parishioners were apt to be close ones which formed early, and held. It is important to remember at this point that a significant number of non-evangelical ministers had been delicate, even sickly, homebound little boys. Ministers often exalted the maternal impulse because it had been a key force in their own lives.”

<sup>221</sup> Podles 5-6. See also 17

<sup>222</sup> On the masculinity of the early church, see Podles 87-99.

<sup>223</sup> On the masculinity of the early Protestant church, see Podles 152ff.

<sup>224</sup> Richard Weaver *Southern Tradition at Bay* 274.

<sup>225</sup> 395.

<sup>226</sup> Weaver 279.



egalitarianism (or Jacobinism) of the French Revolution prevailed in America, Dabney painted a grim future. The feminists of his day clamored for easy divorce laws and argued traditional marriage was patriarchal and oppressive. Dabney predicted disastrous results for families, especially children, if the feminist program was carried out. However, as a true Southern gentleman, his main concern was the effects feminism would have on women. He feared the feminine virtues would no longer be honored as they had been in our Christian past: “In Christian and European society alone has she ever attained the place of man’s social equal, and received the knowledge and honor due from magnanimity to her sex and her feebleness. And her enviable lot among us has resulted from two causes: the Christian religion and the legislation founded upon it by feudal chivalry. How insane then is it for here to spurn these two bulwarks of defense, to defy and repudiate the divine authority of that Bible which has been her redemption, and to revolutionize the whole spirit of the English common law touching the woman’s sphere and rights? She is thus spurning the only protectors her sex has ever found, and provoking a contest in which she must inevitably be overwhelmed.”

Dabney argued that feminism actually betrayed the female sex: “Casting away that dependence and femininity which are her true strength, the ‘strong minded woman’ persists in thrusting herself into competition with mans as his equal. But for this contest she is not his equal; the male is the stronger animal...It is when she brings her wealth of affection, her self-devotion, her sympathy, her tact, her grace, her subtle intuition, her attraction, her appealing weakness, and places them in the scale with man’s rugged strength and plodding endurance, with his steady logic, his hardihood and muscle, and his exemption from the disabling infirmities of her sex, that he delights to admit her full equality and to do glad homage to her as the crown to his kind. All this vantage-ground the ‘Woman’s Rights women’ madly throw away, and provoke the collision for which nature itself has disqualified them. They insist upon taking precisely a man’s chances; well, they will meet precisely the fate of a weak man among strong ones.”<sup>227</sup> Dabney feared what would happen to women if they competed with men on men’s home turf. He then illustrates his point with a humorous anecdote: “A solitary female entered a car where every seat was occupied, and the conductor closed the door upon her and departed. She looked in vain for a seat, and at last appealed to an elderly man near her to know if he would not ‘surrender his seat to a lady.’ He, it seems was somewhat a humorist, and answered: ‘I will surrender it cheerfully madam, as I always do, but will beg leave first to

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<sup>227</sup> A contemporary female voice, Vlahos, echoes Dabney’s wisdom at this point: “Not all women are finding that [entering the masculine world of work] so easy to do. Men programmed to accept gender equivalence see no reason to offer quarter on the playing field, no reason why they should not subject women to the same rough treatment they visit upon one another. Under such conditions, women usually lose. For in spite of the many films of mayhem featuring valorous female cops and starship troopers, no one has yet managed to repeal biology: most men are bigger and stronger than most women. Once upon a time, women knew how to turn male strength to their own advantage. By being physically weak but morally strong, women could claim protection. Feminist doctrine forbids that right and seeks instead a playing field tilted in female favor. Adjustments have also been made in the image department. Woman-as-victim has replaced the Amazon figure on the media stage. That switch has required additional accent on the image of man-as-victimizer. *Are there more brutes today than in yesteryear? Believing and expecting may well have helped to make it so*” *First Things* Feb. ’93.

ask a civil question. Are you an advocate of the modern theory of women's rights?' Bridling up with intense energy, she replied, 'Yes, sir, emphatically; I let you know that it is my glory to be devoted to that noble cause.' 'Very well Madam,' said he, 'then, the case is altered: *You may stand up like the rest of us men, until you can get a seat for yourself.*'" Of course, the man still should have given up his seat for the woman, but Dabney makes his point: "This was exact poetic justice and it foreshadows precisely the fate of their unnatural pretensions. Men will treat them as they treat each other: it will be 'every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.' There will be of course a Semiramis or a Queen Bess here and there who will hold her own; but the general rule will be that the 'weaker vessels' will succumb; and the society which emerges from this experiment will present woman in the position which she has always held among savages, that of domestic drudge to the stronger animal. Instead of being what the Bible makes her, one with her husband, queen of his home, reigning with the gentle scepter of love over her modest, seduced domain, and in its pure and sacred retirement performing the noblest work done on this earth, that of molding infant minds to honor and piety, she will reappear from this ill-starred competition defeated and despised, tolerated only to satiate the passion, to amuse the idleness, to do the drudgery, and to receive the curses and blows of her barbarized masters."<sup>228</sup>

Richard Weaver, in his 1948 classic *Ideas Have Consequences*, lamented the fulfillment of Dabney's prophecies. He shows the folly of the feminist agenda in going against nature and seeking the wrong kind of equality. He, too, is worth quoting at length: "I put forward here an instance which not only is typical of contempt for natural order, but which also is of transcendent importance. This is the foolish and destructive notion of the equality of the sexes. What but a profound blacking out of our conception of nature and purpose could have borne this fantasy? Here is a distinction of so basic a character that one might suppose the most frenetic modern would regard it as part of the *donnee* to be respected. What God hath made distinct, let not man confuse. But no, profound differences of this kind seem only a challenge to the busy renovators of nature. The rage for equality has so blinded the last hundred years that every effort has been made to obliterate the divergence in role, in conduct, and in dress. It has been assumed, clearly out of this same impiety, that because the mission of woman is biological in a broader way, it is less to be admired. Therefore the attempt has been to masculinize women. (Has anyone heard arguments that the male should strive to imitate the female in anything?)<sup>229</sup> A social subversion of the most spectacular kind has resulted. Today, in addition to lost generations, we have a ...lost sex. There is a social history to this. At the source of the disorder there lies, I must repeat, an impiety toward nature, but we have seen how, when a perverse decision has been made, material factors begin to exert a disproportionate effect. Woman has increasingly gone into the world as an economic 'equal' and therefore competitor of man (once again equality destroys fraternity).<sup>230</sup> But a superficial explanation through economic changes is to be avoided. The economic cause

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<sup>228</sup> 34-35.

<sup>229</sup> In Weaver's day, the answer was no. In our day, probably yes. But feminizing men is just as disastrous as masculinizing women.

<sup>230</sup> Egalitarianism breeds envy between the sexes as men and women compete on the same turf.

is a cause that has a cause. The ultimate reason lies in the world picture, for once woman has been degraded in that picture -- and putting her on a level with the male is more truly a degradation than an elevation -- she is more at the mercy of economic circumstances.<sup>231</sup> If we say that woman is identical with man except in that small matter of division of labor in the procreation of the species, which the most rabid egalitarian is driven to accept, there is no reason why she should not do man's work (and by extension there is no reason why she should not be bombed with him). So hordes of women have gone into industry and business, where the vast majority of them labor without heart and without incentive. Conscious of their displacement, they see no ideal in the task. And in fact, they are not treated as equals; they have been made the victims of a transparent deception. Taken from a natural sphere in which they are superior, they are set to wandering between two worlds...A social seduction of the female sex has occurred on a vast scale. And the men responsible for this seduction have been the white-slavers of business who traffic in the low wages of these creatures, the executives, the specialists in 'reduction of labor costs' -- the very economists and calculators whose emergence Burke predicted for us. The anomalous phase of the situation is that the women themselves have not been more concerned to retrieve the mistake. Woman would seem to be the natural ally in any campaign to reverse the trend; in fact, it is alarming to think that her powerfully anchored defenses have not better withstood the tide of demoralization. With her superior closeness to nature, her intuitive realism, her unflinching ability to detect the sophistry in mere intellectuality, how was she ever cozened into the mistake of going modern? Perhaps it was the decay of chivalry in men that proved too much. After the gentlemen went, the lady had to go too.<sup>232</sup> No longer protected, the woman now has her career, in which she makes a drab pilgrimage from two-room apartment to job to divorce court. Women of the world's *ancien regime* were practitioners of *Realpolitik* in this respect: they knew where power lies. (One wonders what Queen Elizabeth would have said had feminist agitators appeared during her reign over England's green and pleasant isle.) They knew it lies in loyalty to what they are and not imitativeness...If our society were minded to move resolutely toward an ideal, its women would find little appeal, I am sure, in lives of machine tending and money handling. And this is so just because woman will regain her superiority when again she finds privacy in the home and becomes, as it were, a priestess radiating the power of her sentiment. Her life at its best is a ceremony. When Yeats in 'A Prayer for My Daughter' says, 'Let her think opinions are accursed,' he indicts the modern displaced female, the nervous hysterical, frustrated, unhappy female, who has lost all queenliness and obtained nothing."<sup>233</sup>

What Kuyper, Evans, Dabney, and Weaver all have in common is a Trinitarian conception of men and women. They accept *both* equality *and* hierarchy as a part of human life under God's order. Men and women are equal in worth, but are different in

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<sup>231</sup> I know of a man who once offered up a sarcastic toast at an ERA rally: "To women: once our superiors, now our equals." Or as another put it: "Women who strive to be like men are not nearly ambitious enough."

<sup>232</sup> Note that Weaver sees clearly that men are to blame for the feminist movement. Many modern anti-feminists have failed to get this point, e.g., George Gilder's *Men and Marriage*. See Graglia 148 and *Biblical Horizons* #32.

<sup>233</sup> 177ff.

nature and therefore have different roles to play. There may even be a great deal of overlap in their respective natures and roles, but the God-created differences are to be joyfully embraced, not erased. We have already seen how this plays out in marriage: The man is the Christ-figure, the woman is the church-figure. He is to image Christ's love as he sacrifices himself for his wife; she is to image the church's submission as she voluntarily subjugates herself to her husband's rule. He is the head, providing direction, vision, and leadership; she is the body, under his care, provision, and protection.

This is not to say these scholars we have quoted were right in all respects. In some cases they may have over-reacted against the rising tide of egalitarian sentiment in their own day. The shortcomings of Dabney and Kuyper have been well documented and have left their stain on the Reformed church. We must not tolerate any prejudice against a person made in God's image on the basis of sex or race. A return to the 'old ways' is not the answer, and is impossible anyway. We must not confuse Victorian culture (or Confederate culture, for that matter) with biblical norms. Every civilization in the past, even at the peak of Christendom (wherever one happens to locate it on the map of Western history) has been flawed in numerous respects. But the Bible's role in shaping Western culture the last fifteen hundred years is undeniable. What the world – and, sadly, now much of the church -- does not understand is that we can forbid women from holding certain roles in the church without being unjust or discriminatory, without arbitrarily imposing some sort of 'glass ceiling' on women. It is simply unloving to place people in roles they are not fit for.<sup>234</sup> Thrusting women into places of church leadership is like using a teacup to drive a nail. The teacup is well suited for many purposes, but not for all.<sup>235</sup> We must learn to speak winsomely and wisely on this issue. But however clear and careful we are, we are bound to be misunderstood in our present context. This is the price of faithfulness, I am afraid. Jesus was not afraid to be misunderstood, to be mocked, to be persecuted. We must be willing to join him. We cannot water down God's truth to make it more palatable or trim the sails to go with the prevailing winds. We cannot apologize for the teaching of Scripture or make it die the death of a thousand qualifications. Let God be true, though all men are liars.

In family, church, business, politics, and every other sector of life, we must willing to embody the biblical pattern of male headship. It will not to do to limit this principle to the family; it must spill over to the rest of life. Our convictions about the roles of men and women must be public in nature. Vern Poythress has persuasively argued from 1 Tim. that male leadership is appropriate in the church because the church is a kind of family.<sup>236</sup> Paul's discussion of church life is dominated by the family metaphor (1 Tim.

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<sup>234</sup> "Another fatal misunderstanding of the NT's denial of the pastoral office to women is to suppose that it reflects a devaluation of women. It is precisely the opposite. It is because the NT unconditionally affirms the character and value of femaleness that it opposes women being pastors, for this is incompatible with their true nature. Putting it another way, God does not commission women to be leaders in his church, because he has entrusted them with other tasks compatible with their nature in which their femaleness can be fully developed. As Schlatter observes, the NT 'contains no dictatorial word, no word which is not meant to minister to us.' This applies to its refusal to allow women pastors" Neuer 175.

<sup>235</sup> And the same could be said of the hammer!

<sup>236</sup> Piper ch. 13.

1:2, 18, 3:2-5, 14-15, 5:1-5, 16, etc.; note Paul's use of household language in these texts and his sensitivity to age, sex, and status). If leadership in the home is masculine, by analogy, it should be in the church as well. Pastors are husbands and fathers to their people. These principles even flow out into society at large, since the church is a kind of micro-cosmos of the world, a mini-society that models life the way it really ought to be. Of course, the constraints are not nearly as defined in the broader society, but the principle applies nonetheless. So, Paul can call on wives and mothers to focus on home life (Tit. 2:1-5). This does not tie a woman to her home in a suffocating way. There is no biblical prohibition on women working outside the home, getting advanced educational degrees, becoming doctors and lawyers, or even climbing as far up the corporate ladder as possible.<sup>237</sup> But Paul's words should determine a woman's priorities. Her direction of sacrifice should be clear: She should never sacrifice her home for her work outside the home, but the reverse.<sup>238</sup> When women are more eager to embrace careers than their husbands and children, something is amiss.

The movement of women from home to workplace was anything but natural or necessary. "Contrary to popular belief, our present arrangement is not an economic necessity. The 19<sup>th</sup> century trend of filling factories by emptying homes and schools was successfully countered by the enactment of child-labor and 'family wage' laws, which protected home-life and preserved traditional sex roles. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century trend of filling offices and daycare centers by emptying homes was made possible by the enactment of laws that force employers to hire women and pay them as much as men. Affirmative action, aggressive government-sponsored litigation, judicial activism, and government subsidies for motherless childcare complete the coercive system forcing society into the feminist mold, against natural inclinations, traditional values, and Christian teaching." Egalitarianism can only be implemented through the welfare state. Those who desire to

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<sup>237</sup> Even though we must never go beyond Scripture in legislating what kinds of callings are appropriate for women, we must be wise. Consider the words of Packer: "[Gen. 2 and Eph. 5] continue to convince me that the man-woman relationship is intrinsically irreversible. By this I mean that, other things being equal, a situation in which a female boss has a male secretary, or a marriage in which the woman (as we say) wears the trousers, will put more strain on the humanity of both parties than if it were the other way around. This is part of the reality of the creation, a fact that nothing will change" (Piper 45; see also Piper 50f on occupations that "might stretch appropriate expressions of femininity beyond the breaking point").

<sup>238</sup> John Hamlin (*Ruth: Surely There Is A Future*, 52-3) tells a story that crystallizes my point: "A Chinese woman pastor's reflections on her dedication to the demands of church life [show that it] involved her in difficult choices between work and family. [She said], 'When I offered my life to the church, the whole family, including my husband and child, became a part of that offering. I get up very early in the morning to send my son to the child care center. [A pastor has many unexpected responsibilities, and] I cannot always be on time to pick him up [at the end of the day]. Sometimes I find him waiting, standing alone at the gate of the center like a motherless child. I cannot stop my tears from streaming down.'" We can sympathize with this woman (especially in light of the pressure the church in China is under) and appreciate her dedication, but needless to say, she made the wrong choice in light of Tit. 2. See Neuer 178: "Christian women in their marriages have ample opportunities as wives and mothers to live for others and sacrifice everything that hinders them from being unconditionally their husband's partner and their children's mother. Sadly, it must be said at this point that many Christian women are not prepared to realize with total consistency their nature and to be their husband's helpmeets and mothers as God intended. More and more are influenced by the spirit of the age and rebel against the man's headship and the total demand of being a mother" (178). See Graglia 12ff, 17ff, 24, 28, 34ff.

be faithful to Scripture must use every means at their disposal to fight it. “We must exchange our modern, individualistic, egalitarian, feminist values for the Christian principles set forth in the teachings of the Apostles and Saints.”<sup>239</sup>

Graglia points to the very deliberate efforts of feminists to raze the traditional biblically molded family to the ground. “Since the late 1960s, feminists have very successfully waged war against the traditional family, in which husbands are the principal breadwinners and wives are primarily homemakers. This war’s immediate purpose has been to undermine the homemaker’s position within both her family and society in order to drive her into the work force. Its long-term goal is to create a society in which women behave as much like men as possible, devoting as much time and energy to the pursuit of a career as men do, so that women will eventually hold equal political and economic power with men...Feminists have used a variety of methods to achieve their goal. They have promoted a sexual revolution that encouraged women to mimic male sexual promiscuity. They have supported the enactment of no-fault divorce laws<sup>240</sup> that have undermined housewives’ social and economic security. And they obtained the application of affirmative action requirements to women as a class, gaining educational and job preferences for women and undermining the ability of men who are victimized by this discrimination to function as family breadwinners. A crucial weapon in feminism’s arsenal has been the status degradation of the housewife’s role...All branches of feminism are united in the conviction that a woman can find identity and fulfillment only in a career. The housewife, feminists agree, was properly characterized by de Beauvoir and Friedan as a ‘parasite,’ being something less than human, living her life without adult capabilities or intelligence, and lacking any real purpose in devoting herself to children, husband, and home...Feminists view traditional nuclear families as inconsistent with feminism’s commitment to woman’s independence and sexual freedom...Operating on the twin assumptions that equality means sameness (that is, men and women cannot be equals unless they do the same things) and that most differences between the sexes are culturally imposed, contemporary feminism has undertaken its own cultural impositions. Revealing their totalitarian belief that they know best how others should live and their totalitarian willingness to force others to conform to their dogma, feminists have sought to modify our social institutions in order to create an androgynous society in which male and female roles are as identical as possible. The results of the feminist juggernaut now engulf us.”<sup>241</sup>

Why feminists glamorized the traditional male role of family provider, and deprecated the traditional female role of family caregiver, is hard to understand. Vlahos explains: “Before the 1960s American wives praised their husbands by calling them ‘good providers,’ and the ordinary working man wore as a badge of honor his ability to maintain wife and children without assistance. Joblessness wounded a man's pride as nothing else. Being a good provider often required a man to commit himself early to a calling and to stay in it until retirement, whether or not he enjoyed the work or was fitted for it. It was

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<sup>239</sup> Mitchell 145.

<sup>240</sup> See *Credenda Agenda* 9:3, p. 12.

<sup>241</sup> Graglia 1-3.

not only women who, trapped in household drudgery, were moved to cry, 'Is this all there is to life?' Men, too, have seen their ambitions thwarted, their dreams scattered while they kept noses faithfully to the grindstone. Nor might they make public complaint. The code of the provider did not permit that." There is simply no reason to believe the traditional female role was oppressive and the traditional male role liberating. As Vlahos goes on to point out, many disillusioned feminists are learning this lesson the hard way. Not a few 'liberated women' have found the work place less than fulfilling and have returned home to raise children and manage the household.<sup>242</sup>

G. K. Chesterton has a storehouse of wisdom on these issues. His praise for home, especially as the domain of the woman, is unequalled. His expose of the folly of anti-biblical family patterns is winsome and compelling. Time and time again, he uncovered the foolishness of feminist and egalitarian practices. Hear some of his gems:<sup>243</sup>

- On the normalcy of the traditional gender roles: "Those who believe in the dignity of the domestic tradition, who happen to be the overwhelming majority of mankind, regard the home as a sphere of vast social importance and supreme spiritual significance; and to talk of being confined to it is like talking of being chained to a throne, or set in the seat of judgment as if it were the stocks. There may be women who are uncomfortable in family life, as there have been certainly men who were uncomfortable on thrones. There are wives who do not want to be mothers; and there are lawyers who do not want to be judges. But, taking normal human nature and historic tradition as a whole, we cannot be expected to start the discussion by assuming that these human dignities are not the object of human desires. We cannot simply take it for granted that kings are humiliated by being crowned. We cannot accept it as first principal that a man is made judge because he is a fool. And we cannot assume, as both sides in this curious controversy so often do assume, that bringing forth and rearing and ruling the living beings of the future is a servile task suited to a silly person."
- On the excellency of the woman's domestic role, especially in training and educating children: "I have never understood myself how this superstition arose: the notion that a woman plays a lowly part in the home and a loftier part outside the home. There may be all sort of excellent reasons for individuals doing or not doing either; but I cannot understand how the domestic thing can be considered inferior in the nature of the thing done. Most work done in the outer world is pretty mechanical work; some of it decidedly dirty work. There seems no possible sense in which it is intrinsically superior to domestic work. Nine times out of ten, the only difference is that the one person is drudging for people she does care for and the other drudging for people she does not care for. But allowing for the element of drudgery in both cases, there is rather more element of distinction, and even dictatorship, in the domestic case. The most fully trusted official must very largely go by the rules and regulations established by superiors. The mother of a family makes her own rules and

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<sup>242</sup> *First Things* Feb. '93.

<sup>243</sup> G. K. Chesterton *Brave New Family*. See also 145ff, 171. See also Graglia 84, 93f, 365ff and Mitchell 131ff.

regulations; and they are not merely mechanical, but often very fundamental, moral ones. Nor are they merely monotonous in their application. Mr. Ford is reported, rightly or wrongly, as saying that the woman should not be in the business of the outer world, because business people have to make decisions. I should say that mothers have to make many more decisions. A great part of a big business goes by routine; and all the technical part of Mr. Ford's business goes, quite literally on oiled wheels. It is the very boast of such a system as this that products are made rapidly, because rigidly, upon a regular pattern, and can be trusted ninety-nine times out of a hundred to turn out according to plan. The little boy does not, by any means, always turn out according to plan. The little boy will present a series of problems in the course of twenty-four hours which could correspond to a Ford car bursting like a bomb or flying out of the window like an aeroplane. The little boy is individual; he cannot be mended with spare parts from another little boy. The mother cannot order another little boy at the same works, and make the experiment work. The domestic woman is called upon to make decisions, real or moral decisions, and she jolly well does. Some have even complained that her decisions were too decisive. I suppose the prejudice must have sprung merely from the fact that domestic operations occur in a small space, and on private premises. Even that is illogical enough, in an age that is so proud of the experimental history of science. The most epoch making scientific feats have been performed in a space no larger than a parlour or nursery. A baby is bigger than a bacillus; and even the little boy is larger and more lively than a germ under the microscope. And the science that is studied in the home is the greatest and most glorious of all sciences, very inadequately indicated by the word education, and nothing less, at least, than the mystery of the making of men. It does not seem to me in the least odd that so mysterious and momentous a business should have been surrounded by virtues of vigilance and loyalty, as by an armed guard; or that the partners in it should have a sealed and sacred relationship. We may or may not be content with the frigid phrase that the family is a child-rearing unit. But it is not unreasonable to expect a unit to have unity... Nothing is so important as training the rising generation. Nothing is really important except the rising generation. They tell us this over and over again, with slight variations of the same formula, and never seem to see what it involves. For if there be any word of truth in all this talk about the education of the child, then there is certainly nothing but nonsense in nine-tenths of the talk about the emancipation for the woman. If education is the highest function in the State, why should anybody want to be emancipated from the highest function in the State? It is as if we talked of commuting the sentence that condemned a man to be President of the United States; or a reprieve coming in time to save him from being Pope. If education is the largest thing in the world, what is the sense of talking about a woman being liberated from the largest thing in the world? It is as if we were to rescue her from the cruel doom of being a poet like Shakespeare; or to pity the limitations of an all-round artist like Leonardo da Vinci. Nor can there be any doubt that there is truth in this claim for education. Only precisely the sort of which it is particularly true is the sort called domestic education. Private education really is universal, Public education can be comparatively narrow. It would really be an exaggeration to say that the schoolmaster who takes his pupils in freehand drawing is



training them in all the uses of freedom. It would really be fantastic to say that the harmless foreigner who instructs a class in French or German is talking with all the tongues of men and angels. But the mother dealing with her own daughters in her own home does literally have to deal with all forms of freedom, because she has to deal with all sides of a single human soul. She is obliged, if not to talk with the tongues of men and angels, at least to decide how much she shall talk about angels and how much about men...We cannot insist that the first years of infancy are of supreme importance, and that mothers are not of supreme importance, or that motherhood is a topic of sufficient interest for men, but not of sufficient interest for mothers. Every word that is said about the tremendous importance of trivial nursery habits goes to prove that being a nurse is not trivial. All tends to the return of the simple truth that the private work is the great one and the public work the small. The human house is a paradox, for it is larger inside than out...In another small way there is something of illusion, or of irresponsibility, about the purely public function, especially in the case of public education. The educationist generally deals with only one section of the pupil's mind. But he always deals with one section of the pupil's life. The parent has to deal with, not only with the whole of the child's character, but also with the whole of the child's career. The teacher sows the seed, but the parent reaps as well as sows. The schoolmaster sees more children, but it is not clear that he sees more childhood; certainly he sees less youth and no maturity. The number of little girls who take prussic acid is necessarily small. The boys who hang themselves on bedposts, after a life of crime, are generally the minority. But the parent has to envisage the whole life of the individual, and not merely the school life of the scholar. It is not probable that the parent will exactly anticipate crime and prussic acid as the crown of the infant's career. But he will anticipate hearing of the crime if it is committed: he will probably be told of the suicide if it takes place. It is quite doubtful whether the schoolmaster or schoolmistress will ever hear of it at all. Everybody knows that teachers have a harassing and often heroic task, but it is not unfair to them to remember that in this sense they have an exceptionally happy task. The cynic would say that the teacher is happy in never seeing the result of his own teaching. I prefer to confine myself to saying that he has not the extra worry of having to estimate it from the other end. The teacher is seldom in at the death. To take a milder theatrical metaphor, he is seldom there on the night. But this is only one of the many instances of the same truth; that what is called public life is not larger than private life, but smaller. What we call public life is a fragmentary affair of sections and seasons and impressions; it is only in private life that dwells the fullness of our life bodily."

- On what he called the "wildness of domesticity": "For instance there is a plutocratic assumption behind the phrase 'Why should woman be economically dependent upon man?' The answer is that among poor and practical people she isn't; except in the sense in which he is dependent upon her. A hunter has to tear his clothes; there must be somebody to mend them. A fisher has to catch his fish; there must be somebody to cook them. It is surely quite clear that this modern notion that woman is mere 'pretty clinging parasite,' 'a plaything,' etc., arose through the sombre contemplation of some rich banking family, in which the banker at least went to the city and pretended to do

something, while the banker's wife went to the Park and did not pretend to do anything at all. A poor man and his wife are a business partnership. If one partner in a firm of publishers interviews the authors while the other interviews the clerks, is one of them economically dependent? Was Hodder a pretty parasite clinging to Stoughton? Was Marshall a mere plaything for Snelgrove? But of all the modern notions generated by mere wealth the worst is this: the notion that domesticity is dull and tame. Inside the home (they say) is dead decorum and routine; outside is venture and variety. This indeed is a rich man's opinion. The rich man knows that his own house moves on vast and soundless wheels of wealth: is run by regiments of servants, by a swift and silent ritual. On the other hand, every sort of vagabondage or romance is open up to him in the streets outside. He has plenty of money and can afford to be a tramp. His wildest adventures will end in a restaurant, while the yokel's tamest adventure may end in a police-court. If he smashes a window he can pay for it: if he smashes a man he can pension him. He can (like the millionaire in the story) buy a hotel to get a glass of gin. And because he, the luxurious man, dictates the tone of nearly all 'advanced' and 'progressive' thought, we have almost forgotten what a home really means to the overwhelming millions of mankind. For the truth is, that to the moderately poor the home is the only place of liberty. Nay it is the only place of anarchy."

- On egalitarianism: "In almost all the modern opinions of women it is curious to observe how many lies have to be assumed before a case can be made. A young lady flies from England to Australia; another wins an air race; a Duchess creates a speed record in reaching India; others win motoring trophies; and now the King's marksmanship has gone to woman. All of which is very interesting and possibly praiseworthy as a means of spending one's leisure; and if it were left at that, even if no more were added than the perfectly plain statement that such feats could not have been achieved by their mothers or their grandmothers, we would be content to doff our hats to the ladies with all the courtesy and respect which courage, endurance and ability have always rightly demanded. But it is not left at that; and considerably more is added. It is suggested, for example, that the tasks were beyond the mothers and the grandmothers, not for the very obvious reason that they had had no motor cars and airplanes in which to amuse their leisure hours, but because women were then enslaved by the convention of natural inferiority to man. Those days, we are told, 'in which women were held to be incapable of positive social achievements are gone for ever.' It does not seem to have occurred to this critic that the very fact of being a mother and a grandmother indicates a certain positive social achievement; the achievement of which, indeed, probably left little leisure for traveling airily about the hemispheres. The same critic goes on to state, with all the solemn emphasis of profound thought, that, 'the important thing is not that women are the same as men - that is a fallacy - but that they are just as valuable to society as men....Equality of citizenship means that there are twice as many heads to solve present-day problems as there were to solve the problems of the past. And two heads are better than one.' And the dreadful proof of the modern collapse of all that was meant by man and wife and the family council, is that this sort of imbecility can be taken seriously. The *Times* in a studied leading article, points out that the first emancipators of women

(whoever they were) had no idea of what lay in store for future generations. ‘Could they have foreseen it, they might have disarmed much opposition by pointing to the possibilities, not only of freedom, but of equality and fraternity also.’ And we ask – what does it all mean? What in the name of all that is graceful and dignified does fraternity with women mean? What nonsense, or worse, is indicated by the freedom and the equality of the sexes? We mean something quite definite when we speak of a man being a little free with the ladies. What definite freedom is meant when the freedom of women is proposed? If it merely means the right to free opinions; the right to vote independently of husbands or fathers; what possible connection has it with the freedom to fly to Australia or score bulls-eyes at Bisley? If it really means, as we fear it does, freedom from the responsibility of managing a home and a family, an equal right with men in business and social careers, at the expense of home and family, then such progress we can only call a progressive deterioration. And for men too, there is, according to a famous authoress, a hope of freedom. Men are beginning to revolt, we are told, against the old tribal custom of desiring fatherhood. The man is casting off the shackles of being a creator and a man. When all are sexless, there will be equality. There will be no women and no men. There will be but a fraternity, free and equal. The only consoling thought is that it will endure but for one generation....We do not mean that we are out of sympathy with the modern movements. We believe firmly in equality of the sexes, and we agree, moreover, that to use woman merely as a wooden idol is as bad as to use her as a wooden broom. But, in the interests of equality, we must say that we doubt whether the mere equalization of sports and employments will bring us much further. There is nothing so certain to lead to inequality as identity. A mere struggle between the sexes as to who will make the best tinkers, tailors, or soldiers, is very likely indeed to result in a subordination of women infinitely more gross and heartless than that which disgraced the world up to now. What we really require is a revised and improved division of labour. Whatever solution may be best (we do not pretend for a moment to have decided) it must be emphatically not be based upon any idea so paltry and small-minded as the idea that there is anything noble in professional work or anything degrading in domestic. Woman must not be elevated as the worst type of working man is elevated, merely (to use the silly phrase) ‘to a better kind of work,’ to choke the memory of his own class in a stick-up collar. If this is the only end of the noble promise of female emancipation, the intellectual woman’s lot will certainly be an ironic one, for she will have toiled to reach the haughtiest eminence from which she can look down upon the housemaid, only to discover that world has become sane and discovered that the housemaid is as good as she.”

- On the foolishness of feminism: “Some of us (who cannot be called conservative in the sense of content with social conditions, and who have even been called revolutionary for our attempts to improve those conditions) have nevertheless come to have a profound suspicion of what is called progress. And the reason is this: that there does not seem to be a principle, but only principles, of Progress. There is not a stream, but a sort of eddy or whirlpool. There could not be a stronger case than this particular ideal of Independence. It is not made the principle of social reform. Even the social reformers would be the first to say that they depend on dependence; on the

mutual dependence of comrades and fellow citizens, as distinct from the individualistic independence they would denounce as mere isolation. It is not made the ideal of the proletarian or wage earner, either by the Communist or the Capitalist system. Both the Communist and Capitalist are alike in not thinking of the individual worker as independent. They will discuss whether he is well paid, whether he is well treated, whether he works in good or bad conditions, whether he is dependent on a good or bad business or a good or bad government; but not whether he is independent. Independence is not made the ideal of the normal man. It is only suddenly and abruptly introduced in one particular relation, in the case of the exceptional woman. She is only independent of her husband, not independent in any other real relation of life. She is only independent of the home-and not of the workshop of the world. And it is supremely characteristic of this confusion that one well-meaning individual should make a yet finer distinction, and resolve to be independent in the dressing room, but not in the dining room...She is independent of the breadwinner, but not of the bank or the employer - not to mention the moneylender...It is mixed up with a muddled idea that women are free when they serve their employers but slaves when they serve their husbands....They [these 'liberated' women] would rather provide the liveries of a hundred footmen than be bothered with the love-affairs of one. They would rather take the salutes of a hundred soldiers than try to save the soul of one. They would rather serve out income-tax papers or telegraph forms to a hundred men than meals, conversation, and moral support to one. They would rather arrange the educational course in history or geography, or correct the examination papers in algebra or trigonometry, for a hundred children, than struggle with the whole human character of one. For anyone who makes himself responsible for one small baby, as a whole, will soon find that he is wrestling with gigantic angels and demons...But when people begin to talk about this domestic duty as not merely difficult but trivial and dreary, I simply give up the question. For I cannot with the utmost energy of imagination conceive what they mean....To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labors and holidays: to be Whitley within a certain area, providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes, and books; to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology and hygiene; I can understand how this might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people's children about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone? No; a woman's function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute. I will pity Mrs. Jones for the hugeness of her task; I will not pity her for its smallness....Modern women defend their office [jobs] with all the fierceness of domesticity. They fight for desk and typewriter as for hearth and home, and develop a sort of wolfish wifeness on behalf of the invisible head of the firm. That is why they do office work so well; and that is why they ought not to do it.... It is a mere matter of simple subtraction that the mother must have less time for the family if she has more time for the factory....[Proponents of 'women's liberation'] seem to express a sympathy with those who prefer 'the right to earn outside the home' or (in other words) the right to be a wage-slave and work under the orders of a total

stranger because he happens to be a richer man. By what conceivable contortions of twisted thought this ever came to be considered a freer condition than that of companionship with the man she has herself freely accepted, I never could for the life of me make out. The only sense I can make of it is that the proletarian work, though obviously more servile and subordinate than the parental is so far safer and more irresponsible because it is not parental. I can easily believe that there are some people who do prefer working in a factory to working in a family; for there are always some people who prefer slavery to freedom, and who especially prefer being governed to governing someone else. But I think their quarrel with motherhood is not like mine, a quarrel with inhuman conditions, but simply a quarrel with life. Given an attempt to escape from the nature of things, and I can well believe that it might lead at last to something like 'the nursery school for our children staffed by other mothers and single women of expert training.' I will add nothing to that ghastly picture, beyond speculating pleasantly about the world in which women cannot manage their own children but can manage each other's. But I think it indicates an abyss between natural and unnatural arrangements which would have to be bridged before we approached what is supposed to be the subject of discussion."

- On the foolishness of masculinism/chauvinism: "In any philosophic strictures upon women it was inevitable that Schopenhauer should be involved, though we fancy most women and most believers in womanhood would be much more annoyed by Schopenhauer's approval than by his denunciation....But the particular passage quoted in this book is so remarkable an instance of Schopenhauer's astonishing literary ingenuity and still more astonishing unreality of experience and outlook, that it is worth a moment's consideration. Women, says Schopenhauer, in effect, are the best guardians of children, because they are themselves children, 'puerile, futile, limited.' Now we know what women do for children; they nearly kill themselves over them with work and anxiety; the simple and obvious way, therefore, of testing the truth of Schopenhauer's comparison is to ask what children do for children. If the 'futility' and 'limitation' of a little boy of seven led him naturally to martyr himself for another little boy of seven, then the comparison is sound. But as we all know that they lead him to kick his shins and run away with his toys, the comparison is nonsense. It is surely strange that the name of philosopher should ever have given to a literary man, however brilliant, who was capable of basing an argument upon the amazing notion that people love what is like themselves. In fact, the whole of Schopenhauer's theory of the childishness of women is capable of the shortest and simplest answer. If women are childish because they love children, it follows that men are womanish because they love women."

Chesterton, no doubt, is overly romantic about the family and domestic life. But his enthusiasm and praise for the home, especially the maternal and wifely role of the woman, must be emphasized today as never before. He smashes to pieces the foolish worldview of modernist egalitarianism and points us to ancient Christian wisdom that is sadly lacking in today's church. We must ask: Why are we tempted to forsake our biblically-shaped heritage in this vital area of family life? Why are we embarrassed by

our tradition's nearly universal practice? Do we really believe modern, egalitarian families are happier or experience a greater quality of life than traditional families?

A few further words need to be said at this point about the so-called 'traditional family.'<sup>244</sup> Many are quick to point out that the traditional family is not really that old. It is basically the creation of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>245</sup> Why then do Christians have a stake in defending it? Two reasons spring to mind. First, Western civilization from the conversion of Constantine up to very recently has been deeply interpenetrated with Christian convictions. This is not to confuse 'Christian' and 'Western,' but it is to claim that our heritage has been deeply suffused with biblically-based practices. The rise of the 'traditional family' was simply the largely Christian response to changing technological and social conditions.<sup>246</sup> This is why we have an interest in preserving this kind of family structure (though we might be wise to change our rhetoric). Second, if our culture jettisons the traditional family model, what does it have to put in its place? In the absence of a more thoroughly Christian alternative, the traditional family must be maintained.<sup>247</sup>

Egalitarianism shows itself in the gross individualism that has come to characterize American life.<sup>248</sup> But it also shows itself in our theological poverty. Biblically, men are responsible for their homes. They are not guilty, personally, of all the sin committed in their homes, but they are accountable for it.<sup>249</sup> A husband, a wife, and their children, all stand as individuals before God. But they are also a collective, covenantal entity, a family, and God deals with them corporately as well. On this corporate level, the husband and father stands not just as a private person, but as a public person. He is the federal head, or covenantal representative, of his family.<sup>250</sup> If we do not grasp this concrete headship in every day life, how will we grasp the Bible's doctrine of original sin, in which Adam acted as federal head of the human family? How will we grasp the Bible's teaching on substitutionary atonement, in which Jesus Christ acts a new Adam and the federal head of a new family? Jesus, as head and representative, takes responsibility for the sin of his bride even though he is not personally guilty of it. Egalitarianism is a denial of this covenantal gospel.<sup>251</sup> It leads to an implicit Pelagianism. And it's no surprise that Pelagianism has in turn spawned all kinds of heretical, individualistic sects: If what I get from society is the bad example of Adam, I must leave society and seek salvation in isolation. The church, then, is no longer a means of grace, but a distraction

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<sup>244</sup> The 'traditional family' is basically the middle class nuclear family, consisting of a husband and wife and their children. Marital roles are clearly defined, with the husband as the breadwinner, and the wife as the homemaker.

<sup>245</sup> See Rodney Clapp *Families at the Crossroads*.

<sup>246</sup> In some ways, this produced a family more biblical than what had preceded it in Western culture. The focus on the nuclear family, rather than the extended family, comports well with Gen. 2:24.

<sup>247</sup> None of this is to deny that the 'traditional family' needs reformation. See Wilson *Federal Husband* 36ff, 74ff, for example.

<sup>248</sup> See Chesterton 55f for mockery of radical individualism as applied to the family. See also *Federal Husband* 17ff, 24ff, 88f, and Graglia 87.

<sup>249</sup> An understanding of this guilt/responsibility distinction was once very common in the Christian West. About the only place where it is still maintained in our culture is in the military.

<sup>250</sup> See Doug Wilson's works, especially *Reforming Marriage* and *Federal Husband*.

<sup>251</sup> The same can be said of politically correct language. See Graglia 155, Mitchell 34.

from the privatized quest to achieve redemption. From this Pelagian vantage point, every man is free to make up his own religion, all of which are of supposedly equal value. From egalitarianism, to individualism, and back to egalitarianism – it's a vicious cycle broken only by the Bible's Trinitarian, covenantal worldview.

If men are the covenant heads of their families, then our larger social crisis will be solved only when what Leanne Payne has called the “crisis in masculinity” is solved.<sup>252</sup> Neuer correctly diagnoses our ills and prescribes the right solution: “There has been no period in history in which it was more urgent to put into practice the biblical view of male and female than today. For at present God's standards, and particularly the divine ordering of the sexes, are being questioned and set aside on a scale never experienced before. Our era is marked by the attempt to level out gender distinctions, or at least reduce them to the undeniable physiological minima. This attempt has found its most radical expression in feminism...[I]t has led to a ...deep uncertainty about what are the roles of men and women. Today whoever dares to use such terms as manliness and womanliness runs the risk of being laughed out of court as hopelessly backward...Our age is suffering a serious loss of manliness. The term manliness may be briefly defined in its biblical sense by the willingness to undertake leadership in a responsible and devoted fashion in marriage, family, and society in accordance with God's standards. Judged by this picture of responsible manliness the present situation appears pretty dismal.”<sup>253</sup>

Neuer points to the flight of men from marital and parental responsibilities, and the disastrous effects of this on Western society: “When the man is no longer prepared in sacrificial love to assume his responsibility in marriage, in family, and in society, the woman is no longer ready to entrust herself to male leadership. The loss of masculinity therefore carries with it a loss of femininity. Male irresponsibility necessarily causes female irresponsibility: when man no longer accepts his male tasks, the woman also rebels against her tasks. It is just this development we can observe so clearly today...At bottom feminism is the consistent unloving answer to men's lack of love!...Whereas previously too many men fell into the trap of justifying their authoritarian domination of wife and family because they were head, today there is the opposite danger: Christian husbands, either for a quiet life or by wrongly adapting to the spirit of the age, are not ready to assume their position as head. Many Christian fathers, for example, deny their headship by leaving the spiritual upbringing of their children entirely to their wives and by so doing renege on their great responsibility to be spiritual head of the family...As head of the family, the father should be the first to arrange for the correct religious instruction and further upbringing of his family; he should be the first to pray and sacrifice with and for his family; he should be the first to exercise the right and duty to bless them; he should be the first involved in various decisions and measures to develop the spiritual life of the child...In a special way he and his own example should kindle the religious life of the family. He is a teacher, priest, and pastor of the family, or as

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<sup>252</sup> See her book *Crisis in Masculinity*. For an excellent survey of modern American distortions of masculinity, and their destructive consequences for society as a whole, see Weldon Hardenbrook's *Missing From Action*, especially ch. 1-2.

<sup>253</sup> 163-4. See *Federal Husband* 74ff on the failure of men to be masculine.

Augustine put it, he is bishop of the family. When Christian husbands put their headship into practice this way they fulfill their maleness in the way that God intended. Fulfilling the headship that the NT envisaged involves the man in a school of selflessness and love, in which he daily has opportunity to crucify his male egoism.”<sup>254</sup> If men had lived as Neuer describes, the feminist movement would have never arisen. Christian men must learn to praise their wives along the lines of Prov. 31:10ff.<sup>255</sup> They must be to their wives what Dabney called an “affectionate authority.”

The failure of men to be true to their God-given natures and God-ordained roles, then, is at the root of feminism.<sup>256</sup> Neuer, echoing Dabney and Weaver, points out the sad irony of the deep destructiveness of feminism for women: “The tragedy of feminism is that it propagates precisely the opposite of the real interests of women. Instead of helping women to develop their femaleness to its optimum, it tends to encourage them to imitate men. Women should participate to the same extent as men in careers, in society, and in politics. The ‘masculinisation’ of women that goes with this is bought at the cost of a radical devaluation of the most vital maternal tasks. The standard for feminist demands is paradoxically what *men* do, and not what corresponds to a woman’s nature. The price which women must pay for this is the loss of their femininity. ‘Woman becomes a caricature, a pseudo-being.’ Since feminism in effect works towards the destruction of femaleness, it proves to be a movement extremely hostile to women! This knowledge has led a former feminist to make this provocative remark: ‘The great historical disaster for woman is the idea of emancipation.’... ‘True emancipation of women should not attempt to stop the woman from being herself or take away from what is intrinsically hers.’...As men widely deny their God-given tasks, so many women rebel against their position in creation, which is to be the man’s support and to be mothers. This is seen, for example, in today’s widespread devaluation of those who are ‘just housewives,’ and of mothers who do not pursue a career...For many women, they still have not been able to give a total ‘yes’ to their life as wife and mother. Instead they seek fulfillment outside the family<sup>257</sup>...The problem for many women arises from the fact that their sacrificial task of motherhood is not properly recognized by their husbands.”<sup>258</sup> Men must not only repent

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<sup>254</sup> 166, 177-8.

<sup>255</sup> See Graglia 84-5, 88 96.

<sup>256</sup> “The growth of feminism and familial rebellion has many causes. But men must simply face the fact that one significant impetus has been male rebellion, which is called the abuse of authority. Christian men have not led properly because the church has not called them to submit properly and so learn how to lead in a distinctly Christian manner. I do not wish to understate the problem of wifely rebellion. Women rebel as well as men, and one particular form of rebellion is by attacking the authority of the husband. Yet if the truth be told, I think many men provoke their wives to rebellion, and this is pandemic” Gary Young *Common Practice* 1:5 p. 7.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. *Federal Husband* 34-5, 83ff.

<sup>258</sup> 166-7. The destructive results of male abdication is seen in men themselves, as well as in their wives and children. An egalitarian culture destroys itself from within, blind to its own folly. Chesterton’s words apply: “People do not know what they are doing because they do not know what they are undoing...On the whole, I am rather less interested in what people do than in why they do it” (60,63). Feminists still seem blind to how oppressive their agenda can be for women. Chesterton always said he fought *against* feminism because he fought *for* the feminine. That is, he attacked feminism and ‘women’s liberation’ on behalf of



of their sinful abdication, but must learn to praise their women and value them for their femininity and feminine roles.

We ultimately cannot escape God's equal-but-hierarchical order for humanity. The differences between men and women just won't go away, no matter what rights bill Congress happens to pass. We simply cannot repeal God's natural laws. We cannot redesign creation to fit our rebellious ideologies. God's natural pattern for men and women is built-in to the creation and is therefore unavoidable and inescapable. Think of Hollywood, which despite its official commitment to radical egalitarianism, still produces 'chick-flicks' for women and action movies for men. How long will we try to undo God's created order? We have to live in God's world, so we had better live God's way if we want to find satisfaction. As Piper argues, we need to recover the *sheer beauty* of the role relations God has established. "[T]here must be a portrayal of the vision that satisfies the heart as well as the head. Or to put it another way: we must commend the beauty as well as the truth of the vision. We must show that something is not only right, but also good. It is not only valid but also valuable, not only accurate but also admirable." We need to show by our godly lives in home, church, and society that the biblical vision, not the egalitarian pattern, "conforms to who we are by God's design [and therefore] is fulfilling in the deepest sense of that word."<sup>259</sup> We must bring back into sharp focus that which our culture has made so fuzzy, namely, the Bible's beautiful picture of male and female living together as an embodied parable of the Trinity and the gospel.

### Summing Up and Clearing Up

At this point, it might be helpful to take stock of all that's been said thus far and clarify possible misconceptions. The biblical teaching on these matters is crystal clear in some areas, but highly subtle and full of nuance in others, so we must be careful to do full justice to the whole counsel of God. In summary, this is our view of the biblical data on men and women as a whole: God created men and women in his image, so there is basic equality between the sexes. Any undermining of that equality is at war with the Word of God. But it is also clear he created men and women to be quite different in nature and function. Any undermining of those gender distinctions is at war with the Word of God. God made the man to serve as the representative head of the marital relationship. "He created *him*; male and female he created *them*." As Scripture unfolds it becomes evident God made the woman for the sake of man, to be his helper in filling and subduing the earth. He is to exercise loving headship over her, as she respectfully submits to him. Their callings are unique but complementary, and neither is complete apart from the other. The fall, in once sense, overthrew God's creation design for the man and the woman. Adam failed to lovingly protect his wife, but stood by and watched as she was helplessly attacked by the serpent. Rather than leading her into godliness, he followed her into rebellion by eating of the forbidden tree after her.

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women! See also *Federal Husband* 33 and Graglia 5f, 9, 12ff, 40ff, 106ff, 109ff, 295ff, 362-3, etc. Wendy Shalit in *Return to Modesty* shows the feminists are the true misogynists (142, 216, 229f).

<sup>259</sup> 33.

God's curses on the disobedient man and woman reveal the basic spheres in which they were to respectively function. The woman is cursed in family life, and the man in work life. These were their natural areas of responsibility, interest, and giftedness. However, in the context of the curse, God also promises healing grace. Rather than scrapping his original design for the creation, he will restore and perfect it, albeit now through a Second Adam who will do for the bride what the First Adam failed to do. The promised Seed of the Woman and Son of Man will crush the serpent's head and restore the garden-sanctuary to humanity (Gen. 3:15).

Because of God's covenantal commitment to maintain order and stability in his creation, male headship continues to be normative throughout Scripture, however imperfectly it may be exercised. Men are the leaders of their homes. They are the heads of their wives (Eph. 5:22ff) and responsible for their children (Eph. 6:4). Men are also leaders in their churches. There are no priestesses in Old Covenant Israel and no female pastors in the New Testament. Pastors, after all, represent Christ to the church and there would be a deep incongruity in having a woman represent the husband to the bride. However, as we move out of family and church, the gender roles are less well defined. The same basic creational principles apply, but with much greater flexibility. No business relationship is equivalent to a marriage covenant, so a woman may be over men in commercial contexts. No state is the bride of Christ, so there is no *a priori* absolute prohibition on women in places of civil authority.

We must exercise care here, lest we under- or over-interpret the Bible's fragmentary and highly occasional teaching on the place of women in society. The Bible is full of nuance at this point and thus blockheaded fundamentalists and rebellious feminists are bound to get it wrong. Fundamentalists want to "play it safe" and so they assume women should never have positions of leadership over men in any context whatsoever. They extend the absolute rules of family structure and church order into society at large. Extreme feminists, on the other hand, seem to think that women should have equal representation in every field in society. Women should do everything (or almost everything) in equal proportion to men. So, 50% of firefighters, CEOs, soldiers, and so forth, should be women. The "50/50" rule is necessary to prove the equality and interchangeability of the sexes.

The biblical view of the place of women in the broader society is much saner. Men are *always* heads of their households. Men are *always* pastors, teachers, and rulers in their churches. But God has not set down fixed structures for business, civil government, education, etc. These institutions do not have prescribed patterns of organization. The biblical position is more like this: *Ordinarily*, men will occupy positions of leadership in the culture and women will focus on more domestic roles. But outside the family and church, individual women may, without sinning, be called to fill leadership positions as well. In other words, *gender expectations are not individual laws.*<sup>260</sup> In society, gender norms are not *absolutes* for individuals, but generalizations, or orientations, that may be

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<sup>260</sup> I believe I owe this precise formulation to Mark Horne.

lived out in various ways. In other words, gender norms outside family and church are broad patterns that allow for flexibility in application. So, to take one illustration, if the most “Christian” candidate for political office in terms of policy-views and competence turns out to be a woman, I can in good conscience vote for her, even while affirming that *most* women will be called to stay at home as wives and mothers. We are dealing with generalizations and broad principles here, not absolute laws. Such situations, of course, require biblically informed prudence, but we must resist the temptation to create artificial, man-made traditions that go beyond what is written. To get a sense for how such generalizations work, consider an analogy. The statement “Men are leaders in society” is analogous to the statement “Men are taller than women.” It does not refute my point in the second proposition to point to 6’ foot tall woman and a 5’11” man. I have given a generalization that is true, notwithstanding various exceptions. And so it is with the first proposition. In a Christian culture, *most* positions of cultural leadership will be filled by men since that is what they are best suited for. But there is no divine *law* prohibiting women in positions of cultural leadership as well, even if it is not what most women were created and called to do.<sup>261</sup> Again, biblically shaped wisdom must be our guide.

So, as we seek to war against the rising tide of egalitarianism and feminism, we must not do so in the same blockheaded way the conservative churches have often done in the past. Perhaps our best strategy is to continually pray for strong, loving male leadership in the culture and to show forth the beauty of God’s pattern in our ecclesial and familial lives.

### **Contemporary Ecclesiastical Application: Some Test Cases<sup>262</sup>**

This is undoubtedly the most difficult portion of this paper to write. Here is where the rubber meets the road. Lord willing, the car will not run off the road into a ditch. I will take up five practical issues concerning the role of women in our local church bodies, hopefully applying the biblical and traditional materials to situations we currently face. I will not arrive at a definitive answer in each case, but at the very least intend to provide fodder for further discussion.

Because pastors and elders are overseers of the congregation, they are to be stewards of the gifts, talents, and resources God has entrusted to their flock. Godly elders will want to maximize the ministry members of the congregation can engage in. But they must also be faithful to God’s design and equipping. Thrusting an unprepared, unqualified person into a leadership role can be disastrous for everyone involved. Likewise, putting a woman in a role that really belongs to a man is like putting a round peg in a square hole.

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<sup>261</sup> If we ever find ourselves in a situation in which female leadership is becoming as common as male leadership, unless there are extenuating circumstances (e.g., war), we may safely conclude we are under the judgment of God. This is the point of Isa. 3:10-12. One of God’s primary ways of cursing a disobedient culture is by taking away strong, masculine leadership, giving instead wimpy, feminized men and women to lead.

<sup>262</sup> My ecclesiastical association is the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and I so will deal with issues in that context (e.g., I make reference to the PCA’s *Book of Church Order [BCO]*). My test cases make most sense when considered against the backdrop of conservative American presbyterianism. I have tried to choose issues that are most hotly debated in those circles.

While elders want to make the most of what God has put under their care, they must make sure God's work is done in God's way. With these considerations in mind, let us turn to our test cases.

1. May women assist in the collection of tithes and offerings and/or the distribution of the eucharistic elements?

The real question here is, "What are we symbolizing by including women in these functions? What is the theological significance of doing things this way?" There are no brute facts in God's universe, least of all in a worship service.<sup>263</sup> What will the use of women in this capacity communicate? What will we be saying to God, the congregation, and the world about the role relationships of men and women? In congregations already adhering to standard Reformed practice at this point, there is an additional question: "Why change a well-established practice of using men only in this capacity? What is to be gained (or lost) if we make this move?"

To better deal with this liturgical question, we need some philosophical background. In *On Christian Doctrine* (and a few other works), Augustine develops his philosophy of signs, giving us a semiotic anthropology and sociology. According to Augustine, signs make an impression on the senses, but also call to mind something beyond the sign itself. A footprint in the sand is a sign because it calls to mind the idea that someone has already walked on this part of the beach. Augustine's wide definition of signs includes words, body language/gestures, symbols such as flags and battle standards, clothing, music, coinage, smells, tastes, etc. For Augustine, culture itself is a semiotic system, a network of signs. We form and maintain relationships through the exchange of signs with one another. There is no communication, no personal interaction, apart from signs.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> The rule of *lex credendi, lex orandi* intensifies the importance of this kind of issue. Implementing certain practices in worship, even unthinkingly, will shape our theological convictions over time, often in ways we could not have anticipated.

<sup>264</sup> Augustine, and Aquinas after him, brilliantly apply this insight to the church and sacraments. Why has God given the church, even in the new covenant, material signs such as baptism and the Lord's Supper? "[R]ites are necessary to the body of Christ as a visible, public body. St. Augustine of Hippo said that men cannot be bound together in a religious association without some common signs and sacraments. For worship to be a public and social act, regular forms and patterns are necessary, lest worship become indecent and disorderly. The sacraments are the most essential of these public and social rites of the church... Although the ultimate cause of our salvation lies in the will of God, God uses means to achieve that salvation. The sacraments are means toward our individual sanctification and salvation. Salvation, however, is not a merely individual matter, but also restores our relationships to others. Since the sacraments are necessary for the being and for the health of the body of Christ, they are means of salvation in this social dimension" (Leithart, *Rite Reasons* #44). Or, as Aquinas says, "You cannot unite men in a religion unless they share visible symbols or sacraments keeping them together" (*Summa Theologica*, edited by Timothy McDermott, 549). In other words, the church could not exist as a publicly recognizable and distinct community in the world apart from semiotic (sacramental) practices and boundaries. Baptism and Eucharist form (or effect, or constitute, or bring into being) the church, even as the church herself performs these rites. Moreover, if God is going to enter into relations with humans, it must *ordinarily* be through the medium of signs. Word, sacraments, and prayer *constitute* our relationship to God (cf. WSC 85, 88; *Rite Reasons* #47 p. 3-4).

Augustine also distinguishes conventional and natural signs. Natural signs communicate “naturally”, i.e., there is a clear cause and effect relationship between the sign and the thing signified. For example, smoke is a natural sign of the presence of fire. Conventional signs are used to “clothe” or “incarnate” the thoughts of our minds in order to transmit them to others.<sup>265</sup> These signs are human inventions. Language is the obvious example. There is no clear and obvious connection between the word-sign “dog” and a four-legged furry creature with fleas that barks.

Obviously, then, community can only exist where there are (conventional) signs. Signs form and sustain community because they are the medium of relationships. But in another sense, the community precedes the signs because there must be a certain measure of consensus on what various signs will mean.<sup>266</sup> We must agree that “dog” will refer to the four-legged furry creature before we can begin to talk about dogs. Conventional signs will therefore vary somewhat from culture to culture, from community to community. Augustine’s 1600-year-old work actually sounds very timely and postmodern, especially in discussing the cultural relativity of language and customs.

But for Augustine, we must remember that not all signs are culturally relative. There are humanly instituted signs and divinely instituted signs. For example, astrology is a (demonically inspired) human system of signs. The religion of the Old Testament was a divinely appointed system of signs that served as types and shadows of the coming Messiah and his kingdom. The fault of the Jews, Augustine says, was in confusing the temporary semiotic, typological system that God gave them with the reality itself, leading them to reject Christ and the new signs he ordained. Human signs can vary, but God’s signs must be preserved.

What does this have to do with our original question about women collecting tithes and/or distributing the eucharistic elements? Everything. Using women in this way encodes or signifies a particular theology. It signifies our convictions about gender (at least partially). As Augustine recognizes, sin has gravely impacted our use of signs. Perverted signs arise from and create perverted communities, e.g., Babel or Mormonism. By God’s grace, in the church, our use of signs begins to be restored, and as this happens, a godly culture is formed (e.g., the reversal of Babel at Pentecost, and the culture described in Acts 2:41ff). If we use women in this way, will it be a perverted sign or a godly sign? Will it embody the truth about the place of women in God’s design or tell a lie?

To answer this question, we must deal with a couple more questions. First, we have to ask, What kind of sign is this action – divine or human? It is not a divinely instituted sign like the sacraments because the Bible says nothing directly about this role. Our liturgical

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<sup>265</sup> Of course, our mental processes are semiotic as well, a point Augustine sometimes failed to make clear. There is no such thing as a private, unmediated language. See Fergus Kerr *Theology After Wittgenstein*.

<sup>266</sup> This chicken-egg dilemma is solved by the Christian doctrine of creation: Language is God’s gift to man. Adam was created in God’s image, and therefore, as a speaking being.

practice on a matter such as this must be guided by the broad teaching of Scripture.<sup>267</sup> So, in that sense, it is a *human* sign, and therefore a matter of convention (though still under the overarching authority of Scripture). That leads us to a second question: What would our community perceive by this action on the part of women? Do we have a consensus of opinion on what this role means (the same way English speakers have a consensus on what “dog” means)? The point to be settled is this: *If collecting and/or distributing are perceived to be authoritative actions in our community, women are not to do these things, per 1 Tim. 2:9ff. But if they are not perceived as authoritative actions, we are free to do as we please (provided we are ruled by Christian charity and wisdom) and the use of women (and perhaps even children) would be appropriate.* In some churches, these roles may be deemed authoritative, for a variety of spoken and unspoken reasons. In other churches, they may not be seen as authoritative. Such is the way with human conventions.<sup>268</sup>

In my own ecclesial context, I’m not always sure how these actions are understood. I do know of one woman who came to my church from a more liberal (i.e., feminized) church. She said she was so excited her first week to see an “army” of men go forward to lead the congregation in the Lord’s Supper. Visible masculine leadership was reassuring to her that our church was willing to stand against rebellious cultural trends. It was a sign that we are a body that takes male headship seriously. But I know many others who think collecting and distributing in the aisles while standing is no different than passing the plates while sitting in a row. It seems to me it is up us to decide what kind of action this is, and therefore who can do it. So long as we give the flock ample instruction and act prudentially, I do not see how there could be any problems.

My own conviction is that using women in this capacity is not really giving them a leadership role over those seated in the pews. That doesn’t mean that changing<sup>269</sup> an

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<sup>267</sup> The Bible does not give detailed instructions on the logistics of these liturgical actions of collection and distribution. In the case of tithes and offerings, several methods of collection may be appropriate. Plates may be passed around, as most PCA churches seem to do. It would be fitting to bring the gathered gifts to the pastor at the front of the church in a processional and offer a wave-offering type prayer. Or, parishioners could bring their gifts to the front of the church and offer them, followed by the prayer. The collection should be a liturgical element, between the sermon and the supper, so collection boxes at the entrances/exits seem inappropriate. The Bible has more to say about the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper. We must perform the words of institution, under the leadership of an ordained male president, using the elements of bread and wine. But beyond that, the Bible leaves us to fill in the details. Some things can be clearly inferred from the biblical data (e.g., eating jointly rather than severally; sitting/reclining rather than kneeling; etc.), but other aspects of the sacrament are to be governed by human prudence and decorum (e.g., how to decorate the table/altar; how to distribute the elements; etc.). In such matters, we are looking for broad biblical warrant, based on general principles and patterns.

<sup>268</sup> Even in the PCA denomination, this role does not seem very clearly defined. The *BCO* acknowledges the collection of offerings as a part of worship, but gives no real specific instruction about how it is to be done or by whom (*BCO* 9-2, 54). It also lacks detailed instruction on the distribution of the bread and wine.

<sup>269</sup> While speaking of changes, there is something else to note. Historically, the deacons have always distributed the elements. Why? Because the Lord’s Supper is God’s diaconal action towards us; it is his act of mercy ministry. Giving the hungry free food -- the body and blood of our Lord -- would simply be an extension of the deacon’s role of ministering to the broken and needy (cf. the waiting on tables in Acts 6). This was the practice of the early church. Up until the Reformation, deacons were not only mercy ministry

established practice would be beneficial or wise, but it certainly isn't prohibited.<sup>270</sup> Here, we are in the realm of wisdom and preference, not iron clad law. My own ideal would be use ordained men (elders and deacons together) for both the collection of tithes and the distribution of the elements. But this is more a matter of tradition, based on my own ecclesiastical experience, than a matter of exegesis.

## 2. May women lead the congregation in public prayer and the reading of Scripture?

Often times, Christians will appeal to simplistic slogans to deal with complex theological and practical problems. In this case, one often hears, "A woman can do anything an unordained man can do."<sup>271</sup> There is some truth to this formula, but it certainly does not do justice to the biblical picture, and in the end must be dismissed as unhelpful. Laypersons are not androgynous creatures. The real questions we are dealing with here are simply these: May women act as public spokespersons for God? May they represent Jesus Christ to the congregation? It seems to me the answer is No to both these questions.

Women may not serve as liturgical readers for several reasons. Reading Scripture in public is a form of teaching and women are forbidden to teach in the assembly (1 Tim. 2:9ff, 1 Cor. 14:34f). Reading, in fact, is the purest form of teaching the Word of God; it is teaching par excellence.<sup>272</sup> Moreover, the God who speaks the Word to us is masculine in character, as we have seen, and so a masculine representative is more fitting to deliver his message, to serve as his herald. Lanier says, "To sanction the practice of women reading the Scripture lessons, to have them serve as mouthpieces for God's Word as it

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coordinators, but liturgical assistants to pastors (McKee, 40; Martimort 154, 156; J.J. Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* 194). Calvin assumed deacons would distribute the elements (*ICR* 1420) and the Puritans continued this practice (*Worship of the English Puritans* 207, 210). For Von Allmen's Calvinian recommendation, see 172, 194. Interestingly, today, most Presbyterian churches use elders, rather than deacons, to distribute the elements.

<sup>270</sup> Some may object to the way I have lumped together the collection of tithes and offerings with the distribution of the Eucharist. Perhaps women can do one but not the other. Perhaps they can help with the collection plate but not the sacrament. Again, an Augustinian semiotics can help us. If one action is perceived as authoritative, and the other is not, then they can engage in the action that is not perceived to be authoritative. My own conviction is that women serving communion is no more authoritative than my wife serving me dinner. The only one who actually exercises biblical, God-ordained authority in the Lord's Supper liturgy is the ordained man who plays the role of Jesus (i.e., who recites the words of institution, offers thanks for each element, hands the elements over to the congregation to be eaten, etc.). Whether or not those who assist the minister in the distribution of the elements also exercise a kind of authority over the congregation will be determined by custom and perception. (See Martimort *Deaconesses*, 141, 151, 167, 183, 195-6, 207, 246 for mixed historical evidence on the use of women as assistants in the distribution of the communion elements.)

<sup>271</sup> See Foh 252f.

<sup>272</sup> Lanier in *Logia* p. 35. While Willimon is wrong on the issue of women in the church, he does provide a helpful illustration that proves reading the Word really is a form of teaching. After describing the way a woman read the sermon text just before he preached, he says, "A whole new dimension of the story was opened up to me because of this woman's sensitive oral interpretation of the Bible" *With Glad and Generous Hearts*, 88. What Willimon's story illustrates is that public reading is a form of interpretation and therefore, a form of teaching. The early church had an order of trained Readers, all of whom were males (cf. Mk. 13:14). See Bordwine 204-5.

instructs his people, is simply one more step down the road of giving in to the challenge.<sup>273</sup> While there may be no ‘express words’ specifically forbidding women from reading the lessons in worship, there are also no ‘express words’ specifically forbidding abortion. And yet the principles of God’s Word stand. There has never been any doubt in the mind of the orthodox church in either case.”<sup>274</sup> The Westminster Directory, a product of the Westminster Assembly, ordinarily entrusts the task of reading specifically to the (obviously male) pastor<sup>275</sup> and roots the public liturgical functions of the pastor in the Old Covenant priesthood (cf. Dt. 31:9-11; Neh. 8:1-3, 13; in the OT it was standard practice for the priests to serve as readers). Ideally, an ordained man will lead us through the whole liturgy, though historically, the church has seen fit to allow the pastor to be assisted by other men in public reading.

The argument against prayer is more difficult to construct. If the church is the bride of Christ, doesn’t it seem women would be better representatives to speak to our husband on our behalf? However intuitive this may seem, the biblical evidence contradicts it. Obviously, 1 Cor. 14:34 seems to be at odds with women leading in prayer since this is one form of speech being discussed in the chapter.<sup>276</sup> In 1 Tim. 2:8 Paul specifically calls on men to lead in congregational prayer. Since he turns to address the women a few verses later, presumably they are excluded from this role of public prayer. But why? The bride-husband relation is obviously important for understanding congregational prayer. The King of kings invites his bride, the Queen of queens, to share her petitions with him. But this is not the only paradigm at work. The Bible is unafraid of mixing metaphors. The bride has a male head, Jesus Christ, who is our great High Priest. The bride never speaks on her own; she speaks through her head and in his name. Jesus is the true worshipper and pray-er; our prayer and worship are led by him (cf. Heb. 8:1-2).<sup>277</sup> He

<sup>273</sup> Note that the argument here is not a slippery slope argument (X leads to Y; Y is unlawful; therefore X must be unlawful too, even though the Bible does not say so), as the abortion example shows, but a deductive argument from biblical principle (WCF 1.6). Lanier’s point is that disobeying God’s Word here will make us vulnerable to disobey it in larger areas later. It is making a sinful concession to the feminist challenge.

<sup>274</sup> 35.

<sup>275</sup> “Reading of the word in the congregation, being part of the public worship of God (wherein we acknowledge our dependence upon him, and subjection to him,) and one mean sanctified by him for the edifying of his people, is to be performed by the pastors and teachers” (375). Cf. WLC 156. See *Order in the Offices* ch. 14. See also Von Allmen 135f.

<sup>276</sup> Granted, 1 Cor. 14 refers to prayer in tongues, but if inspired, tongue-speaking women were forbidden to speak in church, how much more an uninspired woman? Refer back to our discussions of 1 Cor. 11 and 14.

<sup>277</sup> J. B. Torrance *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* 14ff, 20ff, 53, “*The real agent in worship, in a NT understanding, is Jesus Christ who leads us in our praises and prayers, ‘the one true minister of the sanctuary’* (Heb. 8:1-2)...He is the High Priest who, by his one offering of himself for us on the cross, now leads us into the Holy Holies, the holy presence of the Father, in holy communion...The fact that Jesus Christ is the leader of our worship, the high priest who forgives our sins and leads us into the holy presence of the Father, is the central theme of the epistle to the Hebrews...Here is the one true priest, the one true worshipper, the leader of our worship, in whom alone the ‘ordinances of worship’ (Heb. 9:1) are perfectly fulfilled and through whom alone we can draw near to God...*God comes to us as man in Jesus Christ to stand in for us, pray for us, teach us to pray and to lead our prayers.* God in grace gives us what he seeks from us – a life of prayer – in giving us Jesus Christ and the Spirit. So Christ is very God, the God to whom we pray. And he is very man, the man who prays with us and for us.” (23, 57, 63, 64; emphasis added). Our heavenly intercessor is male, so our public earthly intercessors must be male as well. Torrance



represents us before the Father in every act of worship. Thus, the real question here is, Who may represent Jesus in representing the bride before God? Obviously, the bride needs a male representative since throughout the Bible corporate persons are men and Jesus himself is a man.

In short, masculine liturgical leadership is essential because it shows us it is the *Lord* who gathers and leads us in worship.<sup>278</sup> The bride does not gather herself or conduct her own worship. Rather, the ‘divine service’<sup>279</sup> is God’s saving action on our behalf through his

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demonstrates the problems that arise when the church exalts her own priesthood over that of Christ, 64. Unfortunately, Torrance compromises on his own insights into Christ’s unique, masculine priesthood in ch. 4. Torrance suggests the church has excluded women from church office simply because Jesus was a man. He says, “This portrays an inadequate understanding of the incarnation. The Son of God, in assuming our humanity, became a man, not to sanctify maleness, but our common humanity, so that, be we men or women, we can see the dignity and beauty of our humanity sanctified in him.” But Torrance has misunderstood the historic rationale for the church’s traditional practice. *Of course* Christ’s perfect humanity sanctifies maleness and femaleness, our common humanity. He is a corporate person in this respect. But the reason women have been excluded from office has more to do with the Father/Daughter and Husband/Bride symbolism of Scripture than anything related to whether or not femaleness was sanctified by the incarnation. If we took Torrance seriously, not only were women excluded from Christ’s sanctifying work in the church’s historic practice, but laymen (non-ordained males) were too! This is absurd. Surely the church has never claimed Christ only came to sanctify ordained ministers. Giving ordained men certain functional prerogatives in the community is no more degrading to women than to laymen.

<sup>278</sup> “The most profound reason for the Bible’s ‘no’ to a female priesthood and church leadership arises from the nature of the living God. The apostles and NT church leaders, just like the OT priests, had the task of being God’s representatives. In certain respects (namely in his essential nature as creator and father), the God revealed in Holy Scripture can be represented only by the male [cf. 1 Cor. 11:7]. Because God is *Father*, Jesus is God’s *Son* begotten of the same nature. Because Jesus was a *man*, only male apostles and church leaders can represent him. Since it is of the essence of the office of church pastor to represent Christ as the pastor of the church, it is intrinsically impossible for the office of parish priest to be filled by a woman” Neuer 173. Consider also Jordan: “[W]orship...[is] a dialogue between Father and Daughter, and Husband and Bride, the Paraclete assisting the Daughter/Bride, and led by one man who acts as minister and officiant...The leader in worship, representing Father and Husband, must be male. This is a ‘creation ordinance,’ part of God’s design. God is masculine and the creation feminine. Anyone reading the Word or leading in covenant renewal worship must be a man” “Four Liturgical Concerns” (unpublished paper) 1, 16. See also Jordan’s *Theses on Worship* 122. One can get a sense for the kind of confusion entailed in female liturgical leadership by imagining the book of Hosea turned inside out: What if God told a godly female prophetess to marry an unfaithful man? Would the book have made the same point?

<sup>279</sup> “The older way of designating the Christian liturgy is delightfully ambiguous. In the ‘Divine Service’ or ‘the service of God’ who’s serving whom? Is God serving us? Or are we serving God? Or is it both? Classically, the ‘Divine Service’ was thought to include both God’s service to us and our service to God. Even so, our fathers in the faith considered God’s service to us (the forgiveness of sins, the ministry [service!] of the Word, the Sacraments, etc.) as primary and our service to him as secondary response...Christian worship provides the occasion for God’s service to the church, that is, in the liturgy *God serves us* by granting us the gifts of the kingdom...We gather to receive. The Lord gives...Thus, God’s operations on us come first and our actions are in grateful response to God’s gracious activity. The fundamental purpose of the corporate Sunday service, therefore, is to receive by faith God’s gracious service in Christ and then to respond with thanksgiving in union with Christ *worshipping* the living God. This is what we call ‘covenant renewal worship’...Without this understanding, our worship inevitably degenerates into Pelagianism with a Calvinistic veneer. Our service is not first of all *for* God. First, we receive *from* God, then, *secondly*, we give back *to* him with gratitude precisely that which he graciously continues to give to us. He stands in no need of our service or praise. He has not created us primarily to get

means of grace.<sup>280</sup> God serves the congregation in calling us together to worship him, inviting us to confess our sin, cleansing us through the minister's declaration of

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glory for himself, but to distribute and share the fullness of his glory with his creatures. He is not like the pagan gods who need to suck up as much of the glory and praise they can. With the true God the determination of the amount of glory possessed by him and us is not a zero sum game. If he has all glory, that does not imply that we have none. If we possess glory, it does not come at the expense of his glory. Only when we refuse to acknowledge the source of our glory and assert our own over against his do we then fall under the condemnation of the prophets... Unfortunately, too often Calvinistic churches have embraced Calvin's soteriological reformation without also adopting or even understanding his correlative liturgical reformation. H. O. Old explains, 'What Calvin has in mind is that God is active in our worship. When we worship God according to his Word, he is at work in the worship of the church. For Calvin, the worship of the church is a matter of divine activity rather than human creativity'" Jeff Meyers *The Lord's Service* 13-15.

<sup>280</sup> Those in our circles who advocate using women to lead in leadership are often more deficient in their liturgical theology than their gender theology. This is not surprising given the liturgical poverty of the Reformed tradition. We need to understand the symbolism inherent in all liturgical actions. We need to understand that the liturgy is primarily God's work on our behalf, albeit through means. Though from a Romanist perspective, Novak's explanation of the pastor's liturgical role is helpful: "First, the Catholic priest has, in addition to these ministerial duties, a representative, liturgical role. In Catholic worship, the priest stands as a representative of Jesus Christ, head of the community and bridegroom of His bride, the Church. He stands as a representative figure in the ancient order of priests descending from Melchizedek. His being is ontologically marked with the priesthood forever. To be a priest is to be marked - chosen, gifted, indelibly altered - by God. This is the way in which the Catholic priesthood has been understood from the beginning. By contrast, most of the other world religions, in Christ's time as in ours, have orders of the priesthood that include priestesses. Until now the Catholic Church, like Orthodox Judaism, has not. Why not? The fact is clear: the selected representative of the community for the worship-prayer of the people has been unmistakably and deliberately differentiated by gender. And the ground of this selection has been canonically and with all due solemnity codified as a gift given solely to (relatively few) males. Second, the maleness of the priesthood is consistent with the metaphors of gender through which, predominantly, God has chosen to reveal Himself both in the Scriptures and in the long tradition of theological reflection. With respect to the doctrine of the Trinity, Jesus Christ spoke of Himself as the Son of God and taught us to pray 'Our Father.' He said that He was 'sent by the Father,' Who would afterwards send also 'the Holy Spirit.' Gender differentiation seems essential to the metaphor of the 'generation' of the Persons of the Trinity. Poor as human metaphors must be when used of God, gender differentiation is clearly signaled in such frequently employed terms as 'Father' and 'Son.' Are we to hold that such symbols have no significance in revealing the nature of God? That they are required merely for transient reasons? Similarly, gender differentiation seems crucial to the Christmas story that reveals the mystery of God's becoming flesh, the Incarnation. One cannot easily imagine in the Christmas narrative the First Person of the Trinity being represented as 'God the Mother,' inseminated by a human male. It is mystery enough that a human female, Mary, 'conceived of the Holy Spirit,' one with the Father, should bear a human-divine Son. But in this case the humanness of the Son is given concrete meaning. The Son of God is born from the womb of a human mother, nursed by her, brought up by her as other sons are brought up by their mothers. In this respect, the Catholic priest, male as he has always been, is an effortlessly symbolic representative of 'the Son of God,' bringing before His Father His bride, the Catholic people. Gender differentiation is essential to such a role, and the gender of the priest is symbolically consistent with that differentiation. This is no conclusive argument, only an argument from what is 'fitting.' It does bring to light, though, why previous ages found the selection of the male so effortlessly plausible. Finally, one can easily imagine that God in becoming 'man' (in the gender-neutral term represented in the Nicene Creed's '*et homo factus est*') could have been sent as 'the Only-begotten Daughter.' But there seem also to have been weighty reasons why the Incarnation was not realized through a female Messiah but through a male. In becoming flesh, God could not simply appear as 'a person.' He had to accept the limits imposed by gender differentiation. He could have come in female flesh, as Daughter, but He did not; He chose to come in male flesh, as Son. To be sure, mystery surrounds this choice, as it does all human conceptions of and language about God's

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actions in history. This mystery offers fertile, and no doubt fruitful, grounds for wonder, awe, and meditation. But there can be no doubt about the *fact*. Christian faith was by God's deliberate will expressed in the language of gender differentiation and, specifically, in the self-revelation of God as Father and God as Son. Together with the Holy Spirit, these two are three-in-one, a communion of three distinct Persons.... [Jesus] 'became one of us.' This entailed assuming human flesh, with all its differentiation and limits - in short, it entailed a choice between becoming male or female. There was no halfway position. In sum, the Catholic priest is a representative figure selected according to the conditions of embodied, enfleshed persons in concrete human history. The choice was made from all eternity. The selection of males alone as Catholic priests is a sign (a sacrament, bearing grace) of several important revelations about God: about the Trinity, about the Incarnation, about the relation of Christ and His people, and about the importance of gender differentiation... [U]nder the conditions of human flesh and actual history, it is a more accurate sign of the interior life of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, and of the relation of Christ to His people if the priest is clearly differentiated and selected as a male rather than as a female. Matter is the principle of individuation, and an emphasis on flesh safeguards respect for human individuality, even as it differentiates humans from angels. The priest is male because gender differentiation is significant to the self-revelation of God in history... Why is the priest male? It figures. It fits. The priest's maleness is a reminder of the central role played in our salvation by the sacramentality of human flesh - not flesh-in-general, but male flesh. 'This is my body,' he says in the place of Christ, the male Christ. 'This is my blood.' It is not an angel we eat and drink, not spirit, not a (disembodied) person: but the male Christ, body and soul, human and divine person. The priest's maleness reminds us with Nicea: '*Credo in unum Deum, PATREM omnipotentem... .*' We believe in the Father almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit by the Virgin Mary, '*et homo factus est.*' The Word was made flesh, *caro* (John 1:14) - not 'person,' not hermaphrodite, and not female, but male. But, a feminist might object, 'By the same logic, Jesus was a carpenter and a Jew, and that does not mean that all priests must be carpenters and Jews.' Except, of course, that it is *not* the same logic. For an embodied person, being either male or female is of the essence of being human; whereas to be Jewish or Irish, carpenter or professor of logic, is only an accident of culture and circumstance. That the priest be male is fitting to the essence of Jesus, a divine Person embodied as a male, a fully human male. One can 'see Christ' in every human being, male or female, but a female cannot represent the male Christ before the community. Not, at least, without jangling symbols beyond their meaning, without communicating something essentially different. In order to believe that Catholic priests may also be female, one has to believe that sexual differentiation does not illuminate the self-revelation of God in the doctrines of the Trinity; the Incarnation; the shocking transvaluation of sex roles in the moral teaching of Jesus; the spousal relation between Christ and his people; the precisely detailed emphasis of Christianity on the real flesh (including the resurrection of the flesh); its opposition to angelism [i.e., Gnosticism] under all its forms; and the exact complementarity (not interchangeability) of male and female in the mystery of God's self-communion in matrimony. The institution of female priestesses would reverberate off-key through most of the major symbols of God's self-revelation. The beautifully wrought sexual differentiation of the narrative of Christian faith will have buckled. And its collapse will have cracked every arch in its theological architecture. In order to believe that Catholic priests may also be female, one has to believe, further, that the traditional hierarchy of the Church is not now a sacramental sign of God's commitment to this people until the last day but, rather, an unfaithful bearer of errant patriarchy, sexism, and injustice. One has to believe in some ideal Church of the future, separate from the 'oppressive' Church against which feminists rage. One has to reject the real, concrete Church of today as sacrament, and to cast it aside as a source of injustice and alienation, an obstacle to God's grace and an abomination. One has to see in the Vicar of Christ, stubbornly insisting on fidelity to God's word, not the presence of Christ but the disfigurement of Christ. Indeed, one has to see in his claim that maleness is essential to the validity of orders an impediment to the true sacrament. One has to believe that in the *matter* of the sacrament of orders, maleness in the subject signifies nothing of essential importance, and femaleness in the subject alters no sign essential to the faith. One also has to believe that in the authentic *form* of the sacrament the intention of Christ, of the orthodox tradition, and of the Church is now to select females as well as males, and that this selection will have no bearing on the cultural significance of any other Christian teaching. It is entirely possible that there might somewhere be a lovely, haunting religion worshipping a Goddess, cherishing a female messiah, and liturgically represented by priestesses. But whatever such a religion might be, it will not be Christianity... Down one path, orthodox teachings seem coherent, down the other, a great

absolution, consecrating us through the preaching of the word, communing with us in the Lord's Supper, and commissioning us to carry forth his kingdom into the world.

How does this work out? In the God-manward direction, a man must lead because the presider represents the Father to us. In the man-Godward direction, a man must lead in order to represent our representative Head, Jesus Christ, who leads us in our worshipful response (cf. Heb. 2:12).<sup>281</sup> As Meyers says, "It would upset the entire fabric of God-ordained role relationships within the church and home [for a woman to lead in worship]. The symbolism of male headship must be maintained in the corporate liturgy of the church. The church submits to her Lord as she receives from him the Word and Sacraments by the mouth and hands of the pastor. The pattern of male headship is deeply rooted in the created order (Gen. 2:15-24; 3:15-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15; 1 Pt. 3:1-7) as well as the re-created order of the Church (1 Cor. 11:3-16; 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-33). These role relationships are non-negotiable."<sup>282</sup>

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deal seems up for grabs. That things will go worse in the feminist churches is a wager, I think, with odds higher than Pascal's" *First Things* April '93. Whatever problems there may be with contemporary Roman Catholicism (and there are many, no doubt), we evangelical Protestants should be thankful for their strong and coherent stance on this issue. Much of what Novak says ought to be reconfigured into Protestant form, but most of his basic points are congenial to such a project.

<sup>281</sup> See J. B. Torrance 56, on Christ as mediator of worship. Also Meyers (15): "I do not mean to suggest that our response is not also included in God's gracious provision in Christ. It is. It is not as if God works but then stops just where our human response begins. Rather, God's grace includes precisely the human response to the extent that our human response takes place 'in Christ.' God is at work in us even when we are at work praising him. We 'work' at thanking and praising him because he is at work in us. The entire process of covenant renewal or sacrificial worship can only be performed as we are graciously given to participate in the priestly work of Jesus Christ. Our offering of ourselves as Christians will always be a participation in Jesus' own priestly offering of his humanity to the Father in the Spirit."

<sup>282</sup> 12. Meyers also notes the leader in Word and Sacrament should ordinarily be an ordained man, though historically the church has used non-ordained male liturgical assistants. Neuer (173) further explains the principle of male leadership in the church: "Since in Scripture the man is placed over the woman because of the divine creation ordinance, women cannot exercise church leadership without setting aside male headship and thereby coming into conflict with the creator's will and their God-given nature as women. Saying 'yes' to spiritual leadership by women would according to biblical conviction be saying 'no' to God's creation and therefore be rebellion against the creation arrangements." From a Roman Catholic perspective, consider Benedict Ashley as quoted by Aidan Nichols (*Christendom Awake*, 126-7, 129, emphasis added): "Men alone are qualified for this particular function in the church not because they are superior as persons, but because they are qualified to be spiritual fathers and women to be not spiritual fathers, but spiritual mothers. The exclusion of women from the priesthood, therefore, is not an injustice but a simple recognition of the woman's special gifts and special contribution to the church. In fact the church would be unjust to women if it were to call them to a function inappropriate to their special gifts, just as it would be if it called men to an inappropriate role and ignored their special gifts as men' ... Ashley's argument turns on the twin postulate that '*the essential function of the priesthood ... is representational, iconic, symbolic, sacramental*' and that Christ's maleness – as Son, Bridegroom, New Adam – is of considerable theological importance when seen against the backdrop of the proper (and not merely metaphorical) analogy in Scripture between God and the earthly father who gives us life and loves and cares for us – but does not like an earthly mother, produce (pantheistically) out of himself. As he writes '*of course women image [Christ] as he is human, but they are not well qualified to represent him precisely as the New Adam and the image of God as Father.*'" This entire liturgical-symbolic matrix is often missing from minimalist Protestant notions of worship, but must be recovered. We should not be afraid to borrow from the broader catholic tradition of the church in doing so.

We must be careful at this point to distinguish leadership from participation in the liturgy, lest some absurd conclusions be drawn. Women are free to participate with the rest of the royal priesthood in singing, corporate prayer, and other liturgical responses. Women can clearly be choir members (1 Chron. 25:5-6, Ezra 2:65, Neh. 7:67). These actions do not involve exercising authority over the assembly and do not involve a symbolic representative role.<sup>283</sup> All of this squares with our study of the biblical data surveyed earlier in this paper.

Finally, we should deal with a couple of counterarguments. First, one might appeal to 1 Cor. 11:2ff. Assuming the modern interpretation that these verses describe women praying and prophesying in church, why can't women do these things today?<sup>284</sup> Paul undoubtedly has in view revelatory charismatic gifts (inspired speech) in this section, as argued for above under the section "The Biblical Witness." These gifts were transitional in nature, serving as signs of the coming of the new age (Acts 2) and the passing away of the old (1 Cor. 14:20-25). With the destruction of the temple, ending the old order, and the completion of the canon, these gifts passed away (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8ff). Uninspired women, then, would fall under the instructions given in 1 Cor. 14:33-35 and 1 Tim. 2:8ff.

Second, one might argue that women can do these things provided they are done under the oversight of an all-male session. The pastor and session, in other words, could delegate the responsibility to publicly read and pray to a woman, perhaps with some indicator<sup>285</sup> that men are still overseeing the worship service, and therefore the woman is not technically exercising authority. This argument is shot through with holes. Delegation has its limits. The OT priests, for example, could not delegate their tabernacle duties to another tribe. A man cannot delegate the duty to make love to his wife to another man. Pastors may not ordinarily delegate the sacraments to a non-ordained person, except possibly in an emergency. If the delegated task is forbidden to the one performing it, it cannot lawfully be delegated.<sup>286</sup>

### 3. May women serve as deaconesses?

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<sup>283</sup> This distinction is very common and basically unambiguous. Aquinas, for example, "finally decides women may not teach publicly in the church. He distinguishes private speech, which 'becomes a woman,' and public speech, before the 'whole church,' which does not. Public speech 'is not conceded to women' because they 'must be subject to man, according to Gen. But to teach and persuade publicly in the church is not the task of subjects but of prelates.'" See Doriani 230f. The distinction between public and private speech forms should be self-evident, as should be the distinction between individual, authoritative speech and corporate, participatory speech. Those who claim our position should consistently require women to be absolutely silent, thus attempting a *reductio ad absurdum*, have not been fair to the nuanced and balanced nature of the position we have presented.

<sup>284</sup> Remember, patristic, medieval, Reformation, and early post-Reformation interpreters were united in viewing this passage as a reference to women praying and prophesying *outside* the church assembly, in which case this text cannot be used to prove women may lead gathered worship. Weeks provides a compelling case that the passage refers to a liturgical assembly, but is actually intended to shame women into silence. So the modern interpretation dealt with here is hardly a given.

<sup>285</sup> A head covering perhaps? See Foh, 251-2.

<sup>286</sup> Bordwine 204.

A key distinction to make within the church is that between servants and servant leaders. All of us are called to serve, but not all of us are called to positions of servant-leadership. This distinction is implicit in *BCO* 7-2. Elders are servant-leaders, while the diaconal office is one of only service, not rule. Based on everything we have said thus far, we can conclude that positions of formal servant-leadership are not open to women (though, of course, women may lead other women in various capacities). In other words, they cannot be elders or pastors. But because *BCO* calls the diaconate an office of service, not leadership, a good *prima facie* case can be made that this is an office open to women.

This question is really of a piece with the first question we took up. If women assist deacons in collection and distribution, then, *de facto*, we have deaconesses. We have already symbolized that the deacons can have female assistants. But we can go further. In most churches, a good deal of the mercy ministry is done by women. When a meal needs to be made, who usually makes it? Who bakes the communion bread? Who cares for the children of the church? Many times, these functions are performed by women. Every healthy church, it seems, has deaconesses by default, whatever they may be called, and however informal their organization may be.

We have already seen some biblical evidence for deaconesses from the OT and NT. 1 Tim. 3:11 is probably the key text. It seems to indicate (contra NIV) that the church may have a group of qualified women who may or may not be married to male deacons and who perform a feminine version of the deacon's duties.<sup>287</sup>

Other noteworthy deaconesses passages include 1 Tim. 5:3-10 (these widows were probably deaconesses of some sort),<sup>288</sup> Titus 2:3-5 (perhaps these older women have a teaching diaconal ministry with the young women), and Romans 16:1 (Phoebe seems to have been a helper of Paul and a female deacon from her church). Thus, I conclude that the biblical evidence warrants a ministry of women, under male authority, assisting the deacons in their various tasks, and performing mercy ministry that is especially appropriate to women.

This leads us to another question: Are these female deacons to be ordained, as their male counterparts are? This depends on one's theology of ordination. For some, ordination is inextricably linked with authority. If this is really so, then male deacons probably should not be ordained, since their office is not one of rule. But if ordination is seen as simply invoking the blessing of the Spirit to further gift and equip a person for ministry, if it seen as designating a person to a particular function within the body, then there really is no objection to the ordination of women deacons.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> This is consistent with *BCO* 9-7.

<sup>288</sup> Calvin connected these widows with female deacons.

<sup>289</sup> See Edmund Clowney, *The Church* 234-5 and Foh 232-246, especially 235. The PCA *BCO* makes no allowance for the ordination of women in this way. Thus, if we do not ordain these women, it seems the least we can do is 'enlist' them in an 'order.'

4. May women teach men outside of gathered worship (Sunday School, Home Fellowship Groups, etc.)?

Service in Christ's church is always qualified by numerous factors. For example, young children may be gifted by God in a variety of ways, but their gifts have usually not yet matured to the point where they can effectively serve the whole body (though they should be encouraged to do all they can!). For an adult, the particular gift package God has blessed someone with will provide parameters for ministry. A person possessing the gift of encouragement but lacking the gift of rule should study ways to encourage people and not fret over gifts he does not have. In other situations, a particular season of life will curtail what kinds of ministry a person can enter into. A mom with five or six young kids running around the house may not be able to teach as many Bible studies or visit as many sick people as she once could. But age, giftedness, and life circumstances are not the only qualifiers put on how we can serve. Gender is another factor that must be dealt with. God has ordained that the sexes serve in ways appropriate to their natures and roles. What does this mean for teaching in the life of the church that takes place outside gathered worship? Can women lead mixed Sunday school classes or small group Bible Studies?

I would answer a qualified No to these questions, but not an absolute No. In general, the pattern of male headship that we have already seen demonstrated in Scripture must govern these kinds of situations. True, Paul nowhere explicitly forbids women from teaching in these extra-liturgical settings.<sup>290</sup> But there are still intra-liturgical principles that must be applied. In other words, the principles that govern the relations between the genders in the worship assembly are not arbitrary, but simply intensifications of the role relations they are to manifest in all of life. Let's use an analogy to explain. Paul gives specific instructions in 1 Tim. 2:9 that women are to dress modestly in church. Does this mean women can dress *immodestly* outside of church? If a Christian woman went to the grocery store scantily clad, and was confronted about it, could she defend her actions by claiming 1 Tim. 2:9 only applied while she was in church? No, of course not. Paul has simply taken a principle and applied it to a special context – gathered worship. The same is true of Paul's instructions a few verses later, when he says a woman is not to teach or rule over a man. There is a principle embedded in Paul's words here that applies in all of life, as his appeal to the order of creation and fall shows.

However, life is complicated, and principles do not always play themselves out in a neat and clean fashion. In one sense, all of us teach one another. As we sing together, we are all co-teachers (Col. 3:16). My wife and even my children teach me a great deal as we move through life together, pursuing Christ-likeness. But this kind of teaching, in the broadest possible sense of the term, is not what 1 Tim. 2:12ff has in view and is quite different from what goes on in a class setting. We also know from the examples of Abigail, Huldah, Priscilla, and others, that women can teach men privately and informally, provided they do so in a feminine way. It seems that more regular, formal

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<sup>290</sup> Of course, the apostolic church probably did not have Sunday school or small groups as we know them, so there was no occasion to address these issues.

teaching situations are to be *usually* led by men, especially ordained men. But *on occasion* there may be good reason to allow a woman to speak to a mixed group. For example, consider a woman with an extraordinary testimony, a woman making a missionary report, a woman who has some area of expertise not shared by any man, a woman giving men insight into how to better love their wives, etc. In these situations, it seems the session may allow a woman some kind of teaching opportunity, provided it is clear she is not exercising any direct authority over her audience (or at least the men in her audience).<sup>291</sup>

Now, unfortunately, some push caveats to extremes or disregard qualifiers, such as those made above. Some will want to ignore the subtleties of the argument I have presented and say, “Well, if women can teach mixed groups, they can teach as regularly as men.” Sure there is some subjectivity involved (or, better, wisdom), but we must remember that women teaching in mixed settings should be the exception, not the norm. Elders, of course, will have to decide on a case-by-case basis how often is too often. They must be careful to always maintain the principle of male headship. Women with the gift of teaching should be encouraged to use their gift primarily with other women (cf. Tit. 2).<sup>292</sup>

#### 5. May women vote in congregational meetings?

While the Bible makes it clear that congregations ordinarily choose their leaders (Dt. 1:13; Acts 6:1ff, 14:23), it says very little about how this is to be done or who is to vote. As far as I can discern, whenever this biblical principle of suffrage has been upheld in the church’s history, until the rise of modern egalitarianism, voting was done by households through their male representatives. Today, this seems primitive to us, because most moderns think primarily in terms of individuals and not in terms of covenanted units, such as the family. When we look back over past practice we assume that individual men got to vote and individual women did not, and sense injustice. But actually, in the older model, *no* individuals voted. Rather households voted through their representatives (usually the husband/father). It was not that Joe Smith voted and Sally Smith did not; rather *the Smiths* -- the family unit -- voted.<sup>293</sup> This principle of covenant representation, as we have already seen, is deeply rooted in the biblical narratives of the fall and redemption. Adam and Christ acted not simply as private individuals, but as corporate persons on behalf of those covenanted to them. Husbands and fathers, by analogy, did the same in church elections. Thus, the church’s voting practice, till recently, embodied one her core theological commitments.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Neuer helpfully explores exceptional situations on p. 176.

<sup>292</sup> This agrees with Neuer 176-7.

<sup>293</sup> 1 Cor. 11:2ff, Eph. 5:22ff imply husbands are heads (and therefore representatives) of their wives. Thus, when they cast votes, their wives (and children) were voting in them. See Doug Wilson and Doug Jones *Angels in the Architecture* 113ff, Thomas M’Crie “On the Right of Females to Vote” 672-3 in *Miscellaneous Writings*.

<sup>294</sup> There is also a pragmatic benefit to household voting: fewer votes need to be counted. If a woman is in submission to her husband, presumably they will cast identical votes in church elections. The results will be the same as if only heads of households voted, but twice as many ballots will have to counted.



Does this make our now standard practice of individual voting in church a sin? No, it seems not. In point of fact, a good case can be made for our current practice. It is certainly true that the Old Covenant church was comprised of households (Num 1:16, 7:2, Dt. 1:15, 5:23; Josh. 21:1, 22:30; etc). The priesthood also functioned on a household basis, since membership in the priesthood was determined by genealogy. In the New Covenant, God still deals with us on the basis of households, but the importance of the family has been radically relativized.<sup>295</sup> Israel relied upon the family for her existence. In one sense, under the old covenant, the family was the most important, most basic institution in society. The whole point of Israel's existence was to bring the promised seed into the world (Gen. 3:15; Gen. 12; 2 Sam. 7; Jn. 4:22; etc.). Thus, she was dependent on her member families procreating in order to accomplish her mission. God gave her the Levirate law and miraculously enabled barren women to conceive children in order to ensure succession from one generation to the next. But now that the promised seed has come, the natural family recedes into the background. The Levirate law no longer functions, having been fulfilled in Christ, and barrenness for a believing woman, however disappointing it may be, is no longer the curse it once was. True, the household is still an important entity and is still dealt with in terms of the covenant. But in the New Creation, it is the church herself that is the true family of God. The New Testament makes this very clear. Acts continually speaks of the church herself as "the brethren." Jesus said his true family was comprised of those who did his Father's will (Mk. 3:33-34), thus rejecting his natural family, at least to some extent. The gospel sometimes even rips families apart (Mt. 10:21, 34-37); but the new ecclesiastical family that is gained more than compensates for the old family that is lost (Mt. 19:29). In 1 Tim., Paul applies household language to the church time after time, showing it is the true family of God (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:15). Elsewhere, we find patriarchal titles are now given to church leaders, not heads of households, as was common in the OT (1 Cor. 4:14-17, 1 Tim. 1:2, 18-19; 2 Tim. 1:2). We must not confuse the natural family with the supernatural church family.

It is easy to show that the institutional church has now taken over the family's former place of prominence. In Gen. 1, the so-called Dominion Mandate is given to the family. Adam and Eve are rule the earth and subdue it. But in Mt. 28, Jesus reissues the Dominion Mandate,<sup>296</sup> not to a husband and wife pair, but to the eleven disciples who

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<sup>295</sup> The expiration of the Levirate law is one illustration of this.

<sup>296</sup> Leithart shows us that the Great Commission is not exactly the republication of the Dominion Mandate: "The Great Commission is acknowledged by nearly all Christians to be closely connected to the kingdom of God. When he commissioned the apostles to make disciples of all nations, Jesus was commissioning them to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the furthest corners of the world, to call men to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Some have suggested that the Great Commission is a republication of the original 'dominion mandate' given to Adam (Gen. 1:26-28). The two are certainly related, but I believe it is more accurate to say that the dominion mandate sets the context for the Great Commission. The Great Commission *assumes* that the dominion mandate is still in force. There was no need whatever for Jesus to 'republish' the cultural mandate, because humanity never stopped forming cultures. Instead, the Great Commission addresses sinful humanity's propensity to form corrupt, perverse cultures. When people turn from the living God to sin and idolatry, it affects their work. They continue to interact with the creation, form cultures, and produce cultural objects, but they do so in ungodly ways. When men abandon the Creator, He delivers their societies to darkness, ignorance, and chaos (Rom. 1:18-32). They feast at the tables of demons and go out to form demonic worlds. The Great Commission instructs the church to call

will become the basic building blocks for his church. Eph. 1:22-23 indicates that all things are *not* put under the feet of the Christian family, but under the feet of the institutional church. In other words, in the church, the promise of dominion made to Adam (cf. Ps. 8:6, alluded to in Eph. 1:22-23) comes to realization. What the old Adamic family could not accomplish because it was weakened by the flesh, the new family of the church will do in the strength of the Spirit.<sup>297</sup>

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sinner to abandon their ungodly cultural pursuits and to pursue godliness in their cultural pursuits. When people respond with faith and repentance to the preaching of the gospel, they are not delivered from culture. They continue to be cultural creatures, but they are regenerate cultural creatures. They become cultural creatures who know the truth that sets them free, who have access to God's life and his banquet, who love, worship, serve, and obey the Creator rather than the creature. The Great Commission calls men to abandon the table of demons and invites them to the feast of the kingdom. By feasting on Christ, they are conformed to His image, and return to the world, like Moses, reflecting His glory" *The Kingdom and the Power* 129-30. Leithart is right to caution against too close an identification of the Great Commission with the original Dominion Mandate. But his point squares well with the one we are seeking to make, nonetheless: The family itself is one of the cultural institutions that needs to be converted and disciplined in terms of the Great Commission. The family is now impotent, since the fall, to fulfill the Dominion Mandate on its own. True, the family remains an instrument of dominion, in some sense, even after the fall. But only insofar as it trained by the church is it able to take dominion in productive and God-glorifying ways. The Great Commission, in a sense, swallows up the Dominion Mandate, and provides the preconditions, power, and context for its proper fulfillment.

<sup>297</sup> Mark Horne

([http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark\\_horne/heads\\_of\\_household\\_membership\\_and\\_maleonly\\_voting\\_in\\_the\\_church.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/mark_horne/heads_of_household_membership_and_maleonly_voting_in_the_church.htm), emphasis added) explains: "[U]nder the Mosaic economy the leadership of the church is constantly spoken of as being the heads of households and the congregation is described as a collection of households. But in the NC church such language simply vanishes. Rather, the church is made up of 'the brethren' or 'the disciples.' The elders are *never* described as heads of households. This is exactly what one would expect from a shift in the mark of initiation into the covenant [from circumcision, which applied only to males, to baptism, which males and females both receive]. *The institutional church is no longer overshadowed by the family.* Furthermore, the whole arrangement of divisions according to heads of households is part and parcel of the *tribalism* of that age of the church...Israel was organized by families because it was organized by tribes. Again, none of this is practiced today nor was it practiced in the NT era. In the transition from Moses to Christ, we have a transition from tribalism to cosmopolitanism. The church is no longer made up of tribes any more than it is made up of political kingdoms. The church is an institution in her own right without need to depend...on family or state. To go back to heads-of-households as the means of identifying membership in the church seems like a move back from the fullness of Christ into the shadows of the old covenant...The [Adamic] family has been judged by Jesus and found wanting. What is going on is a transition from the first covenant with Adam to the second covenant in Christ as the new Adam. God instituted the family through Adam and Eve and gave them the dominion mandate. Adam and Eve promptly rebelled against God and lost their dominion. What was needed was a new Adam who could undo the work of the first Adam and again take dominion. The second covenant was provisionally established soon after Adam sinned. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and others were new Adams in a sense. Ultimately, of course, they fell short. They themselves were partakers of the first Adam. They sinned; they died; and the covenants established through them did not last. Nor were they able to establish a new institution to replace and fulfill the Adamic family. Jesus, however, was the true New Adam who did all these things." Also, Jordan: "I believe that familism is a pervasive error in American Christianity. By and large, people who are anti-statist tend to be familists. It is understandable that this ethos should infect the churches... The influence of Mary Pride and of the home school movement also tends in this direction...In heaven [i.e. in Lord's Day sacramental worship], however, the family is not the nuclear, biological family. Jesus said that the natural family, not the state, would be the greatest enemy of His kingdom (Matt. 10:16-23, 34-37; Luke 14:26). The new family is the church. The parents are not the biological parents, but the elders of the church, who act for Christ. The natural, biological family is dead in

Please understand that the NT teaching on the centrality of the church as our true family in no way jeopardizes the fact that God still deals with the normal family. As a created institution, the family is a recipient of saving grace. The NT is full of instructions about family life that need to be studied and obeyed and the NT still praises marriage and child rearing as honorable and critical functions to be performed. God still makes promises to believing parents about their children and grows his church from within through covenant succession.<sup>298</sup> The old Adamic family is, in some sense, brought into the new creation, even though its basic features of marriage and procreation will not last into eternity. But the point that needs to be understood here is this: the family is no longer central; rather, the church is central. The church, not the family, is the primary sphere of God's grace. Or, to put it another way, the true family is no longer natural, but ecclesiastical.

Even under the Old Covenant, no one was born an Israelite (i.e., a covenant member). Simply having Jewish parents did not make you a Jew; rather it gave you the right to *become* a Jew via circumcision on the eighth day.<sup>299</sup> Likewise, in the New Covenant, our children are not born members of the church, but enter the church by means of baptism (WCF 28.1), the watery doorway or passageway into the redeemed community.<sup>300</sup> The Old Covenant already acknowledged the failure of the Adamic family and the need for a new family;<sup>301</sup> the New Covenant still acknowledges the old Adamic family as the

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Adam, and its children are born dead. We do not baptize children because they are born into the Church of Christian parents. Rather, we baptize them because they are born dead in trespasses and sins, and their only hope is to be transferred and adopted into the new heavenly family. After baptism, biological parents are mere stewards of Christ. They have no ownership rights. In the presbyterian ritual, all the members of the congregation take vows and become God-parents to the child. Weekly worship affirms this truth. The heavenly family takes priority over the natural family...Only in this way can the new heavenly family *restore* the natural family” *Rite Reasons* #21. Finally, Rodney Clapp and N. T. Wright (in Clapp’s *Border Wars* 114): “Christians should in fact understand the church as their first, or, primary, family -- the social allegiance most determinative of their identity and aspirations in life. N. T. Wright nicely encapsulates the theological basis of this case when he notes that, for the earliest Christians, ‘from baptism onwards, one’s basic family consisted of one’s fellow-Christians. The fact of widespread persecution, regarded by both pagans and Christians as the normal state of affairs within a century of the beginnings of Christianity, is powerful evidence of the sort of thing Christianity was, and was perceived to be. It was a new family, a third ‘race,’ neither Jew nor Gentile, but ‘in Christ.’”

<sup>298</sup> See Robert Rayburn paper “The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture, and Covenant Succession” available at <http://www.faihtacoma.org/covenant2.htm>.

<sup>299</sup> More specifically, the promise made to Jewish parents (cf. Gen. 17) gave the child the right to enter Israel by means of circumcision. It was not a natural birth-right, but a promise-right that entitled the child to circumcision. Similarly, those born into the Levitical family were not automatically priests, either, though the covenant made with their tribe belonged to them. They had to undergo ordination to enter the priesthood. In fact, the OT ceremonial law indicates whatever is produced by humans by ordinary generation is corrupt and must be cleansed before it can belong to God (cf. Lev. 12ff).

<sup>300</sup> Having Christian parents is not enough to make one a Christian or a member of the church. One must pass through the sacrament of initiation, baptism, to be reckoned a Christian. It’s the water, not the blood, that counts. Proof of this is seen in the fact that orphans and adopted children are baptized, provided they will be given Christian nurture and discipleship.

<sup>301</sup> Circumcision itself – a symbolic castration – pointed out that the natural family was impotent to produce the promised seed. The true Isaac had to be born of the Spirit (Cf. Gen. 15-17 and Gal. 4-5). Note that circumcision was instituted right after Abraham’s attempt to produce the promised seed in his own strength.

recipient of the covenant promises, even if its importance is greatly lessened. But in the Old Covenant, the family was the primary instrument of redemption because God had promised to bring the messianic seed into the world through the woman (cf. 1 Tim. 2:15); in the New Covenant, the church is the primary instrument of redemption because to her the ministries of word and sacrament, of conversion and discipleship, have been entrusted. The covenant has undergone a basic change in structure from familio-centrism to ecclesiocentrism.

What implications does this have for voting in church? Certainly the church should recognize family units. In a sense, the church is still made up of household units and the family serves as the training ground and proving ground for church leaders (1 Tim. 3:4-5). The church needs to teach and support families in every way. But in a very profound sense, in the church, we are all members of one household, not several. My family does not come to church simply as the Lusks, as a husband/father, wife/mother, son/brother, and daughter/sister. These inter-familial relationships are all still present, and need discipling by the church, but they are all radically relativized. We come to worship not as members of the Lusk family, but as members of the family God promised Abraham. We are *all* fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters to one another in the church (Mk. 3:33-34). We are all members of the same royal priesthood (Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Pt. 2:5ff). This is the family Jesus promised his disciples (Mk. 10:29ff).

Of course, there are problems with simply connecting the privilege of voting to the church's priesthood. After all, our infants are baptized into the church's priesthood, but are certainly not qualified to vote. Because the Bible gives no specific instructions in this area, we must wisely apply broader biblical principles. It seems we could tie voting to an age, perhaps 20, since that seems to be one's entrance into adulthood (Num. 1:3). Or perhaps we could require some kind of confessional subscription as the pre-requisite for voting. But whatever method is devised, there is nothing wrong with the church dealing with her members as individuals, and not just as members of an earthly family with a head of household.<sup>302</sup> This need not be seen as a concession to modern American individualism.

The *BCO* (24-3) ties voting privileges to communing membership. In historic Presbyterianism, which has often not communed children until their teenage years, this works fine. But with more and more churches pushing the age of first communion younger and younger, or even calling into question the communing/non-communing member distinction,<sup>303</sup> we may eventually find this section of *BCO* inadequate.

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<sup>302</sup> The point: The church can deal with both the one and the many; she can relate to us both as members of an earthly household and as individual disciples in the heavenly household of faith. Just as we have a double citizenship (in a worldly kingdom and in Christ's kingdom), so we have a double family membership (in a human family and the divine family).

<sup>303</sup> This position is commonly known as paedocommunion and favors the inclusion of baptized children in the sacramental meal at the youngest possible age.

We need to deal with an objection to giving women voting rights in church: Isn't this an exercise of authority? And therefore, aren't women exercising authority over the male candidates for office when they vote, contrary to 1 Tim. 2:12? This line of thinking seems unwarranted. Voting in the church is not an exercise of authority per se. If so, each member of the congregation who votes – not just the women -- would exercise authority over the officers of the church, something the Bible does not recognize. There is no sin involved in allowing women to vote, that is, to have some say in who will exercise authoritative pastoral care over them.

In conclusion, the way we structure voting privileges in the church hinges upon which biblical truth we want to emphasize and embody: Voting by households proclaims covenant representation and trains members to understand how one person can act on behalf of others. Voting as individuals manifests the church as the true household of God, the new creation, made up of Christ's disciples who do his will. Either practice can be implemented to the glory of God.

### **Conclusion**

The church is the one place on earth where true community can be found. Through the church, true community in other sectors of culture, such as the family, business, and the state, can be nurtured. But only in the church can life *begin* to be lived as God intended. As several recent liturgical theologians have pointed out, in church we “do the world right,” we practice life the way it really ought to be lived. We embody a new way of being human. The church is the center of the world, the nursery of Christ's kingdom. It is the most important institution on earth. With the church and through the church, societies live and die, rise and fall. What London is to England, Tokyo to Japan, and Paris to France, the church is to the world – only more so. The church is the *polis* and *basilea* of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the capital city and temple-palace of Christ's kingdom.

We who are in Christ are the new humanity, the first fruits of the new age. The church is God's eschatological beachhead in the cosmic war against evil, for only here is the Spirit at work to turn back the forces of sin and death that otherwise hold men and women captive. In the church, the life of the world to come is to be a present, if imperfect, reality. Thus, it is up to the church to model life as it really ought to be. As she does so, she can hope that the kingdom life she embodies will flow out into the broader culture and transform it. But this means the church bears a tremendous responsibility. Western culture is currently in a crisis. To this point, for the most part, the church has done more to exacerbate the crisis than to heal it. The church has failed to be an authentically Scripture shaped community. She has failed to carry out her calling as the servant-leader of culture. She has failed to be the body of Christ – the *broken* body of Christ (Col. 1:24) – giving herself for the life of the world. As the prow of culture, she has misdirected the world by her own unfaithfulness. She has failed to authoritatively and prophetically herald God's truth to the society around her. If the church is to recover her mission and

sense of identity in our day,<sup>304</sup> if she is to begin to reshape the wider culture in more biblical patterns of life, it will mean functioning largely as a counter culture, an island of Christian culture in the midst of a raging sea of apostate, anti-Christian culture.

Nowhere is our call to be counter-cultural more evident than in male and female roles. Feminism, in reality, is simply the ancient heresy of Gnosticism in new clothes.<sup>305</sup> Contrary to much modern Christian thought, egalitarianism is neither God's design for humanity nor a legitimate outworking of the gospel. In fact, it is a radical perversion of the gospel, though it is an error held by many godly people and learned theologians. If a tree is known by its fruit, our current 'liberated' state of affairs is damning testimony against the grand egalitarian experiment that really hit full stride in the 1960s, but had been lurking just beneath the surface of the ostensibly Christian West long before that. The wholesale embrace of egalitarianism has hardly improved the lot of women. We now have more divorce and promiscuity, meaning more single moms who must bear the multiple responsibilities of breadwinner and homemaker. Violence against women and pornography continue to increase. Feminism necessitates the horrors of abortion. Women are no longer considered valuable enough to keep out of military combat zones. And so on. But let us remember that women were allowed into the pulpits of churches before they were allowed in the cockpits of jet fighters.<sup>306</sup> The shift to egalitarianism is largely our own fault.

The church must resist these trends with all her might. The church's culture is not to be an egalitarian culture. To practice egalitarianism is not only to go against the grain of the creation, but to go against the grain of the *new* creation as well. God's grace restores, heals, and enhances male-female role relationships; it does not obliterate these gender distinctions. In the end, egalitarianism will be seen to be a passing – but dangerous -- fad. Man cannot repeal God's laws for men and women any more than he can repeal the law of gravity. Our culture will continue to unravel until its egalitarian premises are rejected and replaced with biblical ones. Egalitarian culture must give way to Trinitarian culture. And this must start in the church.

Thus it is the church's task to teach the world once again what it means to be made in God's image, male and female.<sup>307</sup> Spurgeon once thundered, in the midst of great

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<sup>304</sup> The church's relationship to culture is fluid and dynamic, not fixed and static. In our day, the church's stance vis-à-vis the world will be primarily antithetical. That does not mean it always has been or always will be that way.

<sup>305</sup> Podles 137; Lee *Against the Protestant Gnostics* 213.

<sup>306</sup> The Presbyterian church first began to have female elders in 1930! Obviously, I am assuming the Bible takes an unfavorable stance towards women in combat. See *Federal Husband* 77ff. Also, Graglia 189ff.

<sup>307</sup> "It is the task of Christendom to put this biblical view of the sexes into practice and live it out, showing to the puzzled world what it means to be a man or woman as God intended. The church of Christ is commissioned, as 'a city set on a hill' and 'the light of the world' (Mt. 5:14-15), to make it clear that God's creation ordinance for man and woman enhances life and cannot be set aside without detriment. The church of Jesus Christ should be a model showing how the sexes may live together harmoniously, a model in which both male and female develop their own character and beautifully complement each other" Neuer 168. "The church must develop a right understanding of the meanings of masculinity and femininity, an understanding that is consistent with human realities and with the data of Scripture... Only then will men

ecclesiastical controversy, “Now is the hour for the man! Where is the man for the hour?”<sup>308</sup> The need of our hour is not simply for *men* who are unafraid to be real men, but for *women* who are unafraid to be true women. We must rise to the occasion. We must shape men in distinctively masculine ways and women in distinctively feminine ways. We must embody in our church community, and especially our worship, what it means to be the renewed humanity – renewed in God’s image as men and women. We must teach our own men and then the men of the world that *headship* and *service* are fully compatible – after all, Christ is head of the church but came to serve her. We must teach our own women and then the women of the world that *equality* and *submission* are fully compatible – after all, Christ was fully equal to his Father yet submitted to him in all that he did. The church must do more than simply promulgate *ideas* about role relationships. Cultural change requires the holistic repatterning of life. When we have fully embraced our maleness and femaleness as God intends for us to do, we will find it existentially satisfying (because it is what we were made for), world attracting (because it will resonate with truth in the hearts of all), and God glorifying (because it is in accord with the Creator’s design and the Redeemer’s goal). May God give us grace to do this! Amen.

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return to the church, and the harmony of Adam and Eve in the new creation be at least in part restored. Then the church will have a foretaste of the time when the bridegroom will unite finally with the bride, the church, that uniting of all the sons of God in the communion of sacrificial love which shows to the world the inner life of the Trinity” Podles 208.

<sup>308</sup> Compare the urgent words of Luther: “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of God’s truth except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle front besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.” Obviously, the Bible’s teaching on gender is one portion of God’s truth that is under fierce attack in our day. If we do not valiantly defend this aspect of God’s Word, we are acting irresponsibly and are poor shepherds of God’s flock.