

The Place of Women in the Life and Work of the Church

By Wilbert R. Gawrisch

[This essay was read at the 1968 convention of the Dakota-Montana District of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod. An earlier draft of this same essay was previously read at the Western Wisconsin District Convention in 1966.]

Without question we are living in an age when to an ever increasing extent the place of women in society is undergoing change. This change has been world-wide. It was initiated in our country with the adoption of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in 1920. This Amendment declares that the right of citizens to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex.

The granting of suffrage and political parity to women was the culmination of a long struggle that began at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 with a general declaration of the "rights of women." The National Woman Suffrage Association was formed in 1869 to work for the adoption of a constitutional amendment, and the American Woman Suffrage Association was organized in the same year to work with the state legislatures. These two organizations merged in 1890, forming the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Wyoming was the first state to grant suffrage to women, giving them the right to vote in 1869.

In England the first resolution in favor of woman suffrage was introduced into the House of Lords in 1851. But it was not until World War I that women over 30 years of age received the right to vote, and it was 1928 before women were given equal voting rights with men.

With the industrialization of countries like Russia and Japan and with the development of modern communications, the barriers to equality for women have been crumbling. This is true even in areas like northern Africa, where under Mohammedan influence women were traditionally kept in virtual servitude. In many parts of the world women have been called upon to do heavy labor once reserved for men. Even in our own country it is now illegal for employers to discriminate against applicants for work on the basis of sex, a requirement with which some are finding it difficult to comply.

We mention these matters because these sociological factors have also affected the church. In many Protestant denominations women have been given an equal voice with men in the determination of church policy and the management of church affairs. It is no secret that the women run the congregation in some instances. In a small town in northern Wisconsin the Congregational preacher finally quit in disgust because, as he said, the women were running the church and he was tired of having them dictate to him. In another small town, also in northern Wisconsin, the Methodist church is served by a woman preacher, and this is by no means an isolated instance.

The Lutheran Church has not been immune to these influences either. In congregations of the Lutheran Church in America with which we have had contact woman's suffrage has been the rule. Certain congregations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have granted a limited right to vote to women. In response to pressure that was brought to bear, the Synod itself in its 1965 convention at Detroit retreated from its former position and granted women "limited" suffrage. Reporting on this action of the convention, the *Badger Lutheran* of June 30, 1965, brought the following news item:

The all-male convention decided after considerable discussion to grant women in the synod's congregations not only the right to attend voter's meetings, to voice opinions, but to vote in areas where the office of the keys or doctrinal matters are not involved.

This means, according to Rev. Paul E. Jacobs, chairman of the floor committee on doctrinal matters, that women may not become public representatives of the congregations; they cannot be delegates for instance to the synodical conventions.

Pastor Jacobs further explained that the areas of man's domain are one, in the public exercise of the holy ministry, and two, in the exercise of spiritual authority.

Mindful of the passages in I Cor. 14:34, 35, and I Tim. 2:11–15, the convention reaffirmed the position, “We hold that God forbids women publicly to preach and teach the Word to men and to hold any office or vote in the church where this involves exercising authority over men with respect to the public administration of the Office of the Keys. We regard this principle as of binding force also today because I Tim. 2:11–15 refers to what God established at creation.” The resolution further goes on, “As stated at St. Paul in 1956 and San Francisco in 1959, we consider woman suffrage in the church as contrary to Scripture unless it does not violate the above-mentioned Scriptural principles.”

The *Lutheran Witness Reporter* in its issue of May 22, 1966, carried the following front-page report from Detroit with the headline, “20 Women Received As Voters”:

St. Andrew-Redeemer Lutheran Church here recently added 21 new voting members—20 of them women.

George Kronbach, president of the congregation, said the decision to accept women voters was a “thrilling experience.” He said it resulted in the largest addition to the voters at one time.

“The men of the church wanted it,” said Rev. Finsterle, pastor of the congregation. “They saw interest in congregational affairs declining because of a lack of involvement on the part of the total membership.”

“The ‘male only’ vote was originally established so that there would be one vote per family,” the pastor added, “but we have many widows and women whose husbands are not members. We feel this will draw the whole congregation together around our mutual concerns.”

One of the new women voters said that “we can now do a lot to help in shaping the future by offering our opinions and suggestions as well as our services.”

The Missouri Synod convention in Detroit last summer adopted a resolution permitting congregations to extend voting privileges to women so long as the arrangement does not violate Scriptural principles.

Conspicuous by its absence in the pastor’s explanation is any indication that there are any restrictions on the voting privileges of these new women voters. Possibly there are, but one wonders if the women voters are aware of them. According to the pastor’s statement as quoted in the *Lutheran Witness Reporter*, the “male only” vote was originally established, please note, not for Scriptural reasons, but solely on the practical grounds that there would be only one vote per family.

News items taking note of or commending the enfranchising of women have appeared with remarkable frequency in the *Lutheran Witness Reporter* since the decision of 1965. The June 2, 1968, issue contains another such report. The headline reads, “Voters Admit Eight Women.” The article informs us:

Eight women have signed the constitution of First St. Paul’s Lutheran Church to become voting members.

A total of 11 women attended last month’s voters meeting, the first since voters decided in March to enfranchise women 21 years of age or older. Nineteen men attended last month’s meeting.

Elective offices and decisions affecting ministry and church discipline have been restricted to male voters.

First St. Paul’s is the oldest Missouri Synod congregation in Chicago. The congregation hosted the 1847 meeting at which the Missouri Synod was organized.

About three years ago the *Lutheran*, the official organ of the LCA, in its issue of October 27, 1965, (p. 32) gave prominence to the appearance in pulpits of the LCA of a woman preacher, the Rev. Lore Gradner,

from the Evangelical Church in Germany. In Sweden the ordination of women to the Lutheran ministry was sanctioned by the Church Assembly in 1958. Shortly thereafter the first such ordination took place.

It would be unrealistic to expect that all of these influences and pressures would not also in some ways and to some degree be felt by our Synod and its members. Here, however, as in all matters of doctrine and practice, we must look to God's holy Word for instruction. That, and that alone, must be our guide, no matter what pressure may be brought to bear on us to act differently, no matter how plausible the arguments advanced for a different course may be. We must not let ourselves be swayed by the cry of "unfair." We must not be disturbed or diverted by the accusation that such a position is "museum-minded conservatism," as Krister Stendahl of Harvard charges in his recent book *The Bible and the Role of Women*.¹ We must not permit ourselves to be influenced by comments like the following with which the woman reporter concluded her report in the *Badger Lutheran* which we cited earlier:

(P.S. As one woman to another, do you think it really makes any difference? We wouldn't want to give any man the impression that we think we really deserved it, would we? Or that we think we should have a voice in how "they" spend our money?)

What now does God have to say to us in the Holy Scriptures concerning the place of women in the life and work of the church?

I. The High Calling God Has Given to Women

We must begin by reminding ourselves that the first and highest calling of a woman, according to Scripture, is that of a wife and mother. When God undertook to create the woman, He most clearly and plainly enunciated His purpose in doing this when He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). The word "help" clearly indicates man's preeminent position and the subordinate, auxiliary role that, according to God's order of creation, the woman was to play. Man was to exercise leadership, and the woman's function was to be that of an assistant and support. The fact that her position from the beginning was subordinate in no way detracts from its importance, however. That her place in the created order is a vital one is clearly evidenced by God's statement, "It is not good that the man should be alone."

Consequently, in the sinless state of man and woman before the Fall they found a mutual joy in one another and were supremely happy in their God-appointed station in life. Adam loved and cherished his wife. He received her from the creative hand of God with profound gratitude. He who had carefully examined and appropriately named all the animals, and in doing so had been made acutely aware by God of his unique and lonely position in creation, marveled at this new creature whom he immediately recognized as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. His eyes were undoubtedly filled with the purest wonder and delight as he gave her a name, "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23). This name, too, being a derivative of the word "man" in Hebrew as well as in English, points to the subordinate position of a woman, a role which in no respect whatsoever caused any resentment on her part in the state of innocence. On the contrary, she found her greatest satisfaction and joy in the position into which God had placed her and the role for which He had created her.

Adam, on his part, in that state of holiness never for a moment acted like a tyrant or an autocrat or a despot, who now had a slave at his beck and call. He looked upon his wife as a most precious gift of God. He was thankful that God had placed her at his side. He looked upon her as a "help," which was the relationship between them which God Himself had established. He treated her with the utmost consideration and love as a partner in that tremendous task which God entrusted to them jointly when He blessed them and said, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and

¹ Translation by Emilie T. Sander, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966, p. 23.

over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). To have dominion over the woman was not included in God’s injunction, and such a thought never entered Adam’s mind. His will and the woman’s were in perfect harmony and conformity with the will of God, yes, in such perfect harmony and conformity that when Adam declared, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24), he was giving expression to God’s own thoughts. In Matthew 19:5 Jesus ascribes these words to God, the One who “at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.”

What a tragic effect the Fall into sin had on this blessed and beautiful relationship, however! Summoned before the tribunal of God, Adam tried to excuse himself and attempted to place the full responsibility for his sin upon the woman and through her, of course, finally upon God: “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:12). One can almost see the woman stare at her husband with icy, hate-filled eyes, and then with an impudent toss of her head, mutter under her breath, “Well, I like that! Just you wait!” At the moment, of course, her prime concern was to shift the blame from herself to the serpent as quickly as possible: “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:13).

How sin would further disrupt the happy relationship of marriage God indicated when He added to the sentence pronounced upon the woman the prophetic words, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16). From this time on a deep-seated resentment against her subordinate role is a manifestation of sin on the part of the woman. The husband, too, thoroughly corrupted by sin, no longer sees in his wife a gracious gift and blessing of God. Acting not on the basis of love but of law, he on occasion struggles to impose his will on his recalcitrant wife by sheer force. The rupture of the harmonious, blessed fellowship with God which man enjoyed in Eden was accompanied by a simultaneous rupture in the relationship between man and woman, or, from another point of view, between man and his fellow man.

A Christian woman also has thoughts, experiences feelings, and exhibits actions at times at the prompting of her Old Adam which stem from a sinful rebellion against God and His creational order. But as children of God, born again through faith in Christ Jesus, their only Savior, godly women of all times have struggled against such temptations and have found joy and satisfaction in their God-given position. They have been mindful of God’s admonition, “Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands” (I Pet. 3:1), for the Apostle Peter reminds us, “After this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement” (I Pet. 3:5, 6). Christian husbands, too, will remember Peter’s admonition to them, “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life” (I Pet. 3:7).

These guidelines for a Christian marriage are also set forth by the Apostle Paul in his *Haustafeln*. In the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians (vv. 22–33) he writes the words so familiar to us from the marriage ceremony:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

These directives are repeated more briefly in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (3:18,19):

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

The thought which Peter expressed that both are heirs of the grace of life (I Pet. 3:7) is one which Scripture also emphasizes elsewhere. Paul, for example, writes to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is *neither male nor female*: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (3:28, 29). The difference in status between man and woman is one that applies exclusively to this life. It has no bearing whatsoever on salvation.

In the sight of God earthly relationships and distinctions such as the difference between Jew and Greek, between bond and free, between male and female are entirely without significance when it comes to the matter of being His children and inheriting eternal life in heaven through faith in Christ Jesus. He "died for *all*" (II Cor. 5:15). He "gave himself a ransom for *all*" (I Tim. 2:6) without distinction as to sex. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), that is, the entire human race. *All*, men and women, boys and girls, were in this sorry, hopeless state. *All* were lost, but *all* also without exception and without regard to sex or age, social or financial standing, color of skin or national origin, education or language, *all* have been "reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10), "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). This reconciliation or justification was won by Christ for all human beings whoever they might be, whether they are among the dead, or among the three billion souls presently inhabiting the earth, or among those still to be born before the hour of the final Judgment strikes. "God was in Christ, reconciling *the world* unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor. 5:19).

As Christ by His holy life and by His vicarious suffering and death has made a perfect atonement for all sinners without distinction and without exception, so also when the Holy Ghost, working through the means of grace, brings sinners to faith in Christ, all earthly distinctions drop away. Physical, social, economic, political, educational and all other differences that have to do with life in this world have no significance whatsoever. "Ye are *all* the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," Paul assures us. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26–28).

In this passage Paul is speaking about the blessings and the benefits of salvation. He is not contradicting himself, as some allege, when he elsewhere insists that in the church here on earth the divinely established relationship between the sexes is to be respected, that God's creational order and arrangement have not been abrogated. But this relationship, like that of the family and the home, applies only to this world. Jesus tells us, "The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels: and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:34–36).

As far as life in this world is concerned, however, it is just in the sphere of the family and the home that a woman most fully comes into her own, fulfilling her God-given role, accomplishing truly great things in caring for her husband and bringing up her children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and in this way achieving genuine happiness and satisfaction for herself.

Accordingly, Paul writes to Timothy, "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (I Tim. 5:14). Writing in a similar vein to Titus, he speaks first of all of the kind of life befitting elderly Christian men, namely, that they are to be "sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience," and then continues, "The aged women

likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Tit. 2:2–5).

Surrounded by her children, the Christian wife finds her happiness in her home and family. Here she finds a God-given outlet for her affection and love. In the Book of Proverbs Solomon comments, “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband” (12:4). Again we are told, “Her price is above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Prov. 31:10–12).

Continuing with this thought in this 31st chapter of Proverbs (vv. 13–31), the inspired writer sings the praises of a faithful and godly wife and mother in words that well deserve to be inscribed on a plaque and hung in a prominent place in the Christian home inasmuch as they summarize in incomparable language all of the excellent Christian virtues that Christian young men will hope to find in the girl they marry and which Christian young women will want to strive after as they enter into marriage:

She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.
 She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar.
 She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.
 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.
 She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.
 She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.
 She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.
 She stretched out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.
 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.
 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.
 She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.
 Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.
 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.
 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.
 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.
 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.
 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.
 Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Let no one underrate the dignity and worth of the housewife’s calling! Let no one underestimate the importance of this work! That there is a tendency in our time to do this hardly needs to be demonstrated. One need only take note of the apologetic tone with which some women, when interviewed on television, give their occupation as “housewife.”

But who can measure the scope of a mother’s influence in teaching her children at home? Who can measure the effect of her influence in molding the character of her children by teaching them their first prayers, building prayer habits which they will carry with them through life, patiently but firmly correcting them when they fall into sin, telling them the story of Jesus, directing them to their loving heavenly Father in times of trial and trouble, and in all respects by word, prayer, and example guiding them in the paths of righteousness? It has well been said, “If women prove themselves good teachers in the home (Tit. 2:3), they thereby wield a greater influence on the coming generation than the men, including the pastors and school teachers.”²

² Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), Vol. I, p. 526.

From Holy Scripture we see that in the home the mother shares authority with the father. He is the head of the family, but as far as the children and other possible dependents in the home are concerned, her authority is equal to that of her husband. Paul addresses children with the admonition, “Obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). He cites the Fourth Commandment, “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise” (v. 2). Again we note that both parents are put on an equal plane as representatives of God in the injunction in Colossians 3:20, “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”

Although it was through the woman that Satan succeeded in bringing Adam to fall, and although she is a sinner by virtue of her own transgression, yet the way to salvation is beyond question open to her. Paul writes to Timothy, “Notwithstanding she shall be saved in (that is, in the course of)³ childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” (I Tim. 2:15). Despite the pain and the sorrow which have come into her life as a consequence of sin, she has hope. She too shares the blessed hope of eternal life through the forgiveness of her sins for the Savior’s sake. The same God who in holy and righteous wrath declared, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16), was the one who in immeasurable mercy and grace, to the astonished ears of Adam and Eve, addressed the serpent with words that kindled a ray of hope in their crushed and terror-stricken hearts: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). The Seed of the Woman would crush the Tempter’s head, bringing about his total defeat. But the cost on His part would be great since the Serpent would bruise His heel. It would mean the sacrifice of His life.

What a high honor God bestowed upon womanhood for all time by choosing the woman to be the bearer of the promised Seed! The Savior of mankind would be the Seed, not of man, but of the woman. What a significant role the woman played in God’s eternal plan for the redemption of the world!

Let no one accuse Paul of misogyny or of misogamy, then, or of depreciating womanhood on the basis of the passages to which we will shortly turn our attention when it is from his pen that we have the soul-stirring words, given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which describe the exalted role of the woman in the fulfillment of God’s gracious promise to send a Savior: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4,5).

That God-fearing women in Israel had not forgotten God’s promise and the blessing which was to come to all mankind through the Seed of the Woman is clearly evident from Gabriel’s words to Mary at the Annunciation, “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28). This was recognized also by Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias, when she was filled with the Holy Ghost and greeted Mary, her kinswoman, with the words, “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:42). What greater blessing, what higher honor could God have accorded to the woman than that which is here accorded to Mary and through her to all representatives of her sex? That she was blessed among women only because of what God was doing for all mankind through her by making her the vessel through whom He was sending His Son into the world Mary humbly acknowledged in her response to Elizabeth’s greeting, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation” (Luke 1:46–50).

Perhaps by this time you are wondering why we are putting so much stress upon this point that woman has a high and noble calling in life according to God’s own incomparably wise and gracious plan, conceived before the foundations of the world were laid, for the salvation of sinners. The reason simply is this: We want to view all that God has to say to us concerning the place of women in the life and work of the church in its proper perspective. We want to see it in the complete context of all that Holy Scripture tells us concerning the role of

³ The Greek preposition *διὰ* here indicates an attendant circumstance. Beck, *The New Testament in the Language of Today*, brings out the thought well, “But women, having children, will be saved if they live in faith, love, and holiness, and use good judgment.”

women in God's order in His work both of creation and redemption. When then, later, in this essay, it will be necessary for us to speak of certain restrictions, of certain limitations, of certain divinely prescribed boundaries placed upon women's activities in the church, let these restrictions, limitations, and boundaries in their relationship to men be viewed in the light of all that Scripture has to say concerning the honor and the dignity which God has bestowed upon their sex. Let these restrictions not be viewed as an oppressive and demeaning curb, relegating women to an inferior status, to an insignificant, petty role. Let no one read into the expressions of God's holy will in the divinely inspired statements of Holy Scripture the thinking of certain ancient as well as modern people like the Arabs and the African negroes who practice polygamy and reduce women to the level of slaves or chattel.

At this point some may ask: "Is this not an exaggeration? Surely no one would read such implications into the words of Holy Writ!" Do not be deceived! Such views are openly advocated with the claim that the New Testament statements of Paul reflect the primitive milieu of New Testament culture. It is claimed that they do not apply to our modern era with our more enlightened approach. It is alleged that these statements are a reflection of the so-called "human side" of Scripture. It is said that these passages are irrelevant now that women have been emancipated and have won the recognition and parity with men which are rightfully theirs. Poor benighted Paul, according to these modern prophets, had not yet benefited from the past two thousand years of the evolutionary process. And besides, they say, he was somewhat abnormal in that he did not get married and, apparently, had a rather low view of women. In his book, *The Office of Women in the Church*, Fritz Zerbst cites the views of Gerhard Delling. The Lord's holy Apostle is accused by Delling of being a hater of marriage and a hater of women. He is charged with having regarded woman as a "second class human being."⁴ It is said that Paul "was influenced primarily by ascetic tendencies in Judaism and was filled by the rabbis with hatred and contempt for women."⁵ Zerbst summarizes the thesis of L. Zscharnack and his followers in these words: "The teachings of Scripture concerning the matter must be understood in the light of contemporary history as reflecting a view of life inherited from the ancient Graeco-Roman and the Jewish-Oriental world."⁶

For us it is, of course, self-evident that God is speaking also to our modern age in the Epistles of Paul. We will, accordingly, recognize in what the New Testament has to say to us concerning the place of women in the life and work of the church, God's own expression of His will regarding the extent as well as the limits of each sex's sphere of activity in His church. We will not look upon this as a yoke to be shaken off, but as an arrangement of God, established in His infinite wisdom for the welfare of His church, within which both Christian men and Christian women will find opportunity for the expression and exercise of their Christian faith.

Unquestionably, there is much that women can do to further the work of the church. There is no limit to the ingenuity of faith in discovering ways to be of service within the divinely appointed sphere of activity. What an inspiring example, for instance, not only of hospitality but also of searching out opportunities for service the Shunammite woman is (II Kings 4)! She persuaded her husband to prepare and furnish a room in their house for the Prophet Elisha's use whenever his travels would take him to their vicinity. The Prophet was deeply grateful for this thoughtful gesture. God, too, rewarded her kindness by granting the innermost desire of her heart, namely, that she and her husband might have a son.

The Book of Proverbs, similarly, as we have previously heard, extols charity as one of the outstanding characteristics of a God-fearing woman: "She stretched out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy" (31:20). On the part of a believing woman such deeds of charity are a concrete expression of her faith. They are a practical example of carrying out the Preacher's admonition in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

Works of Christian love like these will be pointed to by Jesus on the Day of Judgment as outward evidence of the faith of the righteous. Then, as He Himself tells us, He will commend them and acknowledge

⁴ Fritz Zerbst, *The Office of Women in the Church*, tr. by A. Merkens (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

them as fruits of faith in Him: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

The Gospels also record the significant service which devout women rendered to Jesus and His disciples during His earthly ministry. In the eighth chapter of St. Luke we read, “And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance,” were with Him as He went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God (8:2, 3).

Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus, also found a way to serve her Savior. What a beautiful expression of her faith it was when she anointed Him for His burial as He sat at meat in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper on his final journey to Jerusalem! Though Judas, for covetous reasons, condemned her, Jesus rose to her defense and disallowed the hypocritical argument of Judas that the perfume should rather have been sold and the money given to the poor. “She hath wrought a good work upon me,” Jesus declared, “for in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her” (Matt. 26:10–13).

Even when Jesus was hanging on the cross, when to all appearances His life’s work was collapsing in the ignominy of failure and defeat, those faithful women who had accompanied Him, though their hearts were broken with sorrow, and though their faith was sorely tried, yes, though they did not understand the meaning of the terrible events they were witnessing, lovingly and loyally kept the death watch. Matthew informs us, “Many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him, among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s children” (27:55, 56). They took note then also of where He was buried “and how his body was laid” (Luke 23:55). Returning to their homes, they prepared spices and ointments with which to complete their final act of devotion to their beloved Master as soon as the Sabbath was over. Then, at the rising of the sun on the first day of the week, they returned to the grave. They were thus the first to hear the angel’s astounding Easter message, “He is risen” (Mark 16:6).

What a distinction God granted to their sex in making them the first recipients of the Easter Gospel! They have the further distinction also of having been the first to bring this good news of Jesus’ resurrection to others. The angel of the Lord gave them the specific charge, “Go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead” (Matt. 28:7). Matthew informs us that, in spite of their astonishment and fear, they were not remiss in carrying out this assignment: “They departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy: and did run to bring his disciples word” (28:8). The Evangelist Luke adds a few details: They “returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (24:9–11).

No survey of what Scripture has to say concerning the place of women in the life and work of the church would be complete without making mention of Tabitha, or Dorcas, after whom many a woman’s organization in the church is named. The only woman disciple so named in the New Testament, Dorcas was renowned for her works of charity. “This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did,” is the Bible’s characterization of her (Acts 9:36). When she died, the Christians of Joppa sent for Peter. They had heard he was at Lydda, which was not far away. When Peter came, “all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them” (Acts 9:39). In response to Peter’s prayer, God restored her to life.

What an outstanding example of Christian service Dorcas is, an example truly worthy of emulation! With quiet humility she set about doing what she could to serve those who were in need, and through them she served her Savior. With her needle and thread she let the light of her faith shine among men so that they saw her good works and glorified the Father in heaven. How many women’s societies in the church, following Dorcas’

example, render noteworthy service in the field of Christian charity as well as in the area of missions and other forms of service in the congregation and the church at large!

Earlier we alluded to the far-reaching influence which a Christian mother is able to wield on the coming generation by teaching her children in the home and molding their character by her wholesome example. In the 16th chapter of the Book of Acts we are told that when Paul came to Lystra on his second journey, he chose as his traveling companion and coworker a young man named Timothy, who had become a Christian on Paul's earlier visit to this Galatian city. Young Timothy, who had an excellent reputation among the Christians of his home town and beyond, was the son of a Jewess, a devout woman named Eunice, who was likewise a convert to Christianity. Timothy's father, however, was a Greek, a Gentile. The full burden of Timothy's religious training fell, therefore, upon his mother. The Apostle Paul gives eloquent testimony to the faithful and conscientious manner in which this sincere woman applied herself to the task of teaching her son from earliest childhood the holy Scriptures, which, as she well understood, were able to make him wise unto salvation. She recognized this as her God-given responsibility. In view of the fact that hers was a mixed marriage, her only encouragement and support in her difficult task came from her own mother, a God-fearing woman by the name of Lois. Paul testifies to the success of her efforts, however, when, in writing his Second Epistle to Timothy, he calls to remembrance Timothy's "unfeigned faith," "which dwelt first," Paul adds, "in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice" (II Tim. 1:5).

When we recall the contribution which Timothy, whom Paul calls "my own son in the faith" (I Tim. 1:2), under the blessing of God, made to the spread and the firm planting of the early church, we will begin to appreciate the blessed results of this humble woman's faithfulness to her calling as she took the child God had given her into her lap and patiently taught him the stories and truths of God's holy Word. Surely hers was no insignificant place in the life and work of the church! Yet she did that which God had given her to do with no fanfare, with no demand for recognition, with nothing but simple, joyful gratitude for the privilege God was according her to be of service. Little did she dream that God would multiply her teaching a hundred-, yes, a thousand-fold, so that, like the ripples created by a pebble dropping into the sea, the Word of God would go out from her home in ever widening circles until it touched the hearts of men on distant shores and extended even to the isles which are beyond the sea.

Time permits us to make only the briefest reference to the 16th chapter of Romans, where in the first 16 verses Paul extends greetings to more than 29 individuals, no less than nine of whom are women, who are referred to either by name or in some other way: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus' mother, Julia, and Nereus' sister. For all time the names of these and many other God-fearing women are recorded on the pages of Holy Writ as an inspiration and example to future generations of women for a life of Christian sacrifice and service in the life and work of the church.

What hours, yes, days, of selfless, unstinting service are embraced in Paul's brief comments: "Mary, who bestowed much labour on us" (v. 6), "Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord," "the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord" (v. 12)! These consecrated and dedicated women toiled for the Gospel's sake, literally spending themselves to the point of weariness and fatigue.

Somewhat fuller is the description of Phoebe's efforts. Paul refers to her as "a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (v. 1). She was what we today would call a deaconess, devoting herself principally, though not exclusively, to work among the women, for Paul commends her for her able assistance to many, including Paul himself. In the course of her duties on behalf of the congregation at Cenchrea, the seaport for Corinth, she made a journey to Rome, and Paul entreats the Roman Christians to show her every consideration in order to expedite her business. It is generally assumed that she was the bearer of Paul's letter from Corinth to Rome.

Lydia, Paul's first convert in Europe, is also worthy of special mention. A prosperous business woman who was a dealer in the costly Lydian purple, she hailed from Thyatira in the Roman province of Asia. Either unmarried or widowed, she was residing, possibly for business reasons, in the Macedonian metropolis of Philippi, a city which had the distinction of being a Roman colony, whose citizens enjoyed the same rights and privileges as if they were living in Italy. Evidently a Gentile by birth, she was a Jewish proselyte. In Philippi,

however, which bore the stamp of imperial Rome in such a marked way, there was no synagogue. Consequently, Lydia and a few other adherents of the Jewish religion were in the habit of meeting together for prayer on the Sabbath at a quiet spot outside the city on the banks of the Gangites River.

This woman's heart the Lord opened to the Gospel. Lydia listened with joy to the message brought by Paul and his companions, Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Then she and her whole household were baptized. In grateful appreciation for the blessings which had come to her and hers through the Gospel of Paul, she insisted that he and his companions make her home their headquarters for the remainder of their stay in Philippi.

The example of the generosity set by this prominent woman seems to have inspired the entire Philippian congregation. While Paul was at Thessalonica, they twice sent a gift to him, and again when he was a prisoner in Rome. Surely the influence of this woman of faith is noteworthy, and the example of her liberality is marked and followed even to this day!

Any thought, therefore, that the service which pious and God-fearing women are able to render to the church is unwelcome, or improper, or displeasing to God is altogether foreign to the Scriptures. On the contrary, the services and the sacrifices, the consecration and the dedication, the faithfulness and the decision of believing women are commended and set forth as worthy examples to be emulated by Christian women of all times.

II. The Restrictions God Has Placed on the Activity of Women in the Church

What then is the meaning of the two passages in the Bible which restrict the sphere of women's activity in the church? Bearing in mind all that has been said, let us now turn to these two passages and carefully examine them in detail.

The first is I Corinthians 14:34–36. Let us recall the context in which these verses stand. The Corinthian Christians had an exaggerated view of the importance of the gift of speaking in tongues. They were impressed with this gift because it was sensational. Paul seeks to correct their sense of values. In his eloquent thirteenth chapter he demonstrates the superiority of charity, the Spirit's gift of Christian love. He stresses that the charismatic gift of love together with other Christian virtues is to be esteemed far above the gift of tongues. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal," he declares (v. 1). "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away" (v. 8). Charity is the highest and the greatest of all gifts conferred by the Holy Spirit: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (v. 13).

The warm, self-sacrificing love which flows from Christian faith outranks the gift of prophecy, but prophecy, in turn, outranks the gift of tongues. The gift of prophecy is the ability to preach, and through this gift the congregation is edified. When one speaks in tongues, however, the congregation derives little, if any, spiritual benefit. Consequently, Paul says, "In the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (14:19). If a stranger were to attend a Christian service in which every one was speaking in tongues, Paul says, he would think that they were all out of their minds. "Let all things be done unto edifying" is therefore the principle that must prevail (14:26). Paul does not rule out the exercise of the gift of tongues entirely but emphasizes that it is to be practiced with restraint and by turns. In addition, he requires that what has been said in tongues be interpreted in order that all may understand and benefit from what was said. "If any man speak in a unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church, and let him speak to himself, and to God" (14:27,28).

Incidentally, we notice that Paul here employs the very same verb, "keep silence," which a few verses further on he uses with respect to women. "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (14:33, RSV). This is the fundamental principle that must be borne in mind.

In this connection Paul now addresses himself to the question of the proper place of women in the worship and work of the church. In this area the congregation at Corinth is not to take independent, unilateral action. It is to bear in mind the practice that is followed in all the other Christian congregations. This practice is

not an arbitrary, self-appointed one. It is based on the Law, that is, on God's Word. It is based on a general principle rooted in God's creative order and set forth in His Word, especially in Genesis two and three, as we shall see shortly. Paul is concerned about fostering genuine unity among all Christian congregations, a unity that is rooted and grounded in a common submission to God's holy Word. Whether women in the congregation at Corinth were disregarding God's Word and will and were speaking in the public services or whether Paul is merely interested in forestalling the possibility that this might happen cannot, perhaps, be conclusively established. The former is more likely, however, we believe, in view of the entire context in which this matter is discussed by Paul.

The closing words of I Corinthians 14:33 are to be construed with v. 34, so that the sentence reads, "As in all churches of the saints, let your women keep silence in the churches." It is so construed in the Nestle Greek text and by the RSV. Luther and the AV take this clause with what precedes rather than with what follows, but the thought, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace," is complete in itself. A further consideration which favors taking this clause with the following is the fact that in verse 36 Paul again emphasizes the thought that the congregation at Corinth should not act independently. It should not fail to take its sister congregations into account. "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?" Paul asks. They owe it to their fellow Christians in other congregations to show them brotherly love and consideration. An insistence upon one's right to follow an independent course in these matters is unbrotherly. Furthermore, in these things God has spoken. We have previously noted Paul's reference to the Law. He repeats this thought in verse 37, stressing the fact that these are not just his own opinions. The Corinthians are not to discount Paul's instructions as mere human judgments. "The things that I write unto you are the commandments *of the Lord*," Paul emphatically declares.⁷ God is a God of order, and therefore in the life, the work, and the worship of the church the principle is to prevail, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (v. 40).

There were some women, as we see from I Corinthians 11:5, who had the gift of prophecy. Others may have had the gift of tongues, a gift that like the gift of prophecy might properly be used in a gathering of women or children. Some of these women undoubtedly were tempted to exercise their gift also in the public service in the presence of the men. The more forward among them may even have done this, and the men tolerated it. But even if things had not yet actually gone so far, Paul under the guidance of the Holy Spirit finds it necessary to warn against such an improper practice. He writes, "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (14:33b–35, RSV).

The speaking of women in the church, which in reality means placing them on the same plane with men, granting them equal authority, violates the fundamental principle that they are to be subordinate to men. That is God's arrangement. That is His will. No man, no woman, and no church has the right to set aside this divinely established order. It was established at creation. "Let them be in subjection" (v. 34). That is God's own injunction, spoken through the mouth of His holy and inspired Apostle. That the part woman played in the Fall also has a bearing on this restriction placed on her position and activity in the church will become clear when we discuss I Timothy 2:11–15.

Furthermore, if a woman does not understand something and wants more information, Paul continues, she is not to ask her question in the public meeting or assembly. How easily that could lead to questioning what was said and debating the matter! Again, this would imply equality of the sexes. In this case a woman is rather

⁷ This lies, therefore, on an altogether different plane from the custom to which Paul refers in I Corinthians 11:13–16. It was a custom in those days for women to wear a covering on the head while attending public services. This was not, however, a commandment of the Lord. It was a matter of propriety. A woman who did not wear a covering on her head was looked upon as being improperly dressed, just as among us a swimming suit is not considered to be proper attire for the Sunday service, but it is proper dress for the Sunday afternoon at the beach. Paul appeals to the Corinthians' sense of propriety when he says, "Judge in yourselves: is it *comely* (Greek: *πρέπον*, proper) that a woman pray unto God uncovered?" (I Cor. 11:13). Customs, we must remember, however, may change.

to ask her husband at home. Unmarried women might well ask men in the family circle like fathers, brothers, or other relatives.

When Paul adds, “It is a shame for women to speak in the church,” he does not merely mean that this is offensive to men or that it is degrading for a woman and beneath her dignity, bringing her into shame in a social sense. It goes much deeper than that. It is not a matter of mere etiquette. It brings shame and guilt upon her in the sight of *God*. It is a sin against His holy will. It is a transgression of His command that the woman is to be under obedience. This is not merely a matter of Paul’s judgment about what is proper or improper. “As also saith the law,” Paul emphatically declares (v. 34). This belongs to “the commandments of the Lord” (v. 37).

We turn now to the second passage in which Scripture treats expressly of the limitations placed upon women in their activity within the church, I Timothy 2:11–15. In this Epistle Paul is addressing himself to Timothy, his young associate whom, as we have heard, he affectionately calls “my own son in the faith” (I Tim. 1:2). Writing from Macedonia, or possibly from Corinth, late in the year 63, Paul lays down certain general principles for Timothy’s supervisory work in the churches of Asia Minor during Paul’s absence. Timothy’s base was Ephesus (I Tim. 1:3). In the first chapter of this Epistle Paul speaks of the importance of sound doctrine. Timothy is to “charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (v. 3). Paul himself before his departure had dealt with two blasphemers, Hymenaeus and Alexander, expelling them from the church and delivering them to Satan (vv. 19–20). In the second chapter he gives various instructions concerning prayer. He encourages the men to “pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (v. 8). This brings him to the subject of the characteristics of a God-pleasing attitude and life on the part of “women professing godliness” (v. 10). They will be modest in their dress. Their true beauty lies not in the artificial and superficial adornment with which the women of the world so often preeminently concern themselves, but in good works, works which reflect the joyous and thankful faith in their hearts.

In this context Paul now adds, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” (v. 11–15).

Paul had indicated in verse 8 that *the men* were to lead in public prayer. Now he adds that the women are to be learners, not teachers. They are to be in silence, not preaching or teaching, functions which would place them in a position of superiority to men. The Epistle to the Hebrews is speaking of those who teach God’s Word when it admonishes, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). Those who “have the rule” are those who teach. They are in a position of superiority and of authority.⁸ Those who learn are to submit; they are to be subject. Subjection is, therefore, also to characterize the attitude of Christian women in all their contacts with men. They are not to put themselves forward. They are not to assert themselves over against men, as they would be doing if they would preach to men or teach men.

Paul says, “I suffer not a woman to teach.” It would be a mistake to conclude from this, however, that he is making this pronouncement on his own authority. This prohibition, debarring women from a teaching position with respect to men, stems from God. Paul is simply conforming his practice to God’s order as it is laid down in the Law, namely, in the Book of Genesis. Paul gives the details in the following verses.

The teaching about which Paul is speaking is, of course, the teaching of God’s Word. This does not mean, however, that women are altogether prohibited from teaching religious truths. The point is that they are not to usurp authority over men. They are not to dominate over men. In their relationship to men they are not to become autocrats. They are to be subjects. One who stands before others in the position of a teacher has a position of authority. A woman who would presume to step before men and to teach them the Word of God would by that very act be violating His Word. In cases of emergency, of course, the women may be compelled to speak in order that the preaching of the Gospel be not entirely omitted. If men are either unable or unwilling

⁸ “For those who teach publicly, teach and rule in the name of God” (Calov, quoted by G. Stoeckhardt in his article, “*Von dem Beruf der Lehrerinnen an Christlichen Gemeindeschulen*,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, October, 1934, p. 771. This and subsequent quotations from this article are translated by the present writer.)

to act, then the women should step in. Luther writes: “Order, decency, and honor require, therefore, that women keep silence when the men speak; if, however, there is no man to preach, then it would be necessary that women preach.”⁹ Zerbst comments, “A woman may proclaim the Word to a congregation of men and women only when it is generally understood that she is doing something which is improper and which puts the men to shame.”¹⁰

Paul’s words do not mean, as we have indicated, that a woman is forbidden to teach the Word to other women. This is specifically mentioned in Titus 2:3–5, where Paul bids Titus to instruct the older women to “teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” In such teaching God’s ordinance respecting the relationship which is to prevail between men and women is not violated.

It is not contrary to God’s will and order, therefore, for a woman to lead a ladies’ group in worship or in a Bible study. Neither is the basic principle contravened when a woman teaches God’s Word to children. Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, are, as we have seen, outstanding examples cited in the Scriptures of women whose instruction and training in the truths of God’s holy Word had a wholesome influence on the children entrusted to their care.

This is, indeed, one of the principal responsibilities of a Christian mother. She is to concern herself not merely with the physical welfare but, above all, with the spiritual welfare of the children with which God has blessed her and whom He has entrusted to her care.

If, in addition, this all-important and necessary work of giving children a thorough Christian training is committed to women who have outstanding ability in this respect and whose natural gifts have been developed through formal training in the most effective methods for accomplishing this important goal, in other words, if the church calls such women to serve as Sunday school teachers or Christian day school teachers, this, too, does not overthrow the divine principle that women are not to lord it over men.¹¹ It is just in this field, on the contrary, that the particular talents and gifts of consecrated Christian women may find a legitimate and useful outlet. Here those God-given traits, characteristics, qualities, and abilities may properly find expression which are so necessary to win the confidence and touch the hearts of children, particularly the little ones—traits, characteristics, qualities, and abilities which are but rarely found in men. Here, then, we find another area where women can and do have a significant part to play in the life and work of the church.

The question may be asked: Up to what student age level may we utilize women as teachers in our Christian schools without violating Scriptural principles? May we call them to teach classes above the elementary level? Is it proper to have women teachers in our Christian high schools and colleges?

The Bible does not, of course, define precisely the time when a child becomes a man. But here Christian judgment as well as a sensitivity to and an appreciation for the basic issue that the woman is not to usurp authority over the man will be our guide. That we as a Synod have been sensitive to this principle in the past is evident from the fact that we have been very cautious about calling women teachers on the high school or college level. They are the exception rather than the rule. We have generally considered it advisable even to have men as teachers on the upper elementary level, though perhaps not exclusively for this reason.

On the high school level, women teachers, for the most part, are serving in our Christian schools in the commercial, home economics, or physical education departments, areas in which they deal principally with girls. In our colleges we employ them in the capacity of deans of women, library assistants, or music teachers. It

⁹ Quoted in Zerbst, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹¹ Stoeckhardt writes (*op. cit.*, p. 772): “On the contrary, the congregation is free to decide whether to leave the instruction and training of the children to the parents and the pastor alone—which is, of course, impossible in larger congregations—or to appoint certain persons to look after the spiritual care of the children, and whether to entrust this task only to men or in addition also to women.” He adds: “(1) The administration of the Word is committed and entrusted to the congregation as a priestly right. 2) For the administration of the Word God Himself has given the congregation certain directives in His Word. 3) In all matters in this respect that are not regulated by express statements of Scripture the congregation has complete freedom, except that everything that it arranges must serve the common good.”

is our conviction, of course, that in our Christian schools all those who teach, whether it be History, English, Science, Mathematics, or other branches of learning, are also ministers of the Gospel. In these classes, too, as well as in the religion classes, the Gospel is served and taught. That we have been hesitant and cautious about calling women to teach English or History, for example, on the high school level and beyond where they would be teaching both boys and girls is wise. In this area we will want above all else to be conscious of the will of God. While we will not, therefore, on the one hand, arbitrarily prescribe limits or impose restrictions in a mechanical, legalistic way where none have been set down by the Word of God, we will also, on the other hand, ever bear in mind the basic principle that the woman is not to exercise authority over the man. Acting according to this principle, we will then exercise Christian discretion, consideration for the brethren, and an earnest concern for the over-all welfare of the church. Above all, we will ever be on guard against acting on the basis of expediency. We will not permit the fact, for example, that a woman teacher may be obtained more easily and, possibly, even at a lower salary, determine our course.

What now is the reason for woman's subordinate or subsidiary role in the life and work of the church as far as the public preaching or teaching of the Gospel is concerned? Paul cites a twofold basis, the first antedating the Fall into sin, and the second growing out of the Fall.

"For Adam was first formed, then Eve," Paul continues in this second chapter of his First Epistle to Timothy (v. 13). God might have created both the man and the woman simultaneously. But He did not. Man was created first. This very fact indicates that God intended man to be the head of the woman. Woman was formed from a rib taken out of Adam. She was created to be a "help" for him. The whole human race was thus to come from *one* source. Adam is its head. Scripture tells us that God "hath made of *one blood* all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

God, to be sure, had from the very beginning planned to create the woman and therefore formed Adam as a male, but this does not set aside the fact that the woman was to be a "help" and that man was to be her head. On the contrary, it serves to emphasize it.

That God's will concerning the relationship between man and woman is expressed in the order of their creation is explicitly stated not only here in I Timothy 2 but also in I Corinthians 11:8,9, where we read, "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man." This is not to be understood, however, as if the woman were inferior to the man. All thoughts of superiority and inferiority are out of place in respect to this relationship. Man, on the one hand, has no reason for pride or for belittling the woman, and the woman, on the other hand, has no reason to have an inferiority complex or to underestimate the dignity and importance of her position. God would have both men and women look upon the position for which she was created as a high and glorious one. In the words of Paul, "The woman is the glory of the man" (I Cor. 11:7). This God-designed and God-ordained glory can only come into its own when the divinely established relationship is recognized and observed. "I would have you know," Paul emphasizes, "that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (I Cor. 11:3).

Adam gave expression to God's thoughts concerning His will with regard to the relationship between man and woman when he gave the woman her name. The Hebrew word אִשָּׁה, like the English word *woman*, points to her derivation from *man* (Hebrew, אָדָם), and therefore also to her subordinate or auxiliary position.

But there is a second reason which Paul advances for not permitting a woman to teach men, namely, the part which she played in the Fall: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (I Tim. 2:14). Adam was not deceived. Paul simply states this fact. Adam was fully conscious of the fact that he was deliberately transgressing the clear command of God. He chose, however, to follow his wife in obeying Satan. In doing this he was not acting as the leader, as the head, but as a follower. He permitted Eve to persuade him. God pointed to this when He pronounced His sentence on the man, "*Because thou hast*

hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it....” (Gen. 3:17).¹²

Eve had taken the initiative in this terrible offense against God. She had seized the leadership which properly belonged to her husband, her God-appointed head. “She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). In doing this she was deceived, thoroughly deceived, as the verb which Paul uses indicates.¹³ This does not, of course, exonerate her. She, too, had the clear Word of God with its plain statement that the consequences of eating of the forbidden tree would be death. By using the passive form, “being deceived,” Paul points to the Wicked One, the Deceiver, the devil, who was the active agent in the deception. In II Corinthians 11:3 we are told that “the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty.” By her act the woman became guilty of transgressing the holy commandment of God. Paul’s use of the word “woman” in I Timothy 2:14 rather than the name “Eve,” which he used in verse 13, designates her as a representative of her sex.

The sainted Prof. William Henkel in his article, “The Status of Woman in the Public Life of the Congregation,”¹⁴ has ably summarized the line of thought in Paul’s argument:

The Greek words show that what is emphasized is that woman, unlike man, was deceived through deception. The thought that the woman on account of her greater sin should be subject to man is completely foreign to the Apostle; as shown, he does not trace the subordination of woman to man back to the fall into sin but to the creation. And if Eve was made to fall through deception and Adam by persuasion, his sin is certainly not the lesser, but, should one want to make any distinction at all, the greater; in spite of clearer understanding he transgressed the same command of God as Eve did. It is therefore clear that the Apostle does not forbid woman to teach publicly and to rule because she has committed a greater sin in Eve than man in Adam, but because from the beginning she showed herself to be “the weaker vessel,” because in the area of understanding she is not equal to man, because she is more easily deceived and therefore not qualified for ruling and authoritative teaching.¹⁵

How completely this entire sorry episode destroyed the blessed fellowship which man had enjoyed with God! In how many respects the holy will of God was flouted! And how thoroughly the woman by the part she played in it overthrew the divinely established order regarding the relationship between man and woman! By obeying the voice of his wife, by submitting to her misdirected leadership, and by his acquiescence and complicity in her rebellion against the authority of both her husband and of God, Adam, the head of the human race, sinned. By his fall all mankind fell. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19).

This, then, is the second reason why Paul declares, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” The first reason was, of course, sufficient. The creational order is decisive. The second reason simply serves to intensify Paul’s stress on the fact that God’s original arrangement has not been abrogated. Cognizant of this, Christians will gladly and willingly abide by it. That the woman is not, of course, excluded from salvation because of her role in man’s fall into sin Paul emphatically points out, as we noted earlier, when he says, “Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” (I Tim. 2:15).

What now are the practical implications of these Scriptural prohibitions? How do these Scriptural truths apply to the life and work of the church? We have already touched on a number of implications. But there are

¹² Joh. Bengel comments, “The serpent deceived the woman; the woman did not deceive the man but persuaded him” (*Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, Stuttgart, 1890, p. 834).

¹³ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα. The prefix ἐξ - has intensive force.

¹⁴ *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, July, 1961, and January, 1962; translation by Pastor Max Herrmann.

¹⁵ *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, July, 1961, pp. 215–216.

others. May women take an active part in the business of the congregation, joining in the discussion, debating issues, perhaps even serving as chairman? May women serve on the church council or as delegates representing their congregations at conventions of the Synod?

On the basis of the Scripture passages which we have discussed our answer to these questions must be: No. Such activity would clearly violate the subordination of the woman to the man which God has established and which He does not want to have overthrown. If women were to participate actively in the business meetings of the congregation, men and women would be functioning as authorities of equal rank, a situation in clear contradiction to the will of God. The women might conceivably have a different opinion from that of the men and, in the event that they were in the majority, carry through their will in opposition to, and over the objections of the men. Thus they would be usurping authority over the men. The relationship God has established would be overthrown.

Some of our congregations invite the women to listen in at congregational meetings, a custom which enables unmarried or widowed women as well as others to become acquainted at first hand with the congregation's affairs. This practice may, however, at times create difficult situations, particularly if controversial matters are under discussion and the more aggressive among the women become emotionally involved and possibly demand to be heard or make their feelings known in one way or another.

Naturally, if the congregation is considering matters which women understand better than men, the men will find ways of seeking out the opinion of the women before making a decision. Not to do that would be foolish.

It ought to be self-evident then also that it is contrary to the will of God for women to serve in the public ministry as pastors, or to lead an assembly of men and women in prayer, or to instruct an adult membership class or to teach an adult Bible class when such groups are composed of both men and women.

In all of this God's purpose is not to place punitive restrictions upon women or to guarantee certain inalienable rights to men, but His sole concern is the welfare of His church. He wants to protect it from disruptive situations. He wants it to prosper and flourish and be edified. His instructions are based on His supreme, divine wisdom. They flow from His insight as man's Creator into the peculiar nature, the particular characteristics, qualities, abilities, and limitations of each sex.

In Romans 12 Paul speaks of the church as the Body of Christ. We Christians are all members of this Body, but that does not mean that we all have the same function in the Body or that we all are able to contribute in the same manner or the same measure to the growth and the edification of the Body. Paul points out that in our human bodies not all members have the same function or purpose, but each member makes its own particular contribution to the welfare of the entire body. He writes, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:4–8). It is God's will, accordingly, that in the church the special gifts which He has given to each sex be utilized to the best advantage for the welfare and benefit of the entire church.

That women, too, as members of Christ's church have the commission to make disciples of all nations, that they, too, are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that they, too, are to be witnesses for Christ in their daily personal and private life hardly needs to be said. The limitations and restrictions which God Himself has put on their activity in the life and work of the church have to do only with *public* teaching or preaching, and then only insofar as the principle of not exercising authority over men may come into consideration.

Two additional matters still call for comment. What about the women mentioned in the Bible who had the gift of prophecy? We read, for example, that Philip, the evangelist, "had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy" (Acts 21:9). We have previously indicated that such a gift of the Spirit might with all propriety be exercised in a group of women or children. There the prohibited factor of usurping authority over men would

not be involved. In such circles a woman might well prophesy, which, as Paul tells us in I Corinthians 14:3, means to speak “to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.”¹⁶

The Old Testament records the names of five “prophetesses.” “Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron” (Exod. 15:20), is called a prophetess because she led the women of Israel in a hymn of thanksgiving at the overthrow of Pharaoh’s host in the Red Sea. Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Huldah (II Kings 22:14) received direct revelations from God to be conveyed to certain men. Isaiah’s wife is called a prophetess (Isa. 8:3) merely because of the fact that she was the wife of a prophet. The final reference tells us of a woman by the name of Noadiah, who was a false prophetess (Neh. 6:14). There were others of this kind, as we see from God’s word to Ezekiel, “Son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people, which prophesy out of their own heart” (13:17). None of these passages gives any warrant for granting women an equal voice with men in the affairs of the church.

Some one might still, however, raise a question about the case of Priscilla in Acts 18:26. Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, who was well versed in the Scriptures and an eloquent speaker, came to Ephesus. He was a Christian. He “taught diligently the things of the Lord” (v. 25). But his knowledge was limited because he knew “only the baptism of John.” He was not informed about the conclusion of Jesus’ ministry, about His death, resurrection, and ascension, about His institution of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism. At Ephesus Apollos met Aquila and Priscilla, humble Christians with whom Paul had lived for about a year and a half at Corinth and who had a deep understanding of the Gospel as a result of their intimate association with the great Apostle. Highly educated as he was, Apollos did not disdain to sit at the feet of this tentmaker and his wife as their intensely interested pupil, for we are told, “Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). The original text places Priscilla’s name first, indicating that she probably took the lead in this. But in the instruction of Apollos she acted with such propriety, with such delicate tact, that this learned man in no way resented her role in helping him to a deeper knowledge of the life and work of Jesus for the salvation of the world.

We may be certain that Priscilla, as a careful student of Paul’s, was acutely conscious of the Scriptural teaching concerning the place of women and studiously avoided anything that might conflict with this. Furthermore, this was not public teaching in the church but a private discussion in the intimate, restricted circle of a man and his wife and a friend, eagerly discussing a matter of deep concern to all of them. Christian women, though forbidden to usurp authority over men by public teaching in the church, are not prohibited from confessing their faith to others. Certainly no one would have any right to use this example as a basis for establishing the principle that women have the right to teach men in the church.

What a great service, however, this energetic woman and her more retiring but no less zealous husband rendered to the church in its infancy is again briefly alluded to when Paul writes to the Christians at Rome, “Greet Priscilla (who here again is mentioned first) and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house” (Rom. 16:3–5).

Naturally, if a woman has concerns about doctrine or if her conscience is troubled regarding practices in the church, she must be heard. Her conscience and her soul, too, are of great concern to the Lord. But she will seek out channels for expressing her thoughts which will not transgress the bounds of God’s ordinance that the woman is not to usurp authority over the man. She may discreetly and with all propriety do this through her husband or by private consultation with the pastor.

Almost daily in his ministry a pastor is confronted with the need of answering questions or perhaps meeting the concerns of women. A ladies’ group, for example, is a forum in which he may wisely provide

¹⁶ The gift of prophecy also included at times the revelation of certain things by God to those who had this gift, whether men or women. With regard to this Zerbst remarks: “Also the ancient church in its peculiar situation devised ways and means by which also women could communicate to the congregation the insights given unto them, namely, through the bishop” (*op. cit.*, pp. 121–122). Cf. also Stoeckhardt: “Although God has forbidden women to speak and to teach in the congregational assembly, He did not tie His own hands when He gave this directive to the congregation. If He so chose, He could also reveal His will on occasion through a woman. He Himself, indeed, once opened the mouth of a donkey and through it rebuked a prophet” (*op. cit.*, p. 770).

opportunities for questions. But his office as teacher and pastor will always be respected by Christian women, for at all times Christian women will acknowledge and observe the requirements of the divinely established relationship between men and women and will scrupulously guard against every impression of usurping the authority of men, recognizing that by such action they would self-evidently undermine and nullify whatever they might hope to accomplish.

The question may be asked: Is it a violation of God's will for a woman to serve as organist in the service? In answer to this we would say that it surely would be if, for example, she would take it upon herself to dictate to the pastor what hymns were to be sung, or would demand or seize for herself the leadership in the conduct of the service. There have undoubtedly been instances when the pastor has had to administer a rebuke and has had to make it clear that he is the one who is conducting and leading the service, having been called for this by the congregation. On the other hand, it is probably just because of this possibility that many of our congregations prefer to have a man serve as organist. In the event, however, that no man in the congregation has the ability to play the organ or that it is desired to give the regular male organist assistance and relief, a congregation certainly may enlist and gratefully employ the services of a woman organist. But a devout and consecrated Christian woman who is called upon to serve in this capacity will always be concerned about observing God-pleasing proprieties in rendering this service to her Lord and to her church. She will ever be mindful of her subordinate role. She will do what she can, employing the talents and the training which she has received, not in a domineering spirit, not seeking to lord it over the pastor and the congregation, but in a spirit of helpfulness, of meekness, and of humility.

Conclusion

Let us now summarize briefly the thoughts which we have gleaned from our study of the Scriptures regarding the place of women in the life and work of the church and the application of these principles to our contemporary church life.

There is, on the one hand, no question that according to Scripture woman's status in the public life of the congregation is different from that of the man. Her relationship to man according to God's express words at the time of creation is defined not in terms of equality but in terms of being a "help" to man. And so Christian women, bearing in mind that according to God's Word this subordination is to be observed also in the life and work of the church, will not seek to rule the church nor demand a voice in the administration of the church's affairs. In the field of teaching, they will cheerfully recognize the limitations which God Himself has placed on their activity in this respect and will not attempt to overthrow, set aside, or disregard the sense or the spirit of what God says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law" (I Cor. 14:34).

But, on the other hand, there is also no question that, according to Scripture, there is a vast area of service in which Christian women may and can properly make a significant contribution to the growth and advancement, to the spiritual life and work, to the worship and welfare of the church. The pages of Holy Writ and the subsequent history of the church teach us that God has endowed them with special gifts, talents, interests, and abilities which Christian women through the ages have in an exemplary way employed in the interest of the church.

We have not had the time within the compass of this one essay to elaborate on the role played by such outstanding women as Hannah, whose example ought to be held high in our pastor and teacher recruitment efforts; or Jochebed, the God-fearing mother of Moses, who instructed her son so thoroughly in the true religion that his subsequent education in all the wisdom of the Egyptians was not successful in eradicating his simple faith in the God of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; or Rahab of Jericho; and Esther, Queen of Persia, who risked their lives for the sake of God's people; or Ruth, who confessed her faith in that beautiful and meaningful profession which she made to her mother-in-law, Naomi, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16); or the adulterous woman whom Jesus met at Jacob's well in Samaria, who, upon learning that Jesus was the Christ, hurried back

to her village, Sychar, in such haste that she left her water jug behind in her eagerness to invite others to come and see the Savior, a clear indication that women, too, have an important part to play in the church's evangelism program; or the earlier example of a similar evangelistic zeal as exemplified in Anna, the aged widow who came up when Joseph and Mary in accordance with the Law presented Jesus to the Lord in the temple and who then "spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

Though we are not able to call the roll here of all the sainted women whose names have been recorded for all time on the pages of the Bible, we have, hopefully, cited enough evidence to demonstrate that there is a far higher service which Christian women can render to their Savior and His church than that of mashing potatoes for the annual chicken dinner, necessary and helpful as that may be on occasion, and far more important than arranging an endless string of luncheons and teas.

God would have them ever bear in mind the great spiritual tasks for which He has equipped them in particular. He would have them bear in mind the magnitude, the vital importance, and the glory of the high calling which He has assigned to them in the church. He would have them bear in mind the real blessing which He wishes to bestow on them and on their work when they dedicate their own special feminine characteristics, talents, and nature to the service of Him who is their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, blessings which He wishes to bestow through them on His church today just as He always has in the past.

In closing, let us recall what the sainted Professor Henkel, to whom we made reference earlier in this essay, wrote some years ago, words that not only bear repeating but also deserve the most earnest reflection if we wish to view the subject of the place of women in the life and work of the church in its proper, Scriptural light:

Before God there is neither male nor female, but we are all one in Christ Jesus. Neither men as such nor women as such please Him. God is pleased by whoever is in Christ through faith, regardless of sex. He who preaches legalistically will prefer to extol the superiority of man. That is again factually wrong. Scripture, generally speaking, knows nothing of a superiority of man and an inferiority of woman; Scripture hasn't given man the public office of teaching and ruling in the Church because he is perhaps a nobler, more capable, and more worthy creature than woman. God has assigned to man a different position in the public life of the congregation than to woman because their gifts differ, and both should be good stewards of their gifts. They should use them where they can accomplish the most with them and work the greatest blessing. The gifts of both are precious and given for the Gospel's sake; therefore they should not be wasted but used, each one directed to its fitting sphere of activity. What Scripture teaches about the duty of woman in church life is an elaboration and practical application of I Peter 4:10: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." And so this also belongs to the evangelical treatment of our question, that one preaches that the instructions which Scripture gives to woman for her church activity only want to show her how she can attain the goal which she, as a Christian, has according to the new man set for herself, namely, to serve God in His kingdom there where she can accomplish the most with her gifts and produce the most fruits.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, January, 1962, pp. 35–36.