

# **The Spirit of Biblical Feminism**

## **An Analysis of Biblical Feminist Hermeneutics**

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### **Introduction**

In the years prior to 1850 there was in evangelical circles a movement to free women from a restrictive role in the church. In various denominations this movement succeeded and women were allowed into their pulpits. In the early years of the women's movement those who were a part of it considered themselves faithful to the Bible. However, by the early 1850's tensions developed between the more liberal element and those who still were trying to defend their feminism by the Bible. The liberal element lost patience with these conservatives and broke away from them. Most feminist literature of that period could be considered radical. However, in that period there also came into being a type of feminist literature that could be called Biblical feminist literature. Their arguments began with Galatians 3:28 and ended with various explanations for the "troublesome" passages in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy.

In the ensuing years these arguments found a home in various circles, especially in those groups that tended toward revivalism and then pentecostalism. In the 1920's this strand of Biblical feminism also was found in some mainline denominations. Important works of that period were written by Lee Anna Starr and Kathrine Bushnell. In more recent years this same strand of Biblical feminism has found homes in any number of Christian circles. With the increasing liberation of women from traditional settings, churches have felt the need to reevaluate their stand on the position of women in both the church and in the home. Many denominations or groups within denominations have turned to Biblical feminist arguments for an answer to the growing disparity between their traditional beliefs and the new status of women in the world around them. Beginning in the late 1960's and continuing to the present a flood of literature has been produced that could be described as Biblical feminist literature. Classic works of this period are *All We're Meant to Be*, by Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, and *MAN as Male and Female*, by Paul K. Jewett. Virginia Mollenkot should also be mentioned as a major spokeswoman for Biblical feminism. Periodicals that carry Biblical feminist literature are *Daughters of Sarah*, *The Other Side*, *Sojourners*, and *Radix*. In addition there have been any number of books published and magazine articles written that seek to uphold the biblical feminist interpretation of the Bible and its statements on the role of women.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to analyze this biblical feminist literature. From the outset I would like to state the conclusions I have reached regarding the main arguments the biblical feminists propose. I wish to do this so that the reader will know where I am heading throughout the paper. I believe that the biblical feminists err in that in their interpretations of the pertinent Bible passages they employ elements of the historical-critical method. Specifically, the biblical feminists use history in a way that is incompatible with the Bible's teaching of the clarity of its words.

### **The Importance of Hermeneutics to the Biblical Feminist**

After reading any amount of Biblical feminist literature it becomes very clear that they value their hermeneutical principles much more than their exegetical discoveries. While there are a number of articles that deal with specific word meanings, they form anything but a concerted attack to overturn traditional interpretations. There are studies on *kephale*, *authenteo*, and *upotasso* that seem to make some sense individually, yet when they are thrown together the result is ridiculous, nothing short of exegetical contortionism. Stephen Clark after analyzing biblical feminist exegesis comes to these conclusions,

A type of exegesis has developed in the area of the roles of men and women that is a distinctive exegesis, with a set of characteristic principles and opinions of its own, that can be historically attributed

to the influence of the recent feminist movement. Many of the opinions set forth in this exegesis are ingenious and are based on a great deal of intricate scholarship, but they are basically unfounded....<sup>2</sup>

Clark continues with a list of these “distinctive exegeses” listing among others, “the word ‘head’ does not indicate any governing role or any subordination of the woman,” “subordination does not involve obedience,” “the purpose of Ephesians 5:21-33 is solely to exhort the husband to care for his wife and not to exhort the wife to be subordinate to her husband,” and “there is no obedience of wife to husband being referred to in Ephesians 5:21-33.” He then writes,

There are, of course, other characteristic exegetical opinions in Christian liberationist writings, but the above list was restricted to those opinions that are clearly unfounded or seemed to have been developed primarily for the sake of holding the new exegetical position. Christian liberationist exegesis is an extreme case of a basic trend in scriptural interpretation that operates when scripture seems to teach something directly at odds with current opinions or social trends.<sup>3</sup>

Some biblical feminists, in particular Paul Jewett, would have little difficulty himself with the above statement. In addition, if not openly, at least tacitly biblical feminists recognize the fact that trying to solve their problems with a combination of exegesis and hermeneutics is illogical. Non-traditional exegesis and non-traditional hermeneutics cannot stand side by side, for if one feels that his answer lies in non-traditional exegesis, then he is admitting that traditional hermeneutics is valid. And if one finds his answer in non-traditional hermeneutics, then he is admitting that the traditional exegeses of the relative passages are unshakable. Hence, due to the weak position that those people find themselves in who try to solve their problems with non-traditional exegesis, the majority of biblical feminists have sought refuge in a non-traditional type of hermeneutics.

The need to reexamine traditional hermeneutical principles is obvious to most biblical feminists. Krister Stendahl of Harvard Divinity School entitled a paper on the subject: “The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics. Another biblical feminist, Grant Osborne of Trinity Divinity School in Deerfield Ill., after listing the pertinent passages writes,

It is the contention of this article that the determination factor in the discussion is hermeneutical and relates to one’s interpretation of all the command passages in Scripture. When the debate is finished the conclusions depend on one’s approach to the above passages.<sup>4</sup>

In one particularly candid statement Virginia Mollenkot states,

But I must admit I see no light at the end of the tunnel. I find Paul’s argument in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11 about who was created first and who sinned first - I find them irrational even if his facts are right. For me the light at the end of the tunnel is that we must de-absolutize the biblical culture as we have already done for slavery and monarchy.<sup>5</sup>

Mollenkot here touches on the main hermeneutical issue. The key words in this quotation are “we must de-absolutize the biblical culture.” The hermeneutical principle described here leads us into the historical critical method of interpretation. To understand biblical feminism we need to understand how this method has permeated the religious world and we need to understand the principles and the underlying essence of historical criticism.

### **A Brief Summary of the Historical Critical Method**

It is difficult to give a precise and clear definition of the historical-critical method. One definition is, “Using historical and literary critical methods in Bible interpretation”. While this definition is somewhat

standard, it is lacking in two areas. First, in our circles the term “historical-critical” is filled with many connotations, most of them justifiably not good. For our purposes, a definition should reflect that fact. Second, historical and literary critical methods as defined by some can contain methods that are not necessarily wrong, methods that we would not call “historical-critical.” The definition is too vague; it should be more specific or at least not quite so open to interpretation. I will attempt to work toward a definition.

First, a few points should be made about the history of the historical-critical method. George Ladd, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and one who advocates using historical-critical methods describes the source of these methods.

It must be recognized that modern biblical criticism was not the product of a believing scholarship concerned with a better understanding of the Bible as the Word of God in its historical setting, but of scholarship which rejected the Bible’s claim to be the supernaturally inspired Word of God.<sup>6</sup> Biblical criticism as a modern discipline arose in reaction to what we may call an uncritical supernaturalistic view of the Bible in post-Reformation times. What is known historically as orthodox scholasticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Germany viewed the Bible almost as a magical book which was not anchored in history, but the Word of God, free from error or contradiction, without theological development or progress, possessing a single level of theological value. History was thus completely submerged in dogmatics.<sup>7</sup>

The methods of historical-critical interpretation were worked out by secular philosophers, the Jewish philosopher Spinoza among others,

Spinoza is considered the first to work out the principles of a historical-critical hermeneutics... He held, Holy Scriptures can be conscientiously explained only if previous to the explanation a history of the Biblical literature has been worked out...The “*sesus literalis*” can therefore not be ascertained except on the basis of a knowledge of the languages and history of the literature.<sup>8</sup>

The details of historical-critical hermeneutics were worked out during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were a lot of disagreements as to which methods were legitimate, and when it comes to specifics there is not much unanimity of method even today. However, over a period of time some basic methods did become standard. Needless to say, these methods of criticism were taken over by religious leaders who had need for them. Concerning the use of the methods today Ramm writes,

This radical treatment of Scriptures reached its full tide in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Suffice it to say that by the middle of the twentieth century most theological seminaries have accepted the basic theses of radical criticism, and many of its conclusions.<sup>9</sup>

Often we connote the use of the historical-critical method with liberal seminaries and theologians, however, the method has been taken over by schools we would term “evangelical.” Schools such as Trinity Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., and Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, have adopted a somewhat toned down form of historical criticism. Ladd traces this development,

Two very different reactions characterized the experience of most young men who were reared in an evangelical environment and deliberately exposed themselves to critical biblical studies in the university. Some accepted the (often unexpressed) presuppositions of a thorough going critical method and surrendered their view of the Bible as the Word of God. Such men have commonly been characterized as “having lost their faith.” Others did not feel compelled to surrender their evangelical view of the Bible, but cautiously accepted as much of the critical methodology as did not seem to

conflict with their Christian faith. They sensed that a great deal of critical work involved theories and hypotheses rather than facts, and they were not ready to surrender their evangelical heritage unless established facts compelled them to do so. Many of these students have become teachers and professors in evangelical colleges and seminaries and employ as much of the critical method in their research and teaching as they feel established historical and literary facts demand.<sup>10</sup>

Ladd then defines this modified historical-critical approach to the Bible,

Because it is history, the Bible must be studied critically and historically; but because it is revelatory history, the critical method must make room for this supra-historical dimension of the divine activity in revelation and redemption. A methodology which recognized both the historical and revelatory aspects of the Bible is what we mean by an evangelical criticism.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, what distinguishes radical criticism from evangelical criticism is that radical criticism knows few, if any restrictions. Evangelical criticism has the restriction that it must not encroach on the fact that God has worked supernaturally in history and that he has acted supernaturally in revelation (although not in the strict sense of what we mean when we speak about verbal inspiration.) Hence, in both circles the method is the same, only the degree to which it is used is different. Just to touch base with the theme of this paper, we must realize that the materials we read that stress a biblical feminism and a biblical feminist hermeneutic have for the most part come from just these evangelical circles.

The development of the historical-critical method is complex, and so are the specifics of its methods, especially if we examine how those specifics are altered and adapted by the many schools who use them. However, historical-critical methods can be grouped in a few main categories. Before we look at these categories we should note that these categories correspond to the categories of traditional biblical research.

1. **Textual Criticism:** Traditional textual criticism, such as we practice, is included in historical-criticism in the broad sense of this term. However, we recognize that our practicing textual criticism is merely our trying to determine the correct text. We do not consider ourselves using critical methods on the text itself. However, textual criticism becomes historical-criticism (in the narrow sense of the term) when it attempts, on the basis of literary studies, to alter an established text in order to solve a problem of exegesis.
2. **Linguistic Criticism:** The traditional interpreter practices linguistic criticism, of a sort. He examines the usage of words prior to translating the text. However, in using his lexicon what he is doing (for the most part) is using the work of someone else who has examined scriptural usage and systematized the results. Linguistic criticism becomes historical-criticism when the results of secular linguistic studies are used in such a way that they sit in judgment on the Bible.
3. **Literary Criticism:** Literary criticism is the method in which important questions about time, date, place and authorship of a book are answered. The traditional interpreter practices literary "criticism" in the sense that he examines the Bible's usage and style and makes certain deductions. However, he never allows those deductions to stand if they contradict some clear statement the Bible makes about itself. However, linguistic studies of the Bible as used in historical criticism is coupled with the idea that the Bible is less than divine, that it is compiled like any other similar piece of secular literature. Writing-style, word usage, and other literary features of the book are used to answer questions about authorship etc., with only marginal regard for the answers the Bible gives to these questions. The various documentary hypotheses, i.e. JEPD theory, largely are a result of historical-critical methods of linguistic criticism.
4. **Form Criticism:** Form criticism is an historical-critical method which seeks to discover through which channels the message we have in the Gospels and the Epistles came to us. It is assumed that

the writings of the NT were not formed until the second-century. The scholar seeks to discover the “*Sitz im Leben*” of the early church, and discards elements in the NT which are a result not of fact but of the conception of fact by the early church. In a sense the traditional interpreter is concerned with “form” also. Luke in the prologue to Acts tells us a little about the source, of his information. Here again, though, the historical-critical method is distinguished from the legitimate practice in that it uses external pieces of information, and brings them to bear on the interpretation of Scripture.

5. History of Religions Criticism: This method is where contemporary religions are studied and attempts are made to show how the biblical writers were influenced by them or wrote as a response to them. The traditional interpreter is concerned with contemporary religions also, but he looks to the Bible itself for a description of the religion to which the Bible writer was reacting. The historical-critical method uses this information to influence the translation of a passage, often in a direction the interpretation would not have gone unless such extra-biblical information were present.
6. Historical Criticism Historical Criticism (here used as a subdivision of the historical-critical method as a whole) is a method by which a person’s overall view of history, or certain historical facts at his disposal are brought to bear on the Scriptures. I think that this method deserves to be defined more precisely since it is here where the biblical feminist hermeneutic enters the realm of historical criticism.

Bernard Ramm describes the use to which history is put by the higher critic,

The historical interpretation is used in a special leveling and reductionist sense by the religious liberal. He means more than painting the historical backdrop of the various passages of the Bible. It is a method which endeavors to break the uniqueness of the Scriptures. It makes a religion a changing, shifting phenomenon so that it is impossible to “canonize” any period of its development or its literature. It believes that there are social conditions which create theological beliefs and the task of the interpreter is not to defend these theological beliefs (as in orthodoxy) but to understand the social conditions which produced them.<sup>12</sup>

In discussing Johann Semler (1725-1791), the acknowledged father of modern historical and literary criticism of the Bible, Fred Kramer writes,

The epoch making importance of Semler to the history of hermeneutics and exegesis lies in the (for his time) new demand for a historical interpretation of the text. He does not deny that the Biblical texts and the Word of God contained in them concern us also and are to be proclaimed to us. But what a given Bible text has to say to us today, is, according to Semler, a question which can be answered only when one has established the original historical sense of this text. Only in this manner can we, in view of the changed historical situation, --reach a correspondence in content between the past and the present proclamation of the Word of God. According to Semler the historical exegesis does not yet solve the problem of the actual proclamation, which must be directed to man today and speak to him in his specific situation.<sup>13</sup> The dispute revolved around the question whether and in how far it can be maintained that Jesus and the apostles in their proclamation accommodated themselves to the religious ideas and the general understanding of the universe of their hearers. Closely connected with this was the other question, how much temporarily conditioned elements of the New Testament message are to be judged from the standpoint of modern science. The manner in which these questions were answered had considerable consequences not only for systematic theology but also for the immediate practical proclamation. For the demand was made that the ideas which were recognized as temporally conditioned

and erroneous should not be considered when the essence of Christianity is defined and should also be banished from the sermon.<sup>14</sup>

The traditional interpreter will use history to “throw some light on the text.” But the historical critical interpreter considers the words of the text to be a sort of synthesis of divine truth and history. The more accurately he can define the historical element in the text, the more accurately can he discover the divine truth. He uses history as an aid to determine what the text “really means.”

In all of these methods we notice a desire to delve into the history behind the Bible and use this history as an aid in interpretation. Hence, the term “historical-critical.” I believe a good definition of the historical-critical method would be: “The historical-critical method is a term used to encompass any of the various methods by which difficulties related to Bible study are solved by altering the bare meaning of the text through the use of data other than that gained from Scripture itself, data gained through literary or historical studies.” Really, when you get down to it, historical-criticism is as much a spirit of hermeneutics as it is a concrete system. In fact, it has been compared to the allegorical method of interpretation used in the middle ages. The spirit of both is the same, only the set of rules has changed.<sup>15</sup>

The spirit of the orthodox interpreter is this. He recognizes that Scripture interprets Scripture. Contradictions (humanly speaking) are reasoned out, or they are left unanswered, but any answer that is found is found using information from the Bible. He recognizes the tentative nature of any conclusion reached using extra-biblical material and none of that material is allowed to contradict the Bible in any way. He treats historical and linguistic “evidence” that the Bible has been influenced by human weaknesses as he treats “scientific evidence” that the world was formed by evolution. He does this in spite of the risk of being called naive.

On the other hand, the spirit of historical-criticism denies the full divine nature of the Bible. It uses the method to ferret out the human elements and arrive at “the truth.”

It is true that the orthodox use of history and the historical critical use of history come very close; they even touch. This fact is sometimes used by the conservative scholar who wishes to toy around with historical critical methods. How can we be sure where one ends and the other begins? As we have seen, each of the categories of the historical-critical method has its corresponding category in traditional interpretation. They “touch” as it were. Yet, I believe it can be safely said that an interpreter with the spirit of letting Scripture interpret Scripture will never stray too far into the historical critical method, if at all. While the interpreter with the spirit of the historical-critical method will soon find himself far from where the two methods touch.

The degree to which this method is used is as varying and complex as are its methods. The rationalists who first developed methods of historical-criticism saw a contradiction that needed to be mended. The “facts” they had to square were 1) their completely naturalistic world view, and 2) the testimony of the Bible that God miraculously intervened in history on many occasions. Critical methods were applied to the Bible to strip away everything miraculous about it, turning it into just another piece of secular literature.

Then there were the liberal German theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These theologians with Bultmann as one of the main spokesmen also had contradictory “facts.” Bultmann’s philosophy was that what men needed was an existential encounter. He was also a naturalist. The Bible of course considered man to have a much different need and it spoke about miracles. Bultmann used radical methods of historical criticism. He attempted to demythologize the Bible so its readers could disregard the historical garb and allow the Bible to lead them in their existential encounters.

Bultmann would be a radical example of a theologian who used the historical-critical method. There are other examples closer to our setting. In the current Seminary hermeneutics notes, Prof. David Kuske draws a parallel between the hermeneutics of Bultmann and those of the liberal element of the Missouri Synod. He describes this parallel in six areas of theology.<sup>16</sup> His conclusion could be stated using this idea of “contradictions.” The liberal Missourians believe in the fact of the Gospel message. Their interpretation of the Gospel message, however, contradicts many passages of Scripture that seem irrelevant to it, or that are

downright “unloving.” The historical critical method is used to nullify those passages. The liberals’ canon thus becomes only those passages that reflect the Gospel. This has been called “Gospel reductionism.”

This same complex is also found in biblical feminism, which, as we have noted, often has its roots in evangelical circles where the historical-critical method is used. Two “facts” stand in contradiction, 1) the idea of freedom which is an application of the Gospel and is applied by Paul in Galatians 3: 28, and 2) the passages that speak about the subordination of women. Scanzoni and Hardesty write,

Interpretations of Scripture relative to women must not conflict with either the unequivocal, universal, and identical sinfulness of both sexes, or the grace bestowed on both sexes through Jesus Christ. Likewise, any interpretation that does not stress equal responsibility of both sexes in the kingdom of God must be rejected. An interpretation that “absolutizes a given historical social order” is unacceptable, as is one that is based on only isolated texts. In other words, any teaching in regard to women must square with the basic theological thrust of the Bible. It must not contradict the truth of the gospel.<sup>17</sup>

We note this attitude coming out in another part of their book. In discussing 1 Corinthians 11 they write,

Paul approaches the issue from a different angle in 1 Corinthians 11: 8-9 where he argues that “man was not made from women, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” Paul himself seems to realize immediately that this argument has inevitably led to a subordination of women which is incompatible with the gospel he expounded in Galatians 3:28 and elsewhere. So lest readers be misled, he declares: “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman...”<sup>18</sup>

Jewett declares,

To put matters theologically, or perhaps we should say hermeneutically, the problem with the concept of female subordination is that it **breaks the analogy of faith.**<sup>19</sup> (emphasis his)

As we have pointed out, this problem of “contradictory facts” is too difficult for the biblical feminist to solve exegetically. Hence, a non-traditional hermeneutical approach must be taken. In the next section we will examine the basic biblical feminist argument and how this squares with the hermeneutical principles Scripture demands that we use.

### **The Biblical Feminist Argument and the Clarity of Scripture**

Before we describe the more subtle biblical feminist argument, we should note that many biblical feminists do not try to be subtle. Rather, they use more radical historical-critical methods to solve the problem passages.

In an article by Samuel Terrien of Union Theological Seminary in New York we read,

Canonical hermeneutics will not attempt to harmonize the conflicting points of view which appear in the sixty-six books, as if the canon had to be statically conceived. It will take with utmost seriousness the results of literary, archaeological, and historical investigation of the biblical text. It will strictly respect the work of philology, form criticism, tradition-historical analysis, redaction criticism, and history of comparative folklore, mythology, and religion. It will pay due attention to the newer methods of existential and structuralist exegesis. At the same time, it will seek to discover, beyond atomistic faith of the early Hebrews to the proclamation of the living Lord in the early church.<sup>20</sup>

The Bible does not contain a ready answer to the question of the role of women in the church or in society. Many questions related to this role remain for contemporary theologians to investigate. Biblical faith, however, from Abraham to Jesus Christ, lays the basis of a theology of womanhood which goes counter to the traditional attitudes and practices of Christendom and challenges the church of today to rethink critically and creatively the respective functions of man and woman.<sup>21</sup>

In an article entitled “Paul, Chauvinist or Liberationist?” by Robin Scroggs of Chicago Theological Seminary we read,

Will the real Paul stand up? It would hardly seem necessary to reiterate that Ephesians, Colossians and the Pastorals are pseudipigraphal writings and that they cannot be used as an indication of Paul’s own views - were it not for the stubborn fact that it is precisely these deutero-Pauline writings that are continually being mined by both establishment and antiestablishment for nuggets of evidence to buttress their respective arguments.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, both sides should heed the scholars who discard as a post-Pauline gloss that infamous passage (1 Cor. 14: 33b-36) which prohibits women from speaking in Christian assemblies. Among the several reasons for regarding those verses as spurious, the most weighty is that they blatantly contradict 1 Cor. 11: 2-16, in which Paul clearly accepts without question the right of women to lead worship. Attempts to harmonize these two passages have been totally unsuccessful. The real Paul’s views about women must be gleaned from a few passages in 1 Corinthians, the rhetorical but crucial comment in Galatians 3: 28, and, scattered throughout the correspondence a few greetings to the women who were his fellow workers.

Similar remarks are found in a booklet prepared by the Consulting Committee on Women and the Church of the LCA. The first article leads with this thought,

For centuries the mainstream of church life has accepted the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. For centuries the Genesis passage has been deemphasized, while Paul’s mistaken assertion in 1 Corinthians 11: 7 that “a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but a woman is the glory of man” has been overemphasized.<sup>23</sup>

Other comments in this booklet include,

So, plainly, according to modern understanding of science and theology Martin Luther was as wrong as Paul in seeing women as inferior.<sup>24</sup>

New scholarly studies are bringing to light new understandings of the role of women in the church from the beginning of history. New interpretations based on scholarly research suggest new views of some Old Testament stories and traditions. These studies are changing people’s ideas of how men and women are intended by God to live in relation to each other.<sup>25</sup>

It is strange that contradictions within New Testament Gospels and Epistles about the roles and work of women in the early church have so long been ignored. We have been led to believe that only the subordination of women called for in later New Testament letters (now usually thought not to be Pauline) is distinctively Christian.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly the more radical forms of the historical critical method have had an impact on biblical feminist thought. However, there is another and more subtle argument that is found in biblical feminist literature, an argument that comes from traditionally more conservative backgrounds. Indeed, this basic argument is at the root of most biblical feminist thinking. Let me quote from three authors who define this argument. From a booklet produced by a conference of Canadian evangelical women,

However, theological principles have to be incarnated - given concrete expression in the Church in particular places and particular cultures. It is hardly surprising therefore to find that this particular theological principle has been accommodated to meet the demands and values of a patriarchal society, simply because the Church had to live in that society in order to proclaim its Gospel. The principles did in fact demand radical changes in outlook and values in relation to women—husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it - but it is hardly to be expected that the very nature of the society be changed overnight.<sup>27</sup>

In a book dealing with contemporary women's roles, Joseph Grassi writes,

At first glance the New Testament seems hardly a handbook for the ardent proponent of women's lib. The familiar texts about women in the NT quickly pop into mind: Paul's command that women are to be veiled in church (1 Cor. 11: 1-16); the pastoral letters' injunction that a woman is not to be a teacher but should keep silence in church gatherings (1 Tim. 2:12); the advice to the bride that she is to be subject to her husband (Col. 3:18). Some have made the mistake in the past (and even in the present!) of presuming that these are timeless Christian teachings. However, a close study shows that they are culturally bound to the background of the relationship between men and women at that time. The N.T. perspective can only be understood in relation to woman's position in the O.T. and in Jesus' own time.<sup>28</sup>

And Virginia Mollenkot, professor at William Patterson College in New Jersey writes,

Because patriarchy is the cultural background of the Scriptures, it is absolutely basic to any feminist reading of the Bible that one cannot absolutize the culture in which the Bible was written. We must make careful distinction between what is "for an age" and what is "for all times." We cannot assume that because the Bible was written against the backdrop of a patriarchal social structure, patriarchy is the will of God for all people in all times.<sup>29</sup>

In these three quotations all saying about the same thing lies the basic argument of conservative biblical feminism. While there are related "sub-arguments" which branch off from this main argument, the basic argument still boils down to this: Because there is a difference in culture between the Apostle's day and ours, the statements of Paul on women are not normative for our day, for they are set in the culture of the time and therefore are not applicable to a different culture such as ours. Specifically, the statements of Paul are said to have been written in a culture where if Paul would have said anything different he would not have been following the "law of love" since he would have been foisting on his readers a principle (alluded to in Gal. 3: 28) that would have caused offense in the membership and to the world that was looking on. Since our culture no longer holds any taboos regarding women in leadership positions the Lord would have us implementing Gal. 3: 28 to the full, and in this way follow the "law of love" in our cultural context.

What can we say about this argument? The biblical feminist has fallen into an error which is basically this: He has used history to judge Scripture. His use of history falls within the historical critical method since he has used extra-biblical data and used it to cause the interpretation of a text to go in a different direction than it would have gone if only the plain words of Scripture had been used. He has concocted a problem. His view of freedom and equality (Gal. 3: 28) is at odds with the passages in Scripture where subordination of women is

mandated. Instead of solving the problem using Scripture alone, he brings in his knowledge of history. He uses it to create a context in which Paul's arguments are absorbed so that their force does not come to bear on our modern context.

His position on interpretation is well stated in this view of interpretation,

It has long been recognized that the context bears an important relationship to determining the meaning of biblical words or statements. Why should this be so? Simply because it forces us to consider the author's intended meaning instead of our own. Context-concern forces us away from our private meanings back into the ideological framework of the author. But context must be understood to include more than the surrounding paragraph, chapter, and book. The careful interpreter must also consider the historical-cultural context of the world to which the New Testament writers spoke their message. Although there is a valid sense in which the New Testament is self-interpreting by a consideration of the literary contexts and references, there is also a sense in which the text is not self-interpreting without consideration of its historical background.<sup>30</sup>

But is this view of interpretation and hermeneutics valid? It does not square with what the Bible says about its clarity. The Scriptures teach us that they are true. But more than that they teach us that they are clear and that there is sufficient information within them to understand the teachings they present. This is implied in all of the passages in the Bible that lead men to find their source of spiritual growth within the pages of Scripture. David writes in Psalm 119: 105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul writes, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." As Paul was leaving the Ephesian elders he told them, "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32) In our dealings with people as citizens of this world, we all need wisdom and guidance. Living together as men and women, at church, in our homes and in society is an area in which we need an especially great amount of guidance. It is an important part of our lives as Christians. In these most important passages that speak about the roles of men and women is the Bible not sufficiently clear in and of itself so that in this most important area "the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work?" The passages that speak about God's Word being our guide imply that their words concerning the relationship of men and women can be understood in and of themselves. A childlike trust in the Bible demands that we take it and use it with the confidence that it will give us the information or principles we need to decide on issues that relate to our lives as men and women in Christ. What I am saying is this: If I were a layman or a pastor on a desert island with only my Bible, I would be able to know what the Lord wanted me to believe and to practice in this area of men and women using only my Bible.

This conclusion is well stated by Pieper,

If the exegete wishes to hold the right course and keep the fountain of the Christian doctrine clear, he must ever bear in mind the divine truth (Ps. 119: 105; 2 Peter 1:19) that "the Scriptures are a light in themselves", that *Scriptura sua radiat luce*. He must reject every interpretation which is based on something outside Scripture.

This principle takes in both the linguistic usage and the historical circumstances of the text. Interesting and important for apologetics as it is, e.g. to compare the New Testament Greek with the earlier Greek of Homer, and with the contemporary Greek of Philo and Josephus and the monuments, etc., in the last analysis the linguistic usage of the New Testament alone decides the matter.

The same applies to the historical statements and circumstances. All historical and chronological data which are needed to the end of time for the correct understanding of Scripture are furnished by Scripture itself.

It must be maintained that the sure understanding of Scripture in no wise depends on the acquaintance with its secular-historical background, since the entire “historical background” necessary for a correct understanding of the meaning of Scripture is given in Scripture itself. In fact, we go astray in our exegesis. If Scripture needs to be supplemented by material from secular history and permit this supplementation to have any decisive influence on our exegesis. Such a procedure too, would be an infraction of the truth that Scripture shines in its own light and would introduce also an element of uncertainty into the interpretation of Scripture, for who will guarantee the correctness of the background taken only from secular history.<sup>31</sup>

It is these principles that the biblical feminist ignores in his effort to get around the implications of Paul’s clear statements on the role of women.

### **The Idea of Culture**

One of the reasons why the biblical feminist misuses history and become cemented in his “de-culturization” hermeneutic is because he does not have a biblical view of “culture.”

Whether an interpreter holds to the biblical feminist interpretation or whether he espouses the traditional orthodox understanding, he has to come to grips with culture and with history. The previous quotation from Pieper was not meant to sweep history under a rug. Rather, it was to describe the limits within which history must be contained. All of us need to deal with the fact that the Bible was written against the backdrop of a specific historical and therefore “cultural” setting. What is important is how we handle this fact. The traditional interpretation says that veils were a part of the culture and need not be used today in our culture. On the other hand, the biblical feminist says that the whole question of veils was culturally conditioned and therefore none of its arguments are applicable today. Where do we draw the line? Are not traditional interpreters employing a double standard in their interpretation?

The answer to this question lies in our understanding of culture. In a world steeped in evolutionary thought, culture is viewed to include not only external “trappings” of a society, but the very fiber of the society itself. History is viewed as a series of little cultures linked together like a chain extending through the years. A change in culture to the biblical feminist entails a very basic change. Hence, if a basic change is taking place as cultures change, then a rather basic change must also take place in the applicability of the Bible writer’s instructions.

It is obvious that cultures do change, but what exactly is changing? This is the question that must be answered. The Bible is clear that the external “trappings” of society must be all that are to be taken into consideration when we talk about the Bible as written in “cultural settings.” The use the Bible writers make of other parts of Scripture tells us that they believed that God’s Word transcend every culture without a secular historian needed to sit over the Bible reader “de-culturizing” what he is reading. Jesus and the Apostles used the Word of God that had been written over many years, written to and by people whose culture was radically different from those whom they were writing and speaking to. Yet they used the simple words of Scripture. Think of Peter who spoke about the way women in his modern world should act. If he had had any flashes of “insight” looking forward to the future emancipation of women, would he have dipped back 2000 years to another culture to find an example of God-pleasing submission to one’s husband? The people in our day who claim that traditional interpreters are asking the church to play “ancient Palestinian” would have to accuse St. Peter of telling the church in his day to play “ancient Sumerian.” The rapid technological developments in the last 100 years have perhaps caused us to view ourselves in a little bubble here in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, distinct in

culture from other periods. But if we strip away our technology are we any different than others in other societies when it comes to the basic structure of society, the basic needs, desires, and understandings we have?

The book of Ecclesiastes gives us Solomon's answer to the matter of cultural change. While cultures change in a sense, the world as a whole continues in an unbroken pattern,

What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

The wind blows to the south and turns to the north;

Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

All things are wearisome, more than one can say,

The eye never has enough of seeing, or the ear its fill of hearing.

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again;

There is nothing new under the sun.

Is there anything of which one can say, "Look, this is something new?"

It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow. (Eccl.1: 3-11)

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man, (Eccl. 12:13)

I am not suggesting that Christianity has not had an influence on the world for good, morally speaking. But in this world, the world in which the church must live, "there is nothing new under the sun." The Bible bears its witness to an unchanging world. The principles laid down in Scripture are spoken in such a way that they clearly tell us that these principles are for the church in a world that just does not change substantially.

In describing the confusion that those who follow the historical critical method make in this area of "de-culturization" or "cultural accommodation" of the biblical message, Ramm makes a most important distinction. He writes,

Before leaving this subject of accommodation of Scripture it is necessary to declare our rejection of the liberals' use of the idea of accommodation. This particular species of interpretation by accommodation comes from Semler (1725-1791). To liberalism, accommodation was the evisceration or enervation of the doctrinal content of the Bible by explaining doctrinal passages as accommodations to the thought-patterns of the times of the Bible writers. **Thus the liberals asserted that the Scriptures were not only accommodated in form but also in matter, or content.**<sup>32</sup> (emphasis mine)

Note that this is what the biblical feminists are doing. They fail to make a distinction between form and content. Where the traditional interpreter will keep the content of Paul's words (the principles which Paul implies transcend the "culture of his day), the biblical feminist will alter both the form and the content of Paul's message. The traditional interpreter will claim that veils were an expression of the culture of Paul's time, and that Paul accommodated himself to this expression of culture. The biblical feminist claims that Paul accommodated himself both to the expression of his culture, and also to the very structure of his culture which is thought of as changing over the years. The traditional interpreter will realize that the core of human culture does not change, and that Paul expressed that fact when he addressed his culture using arguments that transcended his culture i.e. arguments from creation, the fall, and the Law.

In connection with the issue of culture, the biblical feminist brings up another point he claims substantiates his point about Paul accommodating the content of his message to his culture. The argument is found in any number of biblical feminist writings and I will merely summarize it here: The institution of slavery is obviously wrong, and no Christian today would dispute that point. Paul said nothing about the injustice of slavery, in fact he encouraged it by sending Onesimus back to Philemon. Therefore, Paul accommodated himself to his culture, and accommodated his message. Why can we not say the same thing in the case of women?

This whole argument is an example of the biblical feminist's lack of serious thinking in his efforts to substantiate his conclusion. The answer to this argument turns on two simple points, points which I believe are quite obvious; first, a comparison of what Paul said to slaves with what he said to men and women, and second, the essence of slavery.

First, Scripture tells us clearly that St. Paul did not consider slavery to be an institution created by God. In the case of women and their roles, Paul refers to the Old Testament and to the law to substantiate his points. Nowhere does he do that regarding the issue of slavery. In fact, Paul writes this to slaves in 1 Cor. 7: 21, "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you -although if you can gain your freedom, do so." Then Paul goes on to describe the real freedom they had in Christ, the freedom that he has also described in Gal. 3:28, "For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave." Paul was not accommodating to his society, he was merely advising slaves.

Second, the essence of slavery must be taken into account. The biblical feminist will say, "But it was not enough for Paul to just advise slaves. If Paul recognized slavery as a sinful institution, then he certainly would have spoken against it. His not doing so implies that he was accommodating to his culture." But we must ask ourselves, what is the essence of slavery? The answer is: slavery is when one man is in control of another man, deprived of freedom to change his position in life. The problem with the biblical feminist argument is that it reads into "slavery" all of the abuses we see in that institution both in ancient times, and in modern times. But slavery is not necessarily a sinful institution, a result of sin perhaps, but not sinful in and of itself.

If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, is sold to you and he serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him do not send him away empty handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.

But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.

Sinfulness in slavery comes in when a man loses his freedom because it is taken from him, and when he is abused, but there are times when an individual legitimately owns a slave. If someone sells himself to pay off a debt, and enters the status of slavery, no one will say that the man who "bought" him would be sinning. If he would, then the Lord in the Old Testament was condoning sin.

To equate the slavery mentioned above with the slavery that was practiced in our country prior to 1860, or to the slavery practiced in certain parts of the world even today is not fair. To make the traditional interpreter out to be someone who desires slavery just because he will not admit that Paul was accommodating himself to his sinful society is not fair either. Both the Lord in the Old Testament and St. Paul encourage God-pleasing treatment of slaves. But both concede that slavery will always be around. While we in our country have abolished formal "slavery" who can say that there is no slavery in our country, that there is no one who because of his poverty has had to sell himself into some job or position from which it is impossible for him to be free?

To speak out against slavery would be to speak out against a social fact, an institution that would always be in existence. To encourage fair treatment of slaves and to remind slaves of the freedom they have in Christ is as far as St. Paul could go.

### **The Implications of Biblical Feminist Hermeneutics**

The biblical feminist argument that we must deculturize St. Paul's words sounds simple enough on the surface, but it very quickly ceases to be so. The historical-critical methodology used in this type of approach soon takes its toll. Virginia Mollenkot takes the necessary step involved in the use of the argument of "deculturization." The unequivocal nature of Paul's statements leads Mollenkot to say,

Since the Bible is a divine book which reached us through human channels, it is also true that some of the Apostle Paul's arguments reflect his personal struggle and show vestiges of the rabbinical training he had received from Gamaliel, training which strongly favored female subordination. Such vestiges seem to be implied in 1 Corinthians 14: 34 where women "are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law"- a reference not so much to the Old Testament as to the social customs and rules of first-century Judaism. The miracle is that Paul so often triumphed over such culturally-instilled preconceptions, most notably in his Galatians 3: 28 vision of a classless, non-racist, non-sexist society, "all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>33</sup>

What Mollenkot is leading to she clearly states in the next paragraph,

Many biblical feminists fear that if they admit that some of Paul's arguments undergirding female subordination reflect his rabbinical training and human limitations, the admission will undercut the authority of scriptures and the doctrine of divine inspiration. Things have come to a bad pass when we have to avoid seeing certain things in Scripture or avoid admitting that we see them in order to preserve our preconceived notions about inspiration. Rather we ought to have so much faith in the God of the Bible that we fearlessly study what is written there.<sup>34</sup>

Mollenkot's theology may be wrong, but her reasoning is impeccable.

The hermeneutical principle involved in the biblical feminist argument necessitates their questioning the doctrine of inspiration. Quotations such as those above could be multiplied indefinitely. In all of the articles by biblical feminists that I read, I found no one who held to this "cultural gap" type of argument (as most of them did) who could defend Paul's integrity of thought in 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Timothy 2.

There is a further implication. The biblical feminist relativizes the Bible. The results of claiming that in any way the Bible accommodates the content of its message to its culture are awesome. There is no teaching that cannot be touched through this use of the historical critical method. There is no teaching of scripture that cannot be viewed in its "culture" and explained away as an accommodation to the thought patterns of an archaic writer, or to the thought patterns of an archaic society.

### **The Question We Are Faced With**

The question we are probing within our Synod is very similar to the question being answered in biblical feminist literature. The key issue has been narrowed down to this: Is there an order of creation? Do Paul's words speak to a situation that has come about as a result of the fall into sin, or does he speak about a status for men and women that applied even before the fall into sin? If we say that there is an order of creation, then the traditional concept of women's subordination is applicable to us, to our churches, homes, and society. However, if we say that subordination came about as a result of the fall into sin, then it becomes a relative concept. It becomes relative in the sense that the more the church, the home, and society reflect a God-pleasing way of life, the more the subordination of women becomes unnecessary. The argument will go like this: There will always

be subordination of women around, since we will always be sinful to some extent, yet the extent to which women are subordinated can become less and less as the particular situation warrants. In a home where there are two Christians living, an egalitarian marriage must be the goal. In a church where there are sanctified people, women's ordination is not just a possibility, but also becomes the goal (not that it will be reached in all cases). The women's liberation movement in essence puts the church to shame, in that society seems to be doing that which the church has been unable to do.

We must face this issue of the order of creation squarely. It must not be shoved under the rug even though the term has been used in ambiguous ways. It is a crucial issue, perhaps the crucial issue. But is an answer to the question about the order of creation so hard to come by? That Paul uses arguments that transcend even the fall into sin is obvious even to the biblical feminists. Jewett can give us our answer,

Whatever obscurity one may feel in the reference to angels, such obscurity does not affect the plain meaning of Paul's argument as a whole as he sets it forth in 1 Corinthians 11. The subordination of the woman to the man is an essential part of the hierarchy which God himself has established to insure a proper order in the relationships of life. Even the parenthetical remark that the woman is of the man and the man through the woman (vs.11-12) does not alter the substance of the apostle's reasoning.<sup>35</sup>

In his discussion of Ephesians 5 Jewett writes,

Obviously, then, the marriage relation is not a matter of mutuality as between equal partners. While the apostle might well have said: "Wives, love your husbands," he would never have said: "Husbands, fear your wives."<sup>36</sup>

Similar sentiments are expressed also in Colossians 3: 18-19, where Paul admonishes wives to be in subjection to their husbands and husbands to love their wives; in 1 Timothy 2: 11, a passage which instructs women to learn in quietness with all subjection; in Titus 2:5f. which urges older women to teach the younger women to be in subjection to their husbands, even if they are unbelievers, that the husbands may be won over by their meek and quiet spirit.<sup>37</sup>

Besides the order of creation ("man is not created from the woman but woman from the man"), we find one other item in the New Testament argument for the women's subjection to the man, though (happily) it is not emphasized. It concerns the woman's part in the fall as recorded in Genesis 3.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, when doing a strict exegesis, Jewett himself comes up with the inescapable conclusion that women are to be subordinate and that Paul is speaking to this with an argument based on the order of creation. Paul's arguments, according to Jewett, transcend the event of the fall into sin and go to the very beginning of man's existence.

It is inconceivable to me that we can come to any less of a conclusion. Paul writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve." (1 Tim. 2: 12,13) He writes, "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."(1 Cor. 11: 7-9). Paul's words are clear, even to Biblical feminists. Without even using the term "order of creation" we must conclude that Paul appeals to facts relating to creation. We have two options. Either we can accept these words for what they say and put them into practice. This is what the paper written by Pastor Curia at our last conference was working toward. He began with this conclusion, "There is no question that Scripture teaches a God-willed temporal subordinate relationship of woman to man in marriage and the church. The Scriptures definitely teach that woman's subordinate relationship to man in the

church (and, by definition, obviously also to man in marriage) exists on the basis of creation.” Or, we can say that woman’s role as defined in Scripture is only a result of the fall.

It is my conclusion that because St. Paul’s words are so clear, unless we take the former position, we will find it necessary to open ourselves to the spirit of biblical feminism, a spirit that is linked with the kind of hermeneutics described in this paper. It has been said that for us to properly apply the teachings of St. Paul in our churches, teachings that we may have been somewhat remiss in stressing in our age of women’s liberation, we would be opening a can of worms. The conclusion I have reached from reading biblical feminist literature is that the question is not whether we will open a can of worms or not, but, which can of worms will we open. In applying the truths of Paul regarding women, we might be opening a can of worms that will frighten or “offend” a few of our men and women. But unless we open that can of worms, we will be forced to open one that contains the hermeneutics of biblical feminism, a set of hermeneutics that has the potential to devour the very principles upon which God’s Word stands as an objective light to our world.

#### **Addendum - Quotations from Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ***

A. Are the Scriptural passages regarding men and women an accommodation to or a reaction against the situations that necessitated the statements to be made? The passages themselves and history itself bears out the fact that the statements are reactions.

The existence of New Testament teaching which agrees with rabbinic teaching does not rule out the New Testament having a distinctive approach. The writers of the New Testament were quite able to decide to approach an area differently from the rabbis, and they often did so. Distinctiveness rather means that when the New Testament teaching on a subject is put together, it exhibits an approach that at some points is significantly different from the rabbinic approach. One who asserts that a particular piece of New Testament teaching is simply rabbinic and not Christian has to show not only that there are rabbinic parallels, but also that the teaching in question is at odds with Christian teaching in the minds of the New Testament writers. Failing that, it would be better to ask why modern minds have difficulty accepting some teaching that is both Christian and rabbinic. (p. 266)

However, the core of the Christian teaching on men’s and women’s roles the insistence that the governing authorities in family and Christian community should be men, the insistence upon expressions of role differences in certain situations, and the basic patterns of family and community life in terms of the roles of men and women - shows no evidence of arising from cultural adaptation. Rather, the New Testament upholds this core of teaching as part of a view that the order in the Christian community is based upon God’s purpose in creation.

Here it is worth stressing that the New Testament could have drawn the line in a different place if adaptation to local customs was the main consideration. In other words, Paul and the other early Christians could have taken a different approach with respect to their environment than the one actually advocated in the pages of the New Testament if it had seemed right to do so. The rule about head coverings in the form stated by 1 Corinthians 11 was not a Greek, Asian, or Roman custom. Neither are there such parallels to the custom about women speaking in the assemblies in the form in which the custom is stated in 1 Corinthians 14. The rulings in 1 Corinthians 11 could have been omitted without causing any scandal to the local Gentile population. In addition, Greeks and Asians allowed priestesses and permitted a greater participation of women in the leadership of religious services and even of religious associations themselves. In other words, Paul and the other early Christian leaders were in an environment in which they would have taken a different position if adaptation to local custom was the primary principle they were following. Instead, they held out for an approach that made Christians different from their neighbors on a number of points, and they did so out of conviction that they were following God’s way. (pp.267-268)

One is dealing with problems (those addressed in the passages in 1 Cor. and 1 Timothy 3 stemming from a Gentile environment, an environment that was open to approaching the roles of men and women more loosely

than Paul or other early Christians would find acceptable. The evidence is strong that Greco-Roman society was undergoing a weakening of traditional customs in the area of men-women roles and family life. This looseness may well have been part of a general weakening of social structure in Greco-Roman society, especially in Asia Minor and Greece, and could well be the background for both 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. Second, whatever these influences from Gentile society might have been, the passages in question were taking a stand against them. The early Christian teachers were being pushed to a point beyond which they believed it was not right to go (p. 269).

B. Christianity is its own “culture.” While it can be translated into various human cultures, it claims for itself an objectivity over against all cultures in that its message is not to adapt, but to redeem and to change its hearers. Biblical feminist hermeneutics of necessity negates or waters down this objectivity.

If, as was said earlier, Christianity comes as a new way of life with its own teaching on righteousness and goodness and with a social structure of its own, then Christianity has to be seen as a culture of its own. The claim of the New Testament, translated into contemporary terminology, is that Christianity is God’s culture, that is, the revelation’ of God’s views on the way human beings should live their lives. In other words, Christianity teaches a human culture that is in harmony with God’s purposes and nature. (p. 275)

The above discussion on culture puts us in a better position to evaluate the modern quest for elements of Christian teaching that are not historically or culturally conditioned. Trying to determine whether or not a teaching is historically or culturally conditioned is not helpful in evaluating its worth, since everything human is historically and culturally conditioned. The real issue is this: Among the historically and culturally conditioned teachings we find before us, which have God’s authority behind them? Which are expressions of his ways, his character, and his purpose for the human race? When it comes to a conflict, which has more authority - a human culture, or the culture that God taught through Jesus and his apostles? The recent attempts to separate culturally determined elements from timeless truths in the area of Christian personal relationships and the roles of men and women has been just as much a failure as was the liberal attempt in the nineteenth century to identify the progressive, timeless elements of Christianity. Both attempts failed for basically the same reason. The reason is not, as is sometimes stated, that the enduring truths simply cannot be distinguished from cultural elements that are not essential to the Christian teaching. Rather, the reason is that when the scripture is allowed to speak for itself, it becomes clear that it is precisely those elements in it that many modern people would like to expunge as timebound and culturally determined that the scriptural writers considered most central and fundamental. In consequence, modern writers who set out to disengage Christian teaching from culturally determined elements and up by canonizing the approach of their modern culture and using that as a standard by which to judge the teaching of scripture. They do this because they cannot find any standard within scripture that would allow them to accept the elements they want to accept and reject those they want to reject (p. 279).

In attempting to understand New Testament teaching on the roles of men and women in relation to the Gentile environment which served as its context, one is confronted with an impressive array of influence and cultural adaptation theories. The very variety of these theories and their failure to harmonize with one another, even at times within the same author, gives the impression that many scholars are saying, “but the early Christians must have been adapting themselves to their culture.” Many of the theories are plausible, at least superficially. In the final analysis, however, they are not borne out by the evidence. There is no positive evidence for them in the New Testament, whereas the New Testament does give strong indications that the decisive factor in the formation of the early Christian approach to the roles of men and women was faithfulness to a tradition of teaching on men, women,, and social order that came to Christians from Judaism and was transformed in accordance with the gospel message. The New Testament shows evidence that the Christians were adopting a consciously distinctive approach (p. 269).

Christianity can be translated into many cultures, expressing itself through a variety of languages, art forms, and social manners. Christianity does not have to bring Latinization or Westernization along with it. At

the same time, as Christianity is translated into various cultures, the essential Christian way of life, social structure, values, and principles have to remain the same. Otherwise the result is not a translation but a new message. God's culture can be expressed in some very different ways, but it still has to be God's culture that is expressed in those ways (p. 278). (While Clark does not express himself very well regarding the purpose of Christianity, i.e, to save men from the guilt of sin, still he has a profound respect for the authority of God's word. The above quotations were included in this paper solely because of that latter fact.)

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1970) 63.

<sup>10</sup> Ladd, op. cit. 13-14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Ramm, op. cit. 68.

<sup>13</sup> Kramer, op. cit. 60-61.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>15</sup> David Kuske, *Hermeneutics Notes*, (Mequon, WI, Seminary Mimeo. Co.), 17ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 29-34.

<sup>17</sup> Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be*, (Waco: Word Books, 1974).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Jewett, *MAN as Male and Female*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Terrien, "Toward a Biblical Theology of Womanhood", *Religion in Life*, 42: 3, 322, 323.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 333.

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<sup>33</sup> Mollenkot, op. cit. 20.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Jewett, op. cit 57.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 59-60.