

Analysis and Evaluation of the CHE Presentation of The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture*

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As we consider this subject and analyze and evaluate the theses and the exposition of the theses, our one concern must be and remain to let God speak to us on this subject in His inspired Word. This is not easy for us to do. We live in the world and its thinking and ideas readily influence our thinking and ideas and these can influence the way we interpret Scripture. It is difficult then to remain objective in the interpretation of Scripture.

By way of introduction, it will be useful to remind ourselves what it means to interpret Scripture. The dictionary gives the word "explain" as a synonym for interpret. That means to make something clear, plain, or understandable. I believe the word that is used in German for interpret gives a better indication as to what we do, and must do, when we interpret Scripture. The word in German is auslegen. Literally that means to lay out, to expose to view. What we need to do is lay out for people to see what is present in the words Scripture speaks. True interpretation lays out to be seen only what is actually there, and everything that is there. That is why we say that when we interpret Scripture we are not to add anything to what Scripture says, nor are we to take anything away from it.

In keeping with this we must guard against letting difficulties we may anticipate in applying what the Word of God says influence our understanding of it. That is like saying: It is difficult to apply what I read here, therefore it must mean something else. Only after we have listened to what Scripture says will we say: And how can we apply this today in our circumstances?

Similarly we need to avoid letting abuses that may have occurred in the past result in a modification or rejection of what the Bible says. We may have seen a husband tyrannize his wife claiming Scripture for what he is doing, So we conclude that the Bible can't really mean it when it says that the wife is to submit to her husband. Abuses should not lead us to modify what the Bible says.

It is, on the other hand, helpful and important to let Scripture explain Scripture. Another passage that speaks of the same subject can throw light on what is being said in a less clear passage. This is not adding to the word of God, but letting it say exactly what it says.

We also must let Scripture say all that it says by looking at the context in which a particular passage is found. That too is part of what should be laid out for the reader to see. That is part of auslegen.

Sometimes extra-biblical sources will give us helpful information. These must be used with caution lest we import into Scripture what isn't really there. If extra-biblical sources contradict what the Bible itself says, we consider as true what the Bible says and discount the extra-biblical source.

These are some well-known principles of sound Scripture interpretation but it is useful to remind ourselves of them in connection with a subject like the one before us.

In evaluating the theses and exposition, I will have to admit that I cannot pretend that I have not heard them discussed and evaluated by others. I have heard agreement and disagreement expressed. I have read a paper that raises a number of questions. I have heard of questions that have been raised in other parts of our Synod. I have read material from outside our Synod on this subject. It is not my intention to take these up point for point. However, I also would be less than candid if I would say that I have been able totally to ignore them. However, my chief purpose will be to point to what I see as significant and important points made in this exposition. If I see any weaknesses, this too will be mentioned.

The first thesis, capital A, on page 10, is extremely important to remember and properly stands at the beginning. The fact that it is short does not make it less important, It asserts the complete equality, and I would underline that, the complete equality of man and woman in their relation to God, that too should be underlined.

* The CHE essay "The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture" may be found at: <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1338> [WLS Library Staff].

This thesis does not speak about a role the two have here on earth in their relationships toward one another in earthly matters. It speaks of our relation to God and what is true in Christ Jesus.

Three passages are used. Genesis 1:27-28. Both male and female are equally created in the image of God. The passage says that, exactly that. And it says that both were given dominion over the earth. Then two further points are made in the first paragraph, both equally became sinners and equally are redeemed in Christ.

For the latter point Galatians 3:28-29 is mentioned on page 11. What that passage says is briefly summed up with the words: "St. Paul clearly sets forth this complete equality for man and woman in their enjoyment of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus." This passage has suffered from being made to say more than it says. It is frequently quoted by evangelical feminists to show that Christianity has made man and woman equal in all respects, has done away with all differences between the sexes (excluding of course the physical). "There is neither male nor female" is made to apply also to social roles and relationships. The context, however, speaks of all equally being sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. At the same time, Paul in other places (Eph. 5, Col. 3) speaks of differing roles for man and woman in marriage. The CHE paper stays with what the passage clearly says and avoids adding to it. (Cf. art. in Bibliotheca Sacra, July-Sept, 1979, pp 258ff).

Thesis B takes up the distinctive role of man and woman in their relationship to each other for this earthly life. This forms the major portion of the presentation and is divided into five further theses.

The first of these is a basic one in that it asserts that distinctive roles for man woman in their relation to each other for this life were ordained by God at creation. The key phrase is "at creation." On the basis of a careful interpretation of Genesis 2:18-25 the exposition notes the following sequence in the creation account: creation of Adam, creation of Eve; made (not merely given) to be a helper for him; the first marriage; the institution of marriage. The paper correctly notes that the creation of male and female is distinguished from the institution of marriage.

Another significant point in the exposition refers to verse 18: "it is not good for man to be alone" etc. The paper points out that God is speaking not only of Adam and of Eve whom He will create as a helper. Rather, man simply is spoken of, referring not only to the one man Adam, but to man as such. Among other things, this is based on the wording in the Hebrew where the article with ADAM leads to such an understanding.

The words of God to Eve in Genesis 3:16 have been pointed to as the origin of subordination in the husband-wife relationship. As a punishment for her sin, Eve, it is said, was told, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." This, however, is like saying that when God speaks in Chapter two of making a helper for man that He doesn't really mean what He says. Similarly, the beautiful subordinate relationship between the church and her Head Christ Jesus, would then be compared in Ephesians 5 to a subordinate relationship in marriage that is the result and punishment of sin. No, the subordination of woman to man was a good and perfect ordinance before the fall, one that man and woman would both consider a blessing of God for their life on earth. The change the fall has brought about is that what had been perfect is spoiled by sin. Man abuses his headship. The woman may find it burdensome to have the man rule over her. Genesis 3:16, rather than establishing something new in the male-female relationship shows that it is still in effect even though it now will prove to be burdensome as a consequence of sin.

Keeping in mind that Scripture interprets Scripture, 1 Corinthians 11 is quoted in the paper on page 12 as further evidence that God in creation already assigns a subordinate position to the woman. Paul there says: "neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."

Two additional New Testament passages are cited in discussing this thesis. These two passages have traditionally been used in our congregational constitutions in support of restricting voting rights to the male members. On the bottom of page 12 we have 1 Tim. 2:11-15 and toward the bottom of page 13, 1 Cor. 14:33-34. In many respects the two passages express parallel thoughts, reiterating and applying to New Testament times what is stated in Genesis 2 and 3. Both speak of the woman being in submission. An application of this is silence in the church. 1 Tim. says she should not exercise authority over the man and applies this to teaching. In both there is a reference to the Old Testament, in 1 Corinthians simply to the Law, in 1 Timothy directly to creation and the fall. Thus the reference to the Law in 1 Corinthians no doubt has the same Old Testament

scripture in mind as 1 Timothy. The CHE paper also states that. However, the statement in the middle of the last paragraph on page 13, "there is general agreement that the word of God which he especially has in mind is the account of creation in Genesis 2," would better read, "there is general agreement that the word of God Paul had in mind was the account in Genesis 2 and 3." Many commentators make mention simply of Gen. 3:16, which reiterates after the fall what was ordained before the fall, as we noted earlier. With both Genesis 2 and 3 mentioned, there is no doubt about the general agreement referred to in the paper.

If the relative roles of man and woman were mentioned only in Genesis, we might conclude that they were in effect only to the earliest Old Testament times. If they were mentioned only in the New Testament, we might say Paul is referring only to a custom of his time, as many do say today. But since in these two passages Paul in the New Testament is restating as applicable what is already said by God in creation, the CHE paper draws the following conclusions: "We will have to say that the distinctive roles of man and woman in their relation to each other for this earthly life were ordained by God at creation... Man was created first for leadership. The woman was created to be a helper and hence she is not to subvert this role by presuming to exercise authority over man... All these aspects of the order of creation belong to the immutable holy will of God for this earthly life (moral law).

At this point it will be well to take note of some questions that have been raised about the paper, about some of its interpretations, and some of the conclusions.

A verb used in 1 Tim. 2:12 has received some attention in a number of areas of our Synod as a result of an article that appeared in the March 1979 issue of *The Reformed Journal*. A Catherine Kroeger, who is studying classics at the University of Minnesota, published an article in which she takes up the meaning of authenthein in 1 Tim. 2:12. This verb is used in only this one place in the Bible. Thus to gain a full understanding of its meaning we cannot look at its use in other New Testament passages but are heavily dependent also on usage of the word in classical literature. She notes that in the one place where it is used in the Bible it is ordinarily translated "to bear rule" or "to usurp authority." Then she continues: "Yet a study of other Greek literary sources reveals that it did not ordinarily have this meaning until the third or fourth century, well after the time of the New Testament." Thus she believes 1 Timothy should not be translated in that way. What then is its meaning? By examining various sources also of related words, she notes that authenthein had erotic connotations and was used to describe women who made sexual advances, such as were common in the fertility rites in heathen cults. Thus she suggests the idea that Paul is here forbidding women to teach and to engage in fertility practices, that is, the women are not to mislead men into heathen erotic religious rites, into that type of false religion. She concludes that this meaning of authenthein was the more common one in the first century and so the one Paul must have had in mind. This would free Paul from saying that a woman should not exercise authority over the man, something which she finds in conflict with references to women who did engage in teaching according to Acts 18 and Romans 16.

She also believes the sexually oriented meaning fits in with the context of verses 9 and 10. These call for modesty and propriety on the part of Christian women in their dress and conduct.

There are several serious flaws in her presentation. First is her claim that the verb authenthein did not ordinarily have the meaning of "to exercise authority" until the third or fourth century. The fact that she says "ordinarily" does recognize that it did at times have that meaning. In fact, a half dozen Greek dictionaries, including dictionaries of classical Greek, give that meaning with references prior to the third and fourth centuries. Her statement is a subjective judgment based on evidence that is not as overwhelming as her statement would lead one to believe.

In regard to the context in which the word appears, she fails to note that in the Greek verses 11 and 12 are not connected with verses 9 and 10. To make verses 9 and 10 the significant part of the context, one would expect a connecting particle in the Greek in verse 11, showing that this verse is closely connected with 9 and 10. None, however, is there. The NIV indicates this very correctly by starting a new paragraph with verse eleven.

The immediate context for the statement in question in verse 12 are these words: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission" and the statement is followed by "she must be silent." To import the idea of making sexual advances into that line of thought is strange. The meaning that has considerable support from

classical Greek according to reliable dictionaries fits perfectly into the context. Likewise, it all agrees with the parallel thoughts expressed in 1 Cor. 14.

This article, it seems to me, is receiving attention among us far beyond its merits.

Another point that has been questioned has to do with the statement in the second paragraph on page 12, "God is speaking of man as the male generically, not merely of Adam as the first individual." Various other questions are connected with this, particularly also the question whether the subordinate role of woman has application only in the marriage relationship, as has been asserted. We have already touched on this briefly in commenting on the interpretation of the significant passages. At the request of President Mischke, Prof. Lawrenz of our Seminary has written a further, more comprehensive, elucidation of the Scriptural basis for this point made in the paper.** If at times in the paper the interpretation of passages is stated briefly with pertinent conclusions, the impression may be given that all that could be said has been said and that the exegetical work is not very comprehensive. This further response shows the extensive, careful exegesis that underlies the interpretations and applications presented in brief form in the paper. There is no time to read these further comments and elucidations at this point. Possibly they can be made available in some form to those who desire them.

We are also told that some seem to have difficulty with the statement that the relationships established by God at creation are a part of the moral law. I might say that the first time I read this, I too wondered. I had not thought of it in those terms. I couldn't find a place for it in the ten commandments.

However, in studying the passages, I could not escape the fact that God in Scripture is presenting His holy immutable will to man about the male-female relationship. This is what he has established already in creation. He tells us in the New Testament how he wants these relative roles practiced in marriage, and in other passages how it should be upheld in the church. Surely then, when I act contrary to that will of God as he has revealed it, I am sinning. What should I say to the man who fails to provide leadership in the home? Should I tell him: God wants the husband to be the head; you are not fulfilling that role, but that's all right, you can go contrary to God's will in this without sinning, for this isn't really a part of God's moral law? Or should I tell the wife who delights in dominating her husband: you can ignore God's will to submit, that's not sin, it's not part of the moral law? Yes, we can sin against God's immutable, holy, will in regard to the relationship of man and woman for this earthly life. Also here we need the ongoing forgiveness of our Savior because we daily sin much. Simply because society in our day does not recognize God's will in this matter does not change anything before God, just as little as society's acceptance of unchaste sexual practices makes them any less sin. What it actually does is make obedience to God's will more difficult for the Christian in that society. This should, however, clearly be understood. I am not saying that it will be easy to determine in every situation when sin is present and when it is not. We must carefully guard against legalistic, simple applications. But I am saying that when the immutable will of God in this matter is transgressed, that is sin. Hence the term moral law is in place. I might add that the CHE paper and Prof. Lawrenz in his further elucidations shows the relationship this has to the Ten Commandments.

The second thesis under B requires little comment. The new man in the Christian will never find fault with God's Word and what it reveals, also not with what it reveals about the order of creation, The old man, on the other hand, considers any subordination debasing. There is no need at this time to examine this thesis further. The points that are made are good as antidote to humanistic philosophy that may want to inject itself into our thinking on this subject.

The exposition of the third thesis, referring to the two important passages Ephesians 5:22-25 and 1 Peter 3:5-7, shows that distinctive roles were assigned to man and woman at the time of creation in the interest of marriage and the family and carefully defines these roles.

While each was assigned his role in the interest of marriage, this was not, however, restricted to marriage. The paper states: "It is in the very interest of maintaining the basic institution of marriage and the family for their earthly life that the order of creation obtains also apart from the marriage bond, and apart from

** This response may be found at: <http://www.wlssays.net/node/2082> [WLS Library Staff].

the family." An important point in that connection is that "God made woman what she is that it would be natural for her to serve in the role that He has ordained for her." This reminds us again of the fact that Genesis says that God made a helper for Adam. Woman's created nature, suited for the role of helper, is the same before and outside marriage. Here we can see the importance of three points made in the interpretation of the creation account, which were referred to earlier. One is that God did not simply give woman a subordinate role, but that He created her for it. He created her with the qualities suited for her helper role. Another is that this creation took place prior to and in anticipation of marriage and is not the establishing of marriage itself. The third is that in creating Eve, God was at the same time creating womanhood, in other words, he was not merely creating Eve as a helper to Adam, but was likewise creating woman to be a helper to man. These are significant points in the creation account that lead to the conclusion that the subordinate, helper role of woman applies also outside marriage, even though it is in the interest of maintaining the marriage bond that God established it.

I believe I am correct in saying that the application of woman's subordinate role to society in general has raised numerous questions among us. The difficulties we see in the application can lead us to question whether it really applies to life in the world as such. Have we interpreted the Word of God correctly, laying out to view what is truly there? There is always room for reexamination of our exegetical work. But we must take care to layout for people to see (auslegen) only what is present and all that is present in the text. We believe the paper has done that. The question that remains is how best to apply God's will in this matter in our society.

To that end, the exposition of this thesis presents helpful suggestions, cautions, and examples. These need not be repeated here. They are found on pages 16 and 17. They should help us avoid setting up rules for every circumstance and prevent us from making a hasty judgment of Christian women who strive to function in the spirit of helpful service called for by God when leadership roles are thrust upon them. God looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart. While we will instruct our Christian people so that they know what God's immutable will is, we will not strive to be their conscience in deciding how they must apply God's truth in every situation that confronts them in a world that is beyond the Christian's control. The following statement in the paper can serve as a caution against legalistic application: "In applying the broad moral principles that woman is not to exercise authority over men to her activities in public life outside the home, Scripture leaves a great deal to our conscientious Christian judgment."

Thesis four shows the difference between government or society and the church. The former is governed by reason; its precepts and regulations will not fully conform to God's immutable, holy will. The latter lives by God's Word and is to reflect God's immutable will in its work and worship life.

Thesis five examines how this was done in the New Testament church and makes some important distinctions to avoid misunderstanding and misapplications.

The paper calls upon the church to distinguish between the immutable will of God, which is applicable for all time, and injunctions that are made in the interest of maintaining God's immutable will which involve customs of the time. Such customs may change; God's will does not. For example, a woman's long hair and head covering in Paul's time stood for proper womanly submission and chastity. For a woman to cut her hair or dispense with a head covering gave the impression that she was setting God's order of creation aside. Today it does not have that implication. Hence our women are not bound by the requirement to cover their heads in worship, yet the immutable will of God regarding subordination has not changed and will need to find application in our customs.

This is also illustrated in the paper in reference to the injunction against teaching and the command for silence on the part of woman. Not all teaching is forbidden, but the kind of teaching that would disregard the subordinate role of woman. Not total silence is imposed, but only when it is required for proper observance of God's immutable will expressed in creation.

Failure to recognize the above distinction has led to false conclusions in two directions. Some have claimed that the injunctions of Paul regarding head covering, cutting of hair, etc., are binding on women today. Thus they have added laws, our paper refers to them as ceremonial laws, to the moral law. This is legalism and destroys Christian freedom.

Others have said that everything Paul says about woman, including her subordination to man, must be seen as a local custom, applicable only to Paul's local circumstances. This fails to recognize that the subordinate role of woman is a part of God's immutable, holy will, or the moral law, applicable for all time.

Only if we recognize this distinction will we avoid legalistic applications. Only then will we recognize that what may look like inconsistent practice is actually consistent with God's immutable, holy will as it is applicable to the New Testament church.

For example: We do not permit women to become pastors in our congregations. Yet we allow women to sing in services as soloists, we allow children, and this includes girls; to speak in our Christmas services, we permit a young woman to speak for her class at a graduation service. If Paul's injunction to silence on the part of woman were a ceremonial law, then what we do would be inconsistent. But we need to see that silence is called for in the interest of preserving God's will that a woman not exercise authority over the man. To invest a woman with the pastoral office would inevitably violate the order of creation. Experience has led us to the conclusion that other forms of speaking mentioned above do not. In both cases we are applying, not a fixed ceremonial law that prohibits speaking, but God's holy will regarding woman's subordinate role in whatever way circumstances demand.

Another example: Our Synod has traditionally rejected woman suffrage in the church, and we quote Bible passages in support of this. However, this should not be understood as though there is a law in those passages that says: The woman shall not vote in the church. You won't find that. But we do recognize that the voting activity and the discussions leading to the voting inevitably result in a subversion of the woman's subordinate role as God wills it.

We believe the distinction the CHE paper makes between local customs and God's immutable will, between what could become ceremonial laws and God's moral law, is a very important one. Only when this distinction is made, will there be a proper evangelical application of God's Word on this matter in the work and worship life of the church.

The CHE paper in this final part refers also to what are called Gospel imperatives. These too should not be confused either with precepts of the moral law or with ceremonial laws. This likeness is a necessary distinction.

If this presentation has served to set a framework for our discussion of the CHE theses and exposition, it will have served a useful purpose. I, however, hope that it may also demonstrate the careful exegetical work that underlies the theses and their exposition, I believe the CHE paper does what is required of us in interpreting Scripture: it strives to say what the Bible says, no less, no more. I believe it approaches the subject objectively from Scripture. May God bless our study and discussion of it.