

HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES RELATING TO THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN:

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON KEY PASSAGES

A Presentation

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by

Gerhard F. Hasel

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Center for Adventist Research  
Andrews University  
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## INTRODUCTION

The vastness of the topic forced certain limitations upon us as a matter of course. I felt it wise to let the proponents of full egalitarianism and opponents as well as people taking a centrist position speak for themselves as far as is possible.

The first part of our paper on this assigned topic presents the arguments for the "new hermeneutic" on the part of both Christian and Biblical feminists. Evidently the historic methods of interpretation of the Bible are in need of revision so that the feminist points of view can be supported. The issue of Biblical authority surfaces time and again.

The second and third parts discuss the passage of Gal 3:28 and 1 Tim 2:8-15 again from the perspective of feminists and their major arguments. In each case, the issues of methods of interpretation and Biblical authority are highlighted.

The fourth and final part addresses the issues of whether there is full or limited Biblical authority in matters of the role of women and how this is related in the discussion by feminists on the Sabbath, the ordinance of footwashing, and adornment. The Biblical teachings on these topics are seen to be of a limited scope by feminists and, therefore, the teaching on the role of women in the church by Paul is also of a limited nature. The paper concludes with an affirmation of major hermeneutical principles of interpretation that will assist in a proper appreciation of the authority of the Bible for faith, life, and practice. We will be able to avoid the extremes of feminism and anti-feminism. The Bible has a very positive role for women based on an ontological male-female equality with functional differentiation.

### A. BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND NEW HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES BY CHRISTIAN AND BIBLICAL FEMINISTS

This part of our paper attempts to present the points of view of feminists in the Christian church at large as they themselves have verbalized them. Feminists in Christianity may be divided according to their own designations as "Christian feminists" and "Biblical feminists". They are divided according to the general theological traditions to which they belong. The former are aligned with the American liberal traditions of modern scholarship and the latter, the



"Biblical feminists", with American evangelicalism.

We have chosen to use a descriptive approach in this section of the paper because the hermeneutical bases of both groups of feminists and also of non-feminists are rather diverse. "Christian feminists" are committed to a thorough-going historical-critical methodology for the study of Scripture whereas the "Biblical feminists" are by-and-large opting for a historical-grammatical approach with some adjustments of a "new hermeneutic" but still holding to a high view of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. "Biblical feminists" are attempting to demonstrate that a full participation of women in the church, its ministry and proclamation with ordination, can be harmonized with and supported from Scripture, even though some parts of the Bible need to be limited in authority and scope.

### I. The "New Hermeneutic" of Christian Feminists and the Authority of the Bible

There is a Feminist Interpretation of the Bible<sup>1</sup> that is in existence for a number of years. Modern liberal Christian thought has an "underlying principle for a feminist hermeneutic."<sup>2</sup> It is "the conviction that women are fully human and are to be valued as such".<sup>3</sup> This basic principle leads to "two closely related principles: (1) the principle of equality (women and men are equally fully human and are to be treated as such) and (2) the principle of mutuality (based on a view of human persons as embodied subjects, essentially rational as well as autonomous and free)."<sup>4</sup> The principles of equality and mutuality "simply extend to women the insights of modern liberal philosophy."<sup>5</sup>

Reference is made to the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer<sup>6</sup> who speaks of two hermeneutical horizons; the first one is that of the text and the second horizon is that of the reader. Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy holds that there must be a merging of the two horizons, namely that of the text and that of the reader for true interpretation to take place. Whereas this is not the place to discuss the merits and demerits of this new hermeneutic,<sup>7</sup> we must, however, be aware that there is a "new hermeneutic" at work in the feminist interpretation of the Bible. The feminist Margaret A. Farley puts the two horizons in relation to each other; "Interpretation of sacred scriptures . . . is precisely the bringing together of the horizons of a



far-reaching tradition [i.e. scriptures as text] and present life situations."<sup>8</sup> The "present life situation" cause feminists to "bring to scripture what seems to be a measure for its meaning and authority, . . . "<sup>9</sup> Accordingly the "Christian feminist" paradigm has "present life situations" or contemporary experience as the measure for the meaning and authority of the Bible.

The feminist "new hermeneutic" also brings to the Bible a "principle of selectivity."<sup>10</sup> Certain portions of the Bible may be selected as authoritative, namely those that agree with present-day social, philosophical, and cultural norms or "present life situations." The "principles of selectivity" are present among other things, in the words of Phyllis Trible, in "the separation of descriptive and culturally conditioned texts from prescriptive and existentially valid ones."<sup>11</sup> This amounts to the use of a canons within the canon of the Bible. Trible states precisely, ". . . feminists employ canons within the canon."<sup>12</sup> This is to say that in the light of this understanding of authority, an authority as partnership between text and present experience, "it is no longer necessary to accept the dilemma of choice between faithfulness to the teaching of scripture or to our own integrity as human beings."<sup>13</sup> Thus authority in a binding sense is not anchored or rooted in the Bible at all. It is built on a partnership between "text" (in this case scripture) and "experience," "present life situations" or modern culture.

Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, one of the foremost American "Christian feminists," speaks most directly about "biblical authority" for a feminist critical theology of liberation. There should be, she insists, "suspicion rather than acceptance of biblical authority."<sup>14</sup> She even heightens her "suspicion of biblical authority" in the following words: ". . . a feminist critical hermeneutics of suspicion places a warning label on all biblical texts: Caution! Could be dangerous to your health and survival."<sup>15</sup> This shift in authority from the Bible to those who are the readers of the Bible, i.e. for feminists the readers are women, means in feminist theology to "denounce all texts and traditions that perpetrate and legitimate oppressive patriarchal structures in the 'word of God' for contemporary communities and people."<sup>16</sup> For a radical feminist of well-known stature such as Rosemary Radford Ruether it is not simply human life situations in general that provide the authority for judging what in the Bible is "Word of God". She insists that it is only and nothing but "women's experience" that "can be used to judge scripture and theological traditions".<sup>17</sup> The experience of men is excluded. Human



experience as the combined experience of women and men is also removed. What counts in judging the Bible (and theology) is "women's experience" alone.

These representative examples of "Christian feminists" of the modern liberal theological tradition reveal that (1) there is an abandonment of the Bible in its entirety as an authoritative transcultural norm for the life of faith,<sup>18</sup> (2) a reassignment of authority from the Bible to the modern (woman) reader, respectively interpreter, (3) a "new hermeneutic" or method of Biblical interpretation with the two horizons of past text and present culture, the latter being vested with decisive authority, (4) an adoption of a "principle of selectivity" on the basis of which one can decide and what parts of the Bible can be used today as "word of God" and what parts are descriptive of past situations alone and thus culturally conditioned without giving any guidance to the faith of the church, and (5) principles or "canons within the canon" of the Bible which must be used to select the appropriate parts of scripture for feminist interests and purposes. "Christian feminists" speak openly of using proof texts from the Bible for their own purposes.<sup>19</sup> Feminists toss Gal. 3:28 "into the ring to compete [as proof text] with [the passage of] I Timothy 2, . . ."<sup>20</sup> The latter is consistently seen to support a subordinationist and, therefore, inferior role of women in the church and beyond.

"Christian feminists" would argue that the Bible contains both truth and error. Truth is what promotes Christian feminism and error is what bespeaks of the extensive patriarchy of the OT and NT. The patriarchal emphasis is not only to be rejected, it is even "dangerous to your health and survival." "Christian feminists" also interpret texts in the Bible for the purpose of removing where possible patriarchy or the superimposed inferiority of women.

It should be clearly understood that the "Christian feminist" does not look upon the Bible as the "Word of God". In harmony with the basic liberal theological tradition, the Bible is made up of various pieces of literature (not Scripture with a capital letter) of a culture foreign to us with its own value systems which are not necessarily current value systems of the "Christian feminist" or our own time. We may refer to a recent essay by Danna Nolan Fewell<sup>21</sup>, who nicely summarized the points of the two horizons of the text, in this case Biblical literature and the reader, the latter having his/her own value systems. The reader of today must enter into the value system of the literary work, in this case the Biblical text, but "that is different from saying

Christian  
feminist



that the reader must adopt that value system."<sup>22</sup> Fewell continues, "When we 'enter into' the value system of a piece of biblical literature, we go through the process of comparing our beliefs with the beliefs of the literary work."<sup>23</sup> She points out that the modern reader can affirm the value system of the Biblical literature, if it is identical to that of his/her own modern value system; if it is different from his/her own value system, but if there is enough overlap between that of the past and that of the present "we can reconsider our own values. We can come away somehow changed."<sup>24</sup> If the value system of the Biblical literature is radically different from that of today, "our ideology takes precedence over the ideology of the [biblical] literature. We cannot be transformed by our reading."<sup>25</sup> The issue here is the normative status or final authority of "our ideology" of the present over against the value system of the Bible. Fewell notes that there is a crucial issue in the priority and precedence of "our ideology" in that it has "raised and magnified the issue of biblical authority."<sup>26</sup> This "issue of biblical authority" remains a core problem in the feminist reading of the Bible.

## II. The "New Hermeneutic" of Biblical Feminists and the Authority of the Bible

There is another group of feminists in the camp of Christianity whose theological bases and traditions are not identical with those of "Christian feminists". This second group of feminists refers to itself as "Biblical feminists". These persons are made up of women and men who do not follow the paradigm of theological liberalism, but are firmly entrenched in American evangelicalism, holding to a high view of the Bible as the inspired Word of God in its entirety. An excellent example of writing and debate of this group of "Biblical feminists" is the recently published volume of 26 essays under the title, Women, Authority and the Bible.<sup>27</sup> The authors were among the 36 participants of the 1984 Evangelical Colloquium on Women and the Bible.

"Biblical feminists" of evangelical orientation support not only open roles for women in all lines of work in the church, including the ordination of women in ministry, but disagree with their fellow evangelicals who advocate more historical or traditional roles for women. The latter

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say the heart of the matter of women in ministry is Biblical authority. "Biblical feminists" argue that the crux is not Biblical authority but Biblical interpretation and application. The issue is a matter of interpretation or hermeneutics. If the Bible is rightly interpreted, then all obstacles for open roles for women in all lines of church work and ministry are removed.

This claim of hermeneutics as the key issue mandates that we make ourselves aware of what new procedures and methods are employed by evangelicals to teach their new interpretation of the difficult passages of the NT and what rationale is provided for it.

There are a variety of discussions and proposals on the matter of Biblical authority and interpretations<sup>28</sup> among "Biblical feminists."<sup>29</sup> The questions of hermeneutics, exegetical method, and authority are more basic than the broader role of women in the Church or home.<sup>30</sup> The reasons are clear for this. The evangelical has a high view of Scripture, supports its inspiration, accepts its normative role and its authority for faith and life, and cannot divest himself/herself of the transcultural and perennially significant.<sup>31</sup> "Biblical feminists" have a score of proposals and suggestions for overcoming the impasse between the Biblical picture of the role of women and the modern aspirations of women as being fully egalitarian in nature. I will depict those aspects that have repeated emphasis without attempting to cite every supporter.

The "new hermeneutic" depicted previously as part of the "Christian feminist" approach with its two horizons is also argued among a number of "Biblical feminists". The two horizons between text and reader are strongly emphasized.<sup>32</sup> It is affirmed that the "second horizon" of the reader in his/her present socio-cultural context is a "needed corrective to traditional evangelical hermeneutics."<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, there are those evangelicals who are strongly opposed to the concept of the two horizons and its merging as a sound hermeneutical enterprise. This issue causes us to enter the larger area of debate on hermeneutics, an area that time and space does not allow us to enter extensively, except to refer to the philosopher and literary critic E. D. Hirsch who distinguishes between "meaning" (the text's simple meaning or idea that was meant by its author) and "significance" (the relationship between the text's meaning and the reader).<sup>2</sup> The evangelical scholar Walter Kaiser, following Hirsch, argues, "To interpret, we must in every



case reproduce the sense the Scriptural writer intended for his own words."<sup>3</sup> The human writer who received God's revelation produced the revelation in what he wrote, the Biblical text. The interpreter needs to discover by appropriate methods the very meaning of the text, the author's single idea represented in the text. Kaiser concludes that to turn to the reader as a "second horizon" in interpretation is to adopt neo-orthodox or liberal theological perspectives.<sup>4</sup> R. C. Sproul, another well known evangelical, argues for "an objective understanding of Scripture" in which the interpreter of the Bible reads "without mixing in his own prejudices."<sup>5</sup>

"Biblical feminists" make a distinction between the "permanent" and the "culture-conditioned". Numerous evangelicals (and liberals alike) have made a distinction between the instruction to a local congregation (such as the instruction of Paul in 1 Tim 2:11-15; 1 Cor 11:5-15; 14:34-35) which is said to be "time-conditioned,"<sup>6</sup> "cultural,"<sup>7</sup> "culturally conditioned,"<sup>8</sup> "limited to a particular situation,"<sup>9</sup> "historically conditioned,"<sup>10</sup> "culturally relative,"<sup>11</sup> or "descriptive"<sup>12</sup> and, therefore, without doctrinal authority for the church of today. Therefore, the troublesome passages of the Bible for the ordination of women today are said to be outside of that Biblical teaching that is "transcultural", "permanent", "universal", "didactic" and "normative", i.e. applicable to all times and all situations in the church. In other words, these passages are in some sense or another limited in scope and meaning, even if such limitations apply today only to the home and marriage.<sup>13</sup>

Evangelicals, recognizing that there are culturally conditioned parts in the Bible but that the relevant NT texts on women do not belong to them, point out several pitfalls in the "culture-conditioned" approach. The distinction between the culture-conditioned and the transcultural is highly subjective and arbitrary. Choosing "what is essential or valuable New Testament message is to set oneself over the New Testament as its judge".<sup>14</sup> The norms for such judgments are rooted in that our culture clashes with the culture of the Bible or the NT. Must judgments be made about past culture on the basis of the modern ways of thinking and doing? The truth with such an approach is that modern culture becomes the norm and Biblical faith is made relative to the modern norm. It is out of this reversal of norms and absolutes that the call of liberal scholarship is voiced that the church must "combine Biblical faith with Biblical criticism."<sup>15</sup> The results of such a combination for the loss of Biblical faith, a loss of faith in miracles, in the



bodily resurrection of Jesus, in the literal return of Christ and so on are too well known to need rehearsal again.

As regards 1 Tim 2:8-15, the argument that the authoritative teaching of women in the church is culturally conditioned is seen to be supported by some evangelicals in vs 9-10. In these verses women's adornment (hair styling, jewelry, and expensive clothing) is also said to be culturally conditioned. Thus the whole section is said to be relative in its meaning, culturally conditioned, and not binding for today. Supporters of women's ordination among evangelicals point accordingly to the flaw of inconsistency in taking vs 9-10 on adornment as culturally conditioned but vs 11-15 on women teaching men in church as transcultural.<sup>16</sup> For Seventh-day Adventists the consistency argument works in reverse. Our church holds that the matter of adornment in 1 Tim 2:9-10 is still applicable for the Christian and thus transcultural and universal in nature. Should vs 11-15 then not also be valid today? On the basis of consistency and contextual reasons, one would be hard pressed to find a different answer unless one pays no regard to consistency and contextuality, a position few would wish to defend. The theological reason cited by Paul in vs 13-15 make it very difficult to limit 1 Tim 2:8-15 (or 2:11-15) to the church of Ephesus. It has implications for the church in a transcultural and universal manner. More on this later.

It has been customary to take the head covering passage in 1 Cor 11:10 as culturally conditioned. Women are said to be able to pray and prophesy (vs 5), but not with their head uncovered (vs 13). It has been correctly noted that here, too, Paul points to the order of creation (vss 8-9, 12).<sup>17</sup> This is seen to negate the arguments of egalitarians who contend that the man-woman distinction is the result of the fall and is removed in the new order in Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The creation order emphasizes an ontological (personal) equality with functional differentiation. The creation narrative reveals the equality and unity of man and woman from the start (Gen 1:27) without obliterating their functional diversity or differences as being male and female (Gen 1:27, 2:18-25). The ontological and functional aspects of humankind have not always been recognized as being present in Gen 1-2 and inadequate conclusions have been drawn from the equality in Gen 1-2 without considering the functional differentiations between the

inconsistency  
in 1 Tim 2:8-15



sexes. There is perfect harmony between the ontological and functional aspects of the creation order. NT writers can draw upon one or the other depending on their purposes.

To return to 1 Cor 11:10 and the woman's head covering, it has often been argued that the head covering as the woman's authority is rooted in the ancient custom of a married woman wearing a head covering as a sign of her submission to her husband, the church leader, or the angels.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Morna D. Hooker upon careful study has suggested that in 1

Cor 11:10 the veil was the sign of the woman's authority to worship God as an equal with man.<sup>20</sup> In this case, 1 Cor 11:10-12 and Gal 3:28 are harmonious. While the "head

covering" may be related to the cultural custom of its time, the teaching on women praying and prophesying in church is in no way limited to Corinth, as Paul's theological argument based on Gen 1-2 indicates. The appeal to the creation account as a theological foundation for his argument of the proper role of women in church is cause for recognizing that there is normative,

transcultural teaching in 1 Cor 10:2-16 which remains valid for today.<sup>21</sup> Such teaching includes modesty, godliness, and functional differentiation. Functional differentiation between man and woman because of creation (vss 3-9) and on the basis of functional orders within the triune Godhead, do not mean in 1 Cor 11 that the apostle Paul assigns differing value judgments of the ontological (personal) nature of man and woman. Both are equal and both are different.

The principles of equality and unity between men and women transcend both local setting and custom and must be recognized as normative teaching for the church throughout all times and places.

Let us now turn to attempts at harmonization. The debate in evangelical circles has been to maintain the authority of the Bible by denying "feminism",<sup>22</sup> as a Biblically acceptable notion, maintaining "patriarchy" as a divinely ordained system,<sup>23</sup> or arguing for the subordination of women as regards ministry<sup>24</sup> and thus keeping an internal harmony in the Bible of both the Old and New Testaments. Other evangelicals to the contrary, i.e. Biblical feminists, argue in favor of women's ordination and also attempt to harmonize the Biblical testimony. "Biblical feminists," writes Stanley Gundry, "who respect the final authority of Scripture also must harmonize these [other passages that seem to favor feminism - the full humanity of women and the full opportunity and partnership of women with men in the home,



church and society] apparently discrepant strands of the Bible".<sup>25</sup> He summarizes three strands in the Bible that are foundational for "Biblical feminists". The Bible is "tied together by the creational themes of complementarity [without functional differentiation], full humanity and equal opportunity/accountability."<sup>26</sup> He holds that this thematic triad was thrown radically out of kilter by the Fall, but restored by redemption (cf. Gal 3:28). It is pointed out by "Biblical feminists" that they approach the matter of harmonization differently from those evangelicals who are not convinced that ordination of women is supported by or permitted by the Bible. "The passages describing the patriarchalism of the cultures and people in them are seen as just that - descriptive, not prescriptive . . . as circumstantial and cultural."<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, a passage such as 1 Tim 2:8-15 is "limited to a problematic situation"<sup>28</sup> regarding "the place of women in the church in Ephesus . . . and was limited to a particular situation of false teaching."<sup>29</sup> The same limitation based on cultural conditioning is placed on 1 Cor 11:2-16 and 14:33-36.<sup>30</sup> The solution to harmonization in the Bible for Biblical feminists is to limit the authority of Scripture by assigning troublesome passages to local situations in NT times without applying these instructions to be valid of all times. The solution is limited Biblical authority. In this part of the paper we have attempted to present the major options and approaches used in coming to grips with the Biblical material relating to the roles of women, particularly to the ordination arguments. In the following parts we attempt to see them function in the two key NT passages that are cited for the ordination of women in ministry, i.e. Gal 3:28, and the text that is traditionally seen as providing the greatest obstacle for a role of ordained women in ministry, 1 Tim 2:8-15. The purpose is to let the various interpretations and arguments emerge.



# ENDNOTES

1. Letty M. Russell, ed., Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (Philadelphia, 1985).
2. Margaret A. Farley, "Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture," Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, p. 44.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 45.
5. Ibid.
6. H.-G. Gadamer, Truth and Method (Philadelphia, 1980).
7. See Anthony C. Thiselton, The Two Horizons. New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein (Grand Rapids, MI 1980).
8. Farley, p. 48.
9. Ibid.
10. Phyllis Trible, "Postscript: Jottings on the Journey," Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, p. 149.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Letty M. Russell, "Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretations," Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, p. 146.
14. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work," Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, p. 130.
15. Ibid, (italics hers).
16. Ibid., p. 132.
17. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlating," Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, p. 111.
18. Catherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Uses of the Bible," Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, p. 64.
19. Ibid., pp. 57-59.
20. Ibid., p. 59.



21. Danna Nolan Fewell, "Feminist Reading of the Hebrew Bible: Affirmation, Resistance and Transformation," ISOT 39 (1987) 77-87.
22. Ibid., p. 77 (italics hers).
23. Ibid., p. 78.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p. 79.
27. Alvera Mickelsen, ed., Women, Authority and the Bible (Downers Grove, Ill, 1986).
28. Typical is that of Robert K. Johnston, "The Role of Women in the Church and Home: An Evangelical Testcase in Hermeneutics," Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation, eds. W. W. Gasque and W. S. LaSor (Grand Rapids, MI, 1978), pp. 234-59, which reappeared in slightly revised form in his book Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice (Atlanta, GA, 1979).
29. Roberta Hestenes and Lois Curley, eds., Women and the Ministries of Christ (Pasadena, CA, 1979).
30. This is the tenor of most evangelicals today.
31. See R. Nicole, "Biblical Authority and Feminist Aspirations," Women, Authority and the Bible, pp. 42-50.
32. See above n. 7 for A. Thiselton; Harvey M. Conn, "Contextualization: Where Do We Begin?" Evangelicals and Liberation, ed. Carl E. Amerding (Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), pp. 90-119; C. Rene Padilla, "Hermeneutics and Culture - A Theological Perspective," Practical Anthropology, 10 (1963): 179-187; Robert K. Johnston, "Biblical Authority and Interpretation: The Test Case of Women's Role in the Church and Home Updated," Women, Authority and the Bible, pp. 36-40; David M. Scholer, "1 Tim 2:3-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," Women, Authority and the Bible, pp. 218-219.
33. Stephen C. Knapp as quoted by Johnston, "Biblical Authority and Interpretation," p. 37.
2. E. D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven, 1976); idem, The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago, 1976).
3. W. C. Kaiser, "Legitimate Hermeneutics," Inerrancy, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), p. 118.
4. Ibid., p. 147.
5. R. C. Sproul, Knowing Scripture (Downers Grove, Ill, 1977), p. 39.



6. John Reumann, "What in Scripture Speaks to the Ordination of Women?" CTM 44 (1973) 7, and others.
7. Nicole, p. 46, and others
8. Scholer, p. 215, and others.
9. Leon Morris, "The Ministry of Women," Women and the Ministries of the Church, pp. 14-25, and others.
10. Scholer, p. 219, and others.
11. Mary Elizabeth Hayter, The New Eve in Christ: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in the Debate about Woman's Ministry, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1985), pp. 254-255. The published title, The New Eve in Christ (London, 1987) was not available to me.
12. David S. Dockery, "The Role of Women in Worship and Ministry: Some Hermeneutical Questions," Criswell Theological Review 1/2 (1987) 373, and others.
13. 1 Tim 2:11-15 is at times limited to the marriage or husband/wife relationship, see as examples, B. W. Powers, Women in the Church: The application of 1 Tim 2:8-15", Interchange, 17 (1975) 55-59; N. J. Hommes, "Let Women Be Silent in the Church: The Message Concerning the Worship Service and the Decorum to be Observed by Women," Calvin Theological Journal 4 (1969) 5-22.
14. Stephen B. Clark, Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in the Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences (Ann Arbor, MI, 1980), p. 359.
15. H. E. Brunner, Revelation and Reason (London, 1947), p. 276.
16. Scholer, p. 202.
17. For example, George Knight III, "The Role Relation of Man and Women and the Teaching/Ruling Functions in the Church," JETS 18 (1975) 84-85.
18. Dockery, p. 368.
19. W. J. Martin, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation," Apostolic History and the Gospel, eds. W. Gasque and R. Martin (Grand Rapids, MI, 1970), pp. 231-241; Bruce K. Waltke, "1 Cor 11:2-16: An Interpretation," BSac 135 (1978) 46-47; P. Patterson, An Exposition of First Corinthians (Nashville, 1983) pp. 175-189.
20. Morna D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Corinthians 11:10," NTS 10 (1963/64) 410-416. She is followed by C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (London, 1971) p. 254; Hayter, pp. 199-201; Dockery, p. 369; F. F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Corinthians (London, 1971), p. 103.
21. I agree here with Nicole, p. 45, who sees the head covering issue as cultural and the matters relating to the arguments of Paul based on the Genesis creation account as transcultural.



22. So Clark, Man and Woman in Christ, see above n. 46.

23. See n. 54.

24. James B. Hurley, Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI 1981). Similarly S. Bacchiocchi, Women in the Church: A Biblical Study of the Role of Woman in the Church (Berrien Springs, MI 1987).

25. S. N. Gundry, "Response to Pinnock, Nicole and Johnston," Women, Authority and the Bible, p. 62.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Scholer, pp. 213, 217.

29. Ibid., p. 219, with reference to about 20 other evangelicals.

30. Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?" Women, Authority and the Bible, p. 180; Hayter, pp. 204-211; and others.

#### B. GAL 3:28, HERMENEUTICS AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

There is unanimity of opinion that the passage of Gal 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (RSV), presents the locus classicus of all Biblical texts "for those who believe that, ultimately, Scripture does not discriminate between male and female and that it is therefore wrong for the Church to perpetuate such discrimination in its ordination practice."<sup>1</sup> This feminist point of view is voiced in a variety of ways by all writers on this subject.<sup>2</sup>

There are some major problems related to Gal 3:28 that call for our attention. 1) There is a bewildering array of suggestions on how to understand and interpret Gal 3:28 in both scholarly and nontechnical investigations. ② There are other Pauline passages such as 1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:33-36; Eph 5:22-33, and 1 Tim 2:8-15 that seem to contradict Gal 3:28, if the latter passage is understood to teach that all distinctions between "male and female" are removed in every sphere of life and existence.

Using Gal 3:28 to argue against actual differences



Since Gal 3:28 is pivotal for all groups and points of view, it is important to become acquainted with the various major hermeneutical matters. What does Paul envision? Is Gal 3:28 more important than the other Pauline passages? Are all statements of Paul on women and men to be interpreted or reinterpreted on the basis of a suggested universal equality between men and women taught in Gal 3:28? What social implications does this text have, if any, and how does it inform the NT church and Christian life and practice today? Does Gal 3:28 demand that the participation of women in ministry include full functional sameness in all positions of (ordained) pastoral and administrative leadership? Is Gal 3:28 one of those pivotal passages, or "the most profound New Testament [one] . . . regarding the respective status of men and women in the Christian community",<sup>3</sup> and can it be used as a "canon within the canon"?<sup>4</sup> Is Gal 3:28 "normative" and the other Pauline and non-Pauline passages "descriptive" of local situations and, therefore, of limited usage for the church today?

In regard to the matter of the ordination of women, the crucial point in every discussion is "what social implications Paul's words may have, particularly for the male/female relationships."<sup>5</sup> Is Gal 3:28 "the most socially explosive text in the New Testament"<sup>6</sup> or does it not deal with social relations within the body of Christ<sup>7</sup> or does it have limited social implications?<sup>8</sup>

These incisive questions and divisive issues lead us to survey key positions and arguments that play a dominant role in the interpretation and application of Gal 3:28 for the roles of women in the Church.

### I. The Alleged Superior Authority of Gal 3:28

There are several positions that use a variety of arguments in favor of the superior authority of Gal 3:28 over other Pauline (and/or NT) passages which are said to be "descriptive" or "local" in application and thus "culturally-conditioned". They are of limited meaning.

1. Appeal to Reason and Logic. There is the argument "whether or not women are fully human in the same sense that our Lord was determined to be fully human . . . . On this issue Scripture and tradition are ambiguous and reason alone says clearly, 'Yes'."<sup>9</sup> Because women are fully human, they should share in all facets of ministry, including the ordained ministry.



This has been argued on both theological and sociological grounds. There is "no reason why the full ordained ministry should be denied to women," says Reginald H. Fuller, because "women today are as well educated as men and have the same place in society, . . ."<sup>10</sup> Krister Stendahl and Jean Danielou have argued similarly.<sup>11</sup>

Many pro-ordinationists<sup>12</sup> have used syllogistic arguments to support their case. The following negative and positive cases may serve as examples.

Paul K. Jewett suggests that opponents of ordination use faulty logic as the following syllogism shows:

- (a) The woman is in no way inferior to the man
- (b) Yet she is different from him
- (c) Therefore, she is subordinate to him.<sup>13</sup>

The positive syllogism in favor of ordination is employed in the following way:

- (a) Men and women are equals
- (b) Equality demands role interchangeability
- (c) Therefore, men and women can interchange all roles.<sup>14</sup>

Another one reads as follows:

- (a) Men and women are equals
- (b) Equality denies inferiority/superiority
- (c) Subordination infers inferiority
- (d) Therefore, women are not subordinate.<sup>15</sup>

All of these syllogisms and others that could be cited share the same fallacy, namely, each one has a faulty minor premise.<sup>16</sup> Subordination does not infer inferiority; equality does not demand role interchangeability; difference does not imply subordination. The feminist Ruth Barnhouse points out honestly that inferiority cannot be construed from role differentiation between the sexes.<sup>17</sup> Madeleine Boucher and others argue that equality and subordination are not contradictory,<sup>18</sup> that equal rights do not indicate identical rights,<sup>19</sup> and that equality before God does not mean "functional interchangeability."<sup>20</sup> The analogy of equivalence and subordination existing in the triune Godhead is brought in relationship to humankind as the image-bearer of God.<sup>21</sup> Since there is role differentiation in the triune Godhead but there is



still equality, there can be role differentiation in the male-female relationship without inferiority.

2. Appeal to Justice. At various times supporters of a universal application of Gal 3:28 have appealed to the justice argument.<sup>22</sup> A parallel is drawn to slavery and its social and moral injustice. Paul Jewett argues that the abolition of slavery was a necessary corollary of the freedom in Christ. He states, "The church of today should not strive to maintain that status quo of church life in the first century as though it were normative for all time."<sup>23</sup> Another writer argues, "I would no more argue for the silence of women in the church than I would argue for slavery on the grounds that Paul sends Philemon back."<sup>24</sup> It is suggested that Paul's own situation in the first century A.D. allowed for existing social patterns such as slave/free and male/female to be continued with transforming safeguards, but that Paul's principle of "neither slave nor free" entailed the abolition of slavery<sup>25</sup> and consequently the "neither male nor female" demands the application of equality in all spheres of male/female relationship's both ontological and functional.

- Gal 3:28 - Neither slave nor free  
Does Paul contradict this principle by sending Philemon back?

Those who see in the male/female relationship an ontological (positional) equality but functional (role) differences have pointed to two major problems in the abolition of slavery and equality of women parallelism: (1) The "distinction between slave and master is not a creation ordinance," admits Jewett,<sup>26</sup> whereas the "male/female" distinction is "indeed our ordinance of creation."<sup>27</sup> (2) Obviously "in Christ" none of the physical distinctions between the sexes is obliterated or removed. "Paul's point is not that gender distinctions are obliterated."<sup>28</sup> Gal 3:28 is no invitation for homosexuality as an alternative life-style for those "in Christ". Indeed Paul's use of "male" and "female" instead of "man" and "woman" shows his maintainance of functional differentiation.

There is a new order and new unity "in Christ". Being "in Christ" (a) does not change human sexuality, (b) does not change marriage, (c) does not change a man into a woman or a woman into a man, and (d) does not obliterate the creation order of humankind as male and female. Being "in Christ" (a) changes the post-Fall inferiority of woman, (b) changes the domination of male over female (and in some cultures or settings, the reverse), and (c) restores the ontological pre-Fall equality without doing away with the functional role differentiations of the creation order.

3. Appeal to "Old Order"/"New Order". Some who deal with the equality of women



in the Bible argue that Gal 3:28 brings about a "new order" of equality which is to be contrasted to the "old order" of the OT or Jewish dispensation which is one under law. Mary E. Hayter is an exponent of this view. "It is, then, male and female as oppressive custody of the Law ordered their relationship which is transcended in Christ."<sup>29</sup> Or in different words, "It is the condition of male and female as they existed under the Law which is abrogated in Christ, not the original 'order of creation'."<sup>30</sup> "With the advent of the Christian faith, however, women needed no longer be in the custody of the Law (v. 25)."<sup>31</sup> Another writer states, "The old order of priorities and privileges which characterized fallen humanity no longer exists . . . . The privileges and obligations of existence in the Image will belong to both in equal measure."<sup>32</sup> The "old order"/"new order" argument is for some feminists the key argument for increased roles of women, including ordination.<sup>33</sup>

The problems of the age-old law/gospel or "old order"/"new order" dichotomy need not be rehearsed here. There is certainly a "new order" in Christ. The "creation order" is certainly one in which equality with male/female distinctions are enjoined. The undergirding assumption of the "old order"/"new order" dichotomy rests upon the position of absolute egalitarianism in creation without any role distinctions. This view denies evidence provided in Gen 1-2 where functional differentiation is maintained.

4. Appeal to Theological Normativity. This appeal presupposes that the NT outlines two types of male/female relationships which are mutually exclusive. On the one hand, there is the position that Gal 3:28 is universal and transcultural in nature and that Paul's other passages deal with women on a narrow scale in a culture-limited way and that these passages are but descriptive of local problems. This position is well expressed by the evangelical scholar Klyne R. Snodgrass, "I view 1 Corinthians 14:6-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 as statements necessitated by specific problems in Corinth and Ephesus, respectively, . . ."<sup>34</sup> and "descriptive" and "cultural",<sup>35</sup> i.e. still part of Scripture but "less important than Galatians 3:28, . . . [and] less direct in their application."<sup>36</sup> This is a limitation in theological normativity of Pauline passages other than Gal 3:28 supported by scholars who argue for the ordination of women in ministry. The primary role of an egalitarian position is alleged for Gal 3:28 and emphasized from various perspectives as theologically normative. It is claimed that of all NT passages on women "only Galatians is in a doctrinal setting; the remainder are all concerned with practical



matters."<sup>37</sup> It is also alleged by pro-ordinationists that if Gal 3:28 is taken at face value, the whole question concerning the role of women is settled.<sup>38</sup> Other statements with identical or similar sentiments abound and do not need to be repeated. Gal 3:28 seems to have been turned into the one and only proof text for the ordination of women!

## II. The Context of Gal 3:28

What does Gal 3:28 say in its own context? How does this passage relate to the verses that precede and follow? Does the context give some assistance in understanding the triplet, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female"? To be most specific, is the issue in Gal 3:28 the ordination of women or is the concern of Paul a different one? At this time it may be well to remind ourselves that Paul Jewett, one of the best-known promoters of women's ordination, notes the impossibility of proving the ordination of women exegetically from the NT<sup>39</sup> } N. 6

It has to be granted to begin with that the letter to the Galatians is not addressing the issue of women on a grand scale at all. Aside from the mention of "male/female" in Gal 3:28, there is a reference to a "free woman". It is the "free woman" Sarah (Gal 4:30-31) of whom we are children. The mother/child relationship in this allegory is without doubt spiritual and not physical in nature. There is also a reference to Mary in Gal 4:4. These are the only mention of women in Galatians.

The sentence that follows Gal 3:28 refers to "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Here the context has a spiritual offspring in mind. The sentence preceding vs 28, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27), is also expressing a spiritual reality. Thus, the immediate context of Gal 3:28 is the spiritual clothing of oneself "with Christ" in the act of being baptized and becoming a spiritual offspring of Abraham, a spiritual heir according to Christ. The realities in this context are spiritual in nature.

Beyond this immediate context referring to baptism, union with Christ, and being Abraham's spiritual offspring, there is the larger context in which Gal 3 is incorporated. This larger "context of Galatians 3 involves Paul's exposition of justification by faith and union with



Christ."<sup>40</sup> David Wenham summarizes, "The general context of Paul's remarks is a discussion of salvation in Christ and the immediate context [of Gal 3:28] is a reference to baptism."<sup>41</sup> Robert Saucy studied in detail the context of Gal 3:28.<sup>42</sup> Based on context and the expression "male/female", he concludes that the male/female relationship is "their relationship before God"<sup>43</sup> or the "spiritual status before God."<sup>44</sup> Others have reached similar conclusions: "The context of vs 28 shows that Paul is dealing with eligibility for baptism, not ministry . . . . Paul is not talking about the roles of the sexes here. Therefore this passage is quite irrelevant to our discussion, and in no way contradicts what he has to say in 1 Corinthians or 1 Timothy."<sup>45</sup> Roger S. Oldham is led to suggest that "to assert dogmatically that Galations 3:28 is the *locus classicus* on the role of women is to suppose a context that is not there."<sup>46</sup> Sometimes even those supporting women's ordination have frankly admitted that Gal 3:28 is used beyond its original intention by them. One case in point is Arthur A. Vogel who points out that Gal 3:28 "contextually refers to initiation into Christ, in contrast to the initiatory rite of circumcision in the Old Testament. To try to argue from this text to the ordination of women, is in my opinion, to extrapolate beyond the intention of the text."<sup>47</sup> Baptism is one of the immediate contextual indicators. As such it is the symbol of salvation, available to all, regardless of race, status, or sexual differentiation. Both men and women are received as full members in the community of believers by baptism.<sup>48</sup> Gal 3:28 is not to obliterate distinctions between male and female but is to correct "religious abuse" of those differentiations as regards salvation.<sup>49</sup> In short, it seems quite clear from the context that Paul argues for complete equality between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female as far as salvation and church membership are concerned. Men and women are equal as far as salvation is concerned *coram Deo* (in the eyes of God).

### III. The Word-Pair "Male/Female" in Gal 3:28

Supporters of women's ordination press the point further. What about the social implications of the soteriological equality of the two sexes in the church and in Christ? It is argued that soteriological or spiritual equality is not enough. Those who support women's ordination are convinced that the word-pairs "Jew/Greek" and "slave/free" involve the removal



of all social distinctions. By extension, it would be rather arbitrary if the third word-pair "male/female" would experience a denial of social implications.<sup>50</sup>

Are all three word-pairs identical in their social importance? The first word-pair "Jew/Greek" is said to be religious in nature; the second pair "slave/free" is social in nature; the third pair "male/female" is sexual in nature.<sup>51</sup> It is correctly emphasized that Paul does not remove the distinctions between these groupings. Jews remain Jews, Greeks remain Greeks and so on.<sup>52</sup> "Being in Christ does not change a Jew into a Gentile; rather, it changed the way Jews and Gentiles relate to each other."<sup>53</sup> Or more correct yet, the way they are saved. The distinctions between slave and master were obliterated in Christ as regards salvation and in the new community of believers. Philemon was to receive Onesimus "both in flesh and in the Lord" (Philemon 16). It took many centuries for slavery to be removed! Gal 3:28 played a key role. Thank the Lord for that!

The word-pair "male/female" has a different setting: 1) It is a creation order whereas the previous two pairs reflect social orders of a post-Fall world. 2) There is a change in the wording usually not reflected in translation.

Let us pay some attention to the different way Paul speaks of "male/female". Almost all major translations render the Greek (ouk eni arsen kai thely) with "neither male nor female" (KJV, ASV, NEB, RSV, NIV, NASB). Paul actually wrote, "There is not male and female," "marking out this third pair as different from the other two and making an allusion to the words of Genesis 1:27."<sup>54</sup> The use of the conjunction kai, "and" is of importance<sup>55</sup> in setting this word-pair apart from the other ones and thus for its meaning. K. Stendahl and H. Thyen, both supporters of women's ordination, argue that Paul's change in usage means an intended contrast between the order of creation and the order of redemption.<sup>56</sup> K. R. Snodgrass suggests that the two orders are not contrasted but that "redemption includes creation within its scope",<sup>57</sup> subordinating creation under redemption. This is stretching the point. Creation precedes redemption. There is general agreement that gender/sexual distinctions are maintained and that they are grounded in the order of creation. Male "and" (kai) female are created equal as beings (ontological or positional equality) while at the same time gender distinctions (functional or role differences) are maintained. The Gen 1 creation order is built on ontological equality and functional differentiation.



Pro-ordination writers add here an additional argument. Paul, it is said, "did not neutralize the equality of male and female in Christ by confining it to the coram Deo [in the sight of God] dimension, unlike many subsequent ecclesiastics."<sup>58</sup> Both men and women were engaged in the early church in missionary activity at every stage of its expansion, as the book of Acts shows.<sup>59</sup> And the work of women was not of a subordinate character.<sup>60</sup> There is indeed ample evidence in the NT that women played a major role in the early church. Women worked alongside men in many instances. Thus there are truly significant social roles that women fulfilled in the early church. The creation order had an important place in integrating women into various forms of ministry and missionary activity. This is a striking phenomenon over against Jewish tradition and Hellenistic custom. While all this is true, it is an equally striking phenomenon that nowhere in the NT was ordination needed or required for women to function this way.

Some attention must also be given to the terms "male" (arsen) and "female" (thely). The question that is to be raised is why, if Paul were speaking of a totally egalitarian position without any further role distinctions in Gal 3:28, does he not use the language "there is neither man and woman" in Christ rather than "male" (arsen) and "female" (thely)? If Paul were giving the magna carta of total egalitarianism, as many supporters of women's ordination hold, why does he not use the terms "man"/"woman" to make this clear?

It has been observed that Paul's use of the terms "male" (arsen) and "female" (thely) "denote a strong emphasis on sex and are used together to express emphatic sexual distinctions."<sup>61</sup> While several writers have attempted to understand Gal 3:28 as referring to androgyny,<sup>62</sup> other students of this text have rejected this view and not without good reasons.<sup>63</sup> Paul's usage of the "male/female" pair illustrates that sexual differentiation is not obliterated "in Christ."<sup>64</sup> The employment of these terms by Paul made it possible to maintain the creation order of ontological (positional) equality before God with its role (functional) differentiation between "male" and "female". His allusion to Gen 1:27 makes this clear where the LXX employs the same terms.

We are now in a position to summarize briefly some conclusions regarding Gal 3:28 based upon its context, terminology, and hermeneutical usage: ① Gal 3:28 is found in a context of baptism and oneness in Christ but not in a context of ordination of women. ② If Gal 3:28 is



used as an argument for ordination, it could only be done by extrapolation but not because the text itself demands it. ③ Gal 3:28 supports the equal standing of male and female before God (coram Deo) as regards salvation/redemption. ④ Gal 3:28 uses terminology that has a linkage to Gen 1:27 and thereby indicates that both the ontological (positional) equality and the functional (role) differentiation belong together as a creation order. "In Christ" the ontological and functional aspects of the creation order are reaffirmed. ⑤ The word-pair "male and female" is different from the pairs "Jew/Greek" and "slave/free". The two latter distinctions were introduced after the Fall and have both brought about social and spiritual inequities. "In Christ" both of these are overcome. Since the "male and female" order goes back to creation, the positional (ontological) equality and the differing role functions established in creation are reasserted. ⑥ Gal 3:28 teaches both spiritual equality before God and restored social functions and roles in harmony with the "male/female" differentiation. Spiritual equality implies a transformation of male/female relationships. It rules out all exploitation by Christian leaders. But obviously, this does not mean the abolition of all differing roles in society. Paul argues for recognized leadership roles in the church of God as well as within the family and within the state. He does not obliterate those leadership roles nor does He assign identical social roles to the "male and female". ⑦ The creation order does not provide for total egalitarianism, obliterating all "male and female" differences. It argues for a creation order egalitarianism with functional role distinctions. ⑧ Gal 3:28 supports "in Christ" an equality without inferiority or superiority of either "male" over "female" or "female" over "male" without obliterating role distinctions.



# ENDNOTES

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## C. 1 TIM 2:8-15, HERMENEUTICS AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

The passage of 1 Tim 2:8-15 is the most debated passage in Scripture as regards the roles of women in the church. Bible students "who oppose or limit the participation of women in preaching, teaching or exercising authority in the church consider 1 Timothy 2:11-12 the clearest and strongest biblical text in support of their position."<sup>1</sup> This text is said to be the one "which most clearly gives both the apostle Paul's verdict and his reason"<sup>2</sup> for the functions of women, writes another author. Much space is given to this passage by those who oppose women in full ministerial service.<sup>3</sup> The evangelical pro-ordination scholar Roger Nicole, on the other hand, maintains that "the suggestion that the passage is perfectly plain and admits no other interpretation than that it disqualifies women for the office of elder or pastor is simply not acceptable."<sup>4</sup>

Evangelical feminists have pointed to four interpretations on the basis of which 1 Tim 2:8-15 does not deny or limit the full (ordained) participation of women in ministerial service. A summary of these points is provided by Patricia Gundry, as follows: 1) "This portion may refer to women disrupting the public meetings." 2) "There may have been two kinds of services in the early church - one was public where unbelievers could observe, and another was private for believers only." Women could only speak in the latter; it would have been offensive to the non-believers for women to speak. 3) "There may have been two kinds of teachings at that time." Women would be allowed to participate in non-argumentative teachings. 4) "This was a local situation in which Paul was limiting the participation of women for a time until they had learned Christian doctrine."<sup>5</sup> These opposing positions in the evangelical community in North America are illustrative of the hermeneutical-interpretative issue to maintain the authority of the Bible, on the one hand, while supporting the full participation of women in ministry, including ordination, on the other hand. Some would level the charge of twisting Scripture with such interpretations while others would simply say that this is a legitimate "reinterpretation" of the NT in view of Paul's universal principle stated in Gal 3:28. Others



again would argue that a new understanding of 1 Tim 2 is demanded because of egalitarian stance and the feminist interests in much of the western world.

### I. The Alleged Limited Authority of 1 Tim 2:8-15

1. Appeal to the Descriptive Nature of the Text. It has been pointed out above that evangelical scholars have customarily referred to the limited, time-conditioned, culture-related, and descriptive nature of 1 Tim 2:8-15. Those who are unable to reconcile 1 Tim 2:8-15 with the alleged universal egalitarian teaching of Gal 3:28, which is to obliterate all role and social distinctions, have usually found themselves before a conundrum. They are forced to bring about a harmony between the two passages by limiting the scope of 1 Tim 2:8-15.

Among Seventh-Day Adventists this has also happened. But the culture-conditioning of 1 Tim 2:8-15 (or 11-15) is actually an inconsistency. The entire section of 1 Tim 2:9-15 deals with women. The SDA Church has used 1 Tim 2:9-10 historically to argue for simplicity in dress and for the avoidance of jewelry, recognizing that these verses are transcultural in nature. How could the instruction in vss 9-10 be transcultural and the following vss 11-15 be but cultural and limited?

Evangelicals have argued in reverse with consistency. They have concluded that 1 Tim 2:9-10 is culturally conditioned and thus descriptive and limited.<sup>6</sup> Biblical feminists have argued that, therefore, vss 11-15 should be understood likewise as limited and applicable only to Ephesus.<sup>7</sup> The principle of consistency for the entire passage makes sense. The whole section is either limited in scope (most "Biblical feminists") or transcultural (all opponents of the ordination of women). A split position is taken by Roger Nicole who sees "the posture in prayer and the meaning of feminine apparel" (vss 8-10) as cultural, but the injunction of vss 11-12 about women as transcultural.<sup>8</sup> His reason for this is as follows: "Yet in view of the appeal to the transcultural events of the creation and fall of Adam and Eve [vss 13-15], it would appear that the Timothy passage constitutes a permanent mandate, and my mind does not find complete rest in the suggestion that the reference is restricted to the church in Ephesus in view of special abuses to be found there."<sup>9</sup>

2. Appeal to the Secondary Nature of the Text. An increasingly common response to



the matter of harmonizing the allegedly universal egalitarianism taught by Paul in Gal 3:28 and allegedly conflicting views in other writings of the Pauline corpus in the NT is to say that one or the other of Paul's views cannot be genuinely Pauline. Feminists who wish to claim Paul to be on their side attempt to deny all subordinationist passages to Paul. Accordingly 1 Cor 11:2-16 is claimed to be a non-Pauline interpolation and 1 Cor 14:33-36 is a post-Pauline gloss.<sup>10</sup> Since 1 Tim belongs to the Pastorals, it is suspect by the majority of historical-critical scholars. Other scholars in turn defend Pauline authorship.<sup>11</sup> The exclusion of the alleged subordinationist passage from the genuinely Pauline writings does not remove them from the NT. Accordingly, they cannot be simply dismissed. Even a "Christian feminist" can defend all of these passages as genuine, since they are part of the Christian canon.<sup>12</sup>

3. Appeal to Progressive Revelation. Aside from such attempts at reconciliation, such culturally conditioned versus transcultural, genuine versus secondary, local church settings versus universal validity, and the like, there is another approach. Richard N. Longenecker designates it as a "developmental approach" or "developmental hermeneutic."<sup>13</sup> This developmental approach 1) clarifies the fullness of the NT redemptive note, including the priority of redemption over creation in the NT, 2) begins where "progressive revelation" has reached its zenith, that is, the NT 3) distinguishes between the NT proclamation of the new life in Christ and its implementation in practice, and 4) involves the effect of circumstances on Christians in putting into practice the Christian gospel.<sup>14</sup> The "progressive revelation" of the NT compels us as Christians, suggests Longenecker, "to stress the redemptive notes of freedom, equality and mutuality that are sounded in the New Testament"<sup>15</sup> over that "what God has done by creation, wherein hierarchical order, subordination and submission are generally stressed."<sup>16</sup> The NT is above the OT. Redemption is above creation.

This approach can and must be reacted to on several counts: 1) The idea of progressive revelation is dubious. It is not necessarily true that what is last in time is the most binding, i.e. 1 Tim 2:8-15,<sup>17</sup> 2) If "progressive revelation" means a progressive or continuous unfolding of the prior revelation, then there is genuine justification for such a view. If it means, however, that later revelation (NT revelation or parts thereof) denies or removes earlier revelation, or sets aside earlier revelation, or is superior to earlier/other revelation as is the case here, then a "canon within the canon" is developed. 3) The real point of contention is



"that the modern notion of progress is highly suspect. . . . Its context of significance is nature, and not grace."<sup>18</sup> 4) Scripture must interpret Scripture; but in "progressive revelation" Scripture is used to set aside Scripture as outmoded and abandoned from a later point of view. While there is diversity in Scripture, all diversity is controlled by an underlying harmony based in God Himself and in this revelation. There is but one Spirit that inspired all Scripture.

## II. The Context of 1 Tim 2:8-15

There is an immediate context for 1 Tim 2:8-15 and there is the larger context. We wish to address the matter of the immediate context first. Many discussions of 1 Tim 2 within the subject of limiting women in ministry or excluding them restrict their discussion to vss 11-12; "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (NASB). This instruction on women in vss 11-12 is preceded by instruction on women in vss 9-10 regarding propriety in dress and adornment. Furthermore, the entire section on women in vss 9-12 is preceded in vs 8 with instruction for men on how to pray. The instruction on men and women (vss 8-12) is followed by a theological argument introduced by the word "for" (*gar*) (left untranslated in NIV), to be taken in an explanatory or other sense as Paul explains his comment with reference to the creation ordinance. The immediate context indicates that the passage of vss 11-12 belongs to the section of vss 8-15.<sup>19</sup>

Some exegetes begin their discussion with vs. 9 which introduces the term "women" (*gynaikas*).<sup>20</sup> But the term "likewise" (*hosautos*) at the beginning of vs 9, shows that there is a clear linkage to vs 8 in which Paul instructs "men" (*andras*) on the proper posture and attitude for prayer.

This relates to the theme of prayer present in the previous part (vss 1-7). Where is the prayer to be offered? Paul speaks of it as "in every place" (vs 8). This is customarily understood as the place where the congregation meets, i.e. the church. ". . . the context is the church."<sup>21</sup> The prayer instruction is for public prayer, not family or private prayer.

The section following 1 Tim 2:8-15 is 3:1-13, which deals with ministers of the church, indicating that the entire section from 1 Tim 2:1 - 3:13 is placed in a church setting. It would,



therefore, be difficult to restrict 1 Tim 2:11-15 to the marriage relationship as some have attempted to do.<sup>22</sup> The total context of 1 Timothy speaks of church activities (cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35), which gives additional support to the immediate contextual emphasis in the sections preceding and following 1 Tim 2:8-15.

### III. Exegetical Considerations of 1 Tim 2:8-15

1 Tim 2:8-15 "is the most difficult [passage] for the interpreter"<sup>23</sup> of the NT passages cited in the debate on women in ministry. It seems, therefore, advisable to give some consideration to some of the disputed parts.

1. 1 Tim 2:8. The instruction is given to "men" (andres). Paul does not employ here the term "male" (arsen) as in Gal 3:28. The term andres is used again in vs 12. Earlier in 1 Tim 2 the generic name for "man" ("men") is used, i.e. anthropos (vss 2,4,5).<sup>24</sup> The designation of "man" as andres has been understood to refer not to "man" but to "husband" and the term "woman", the Greek of which is gyne, is also said to refer to the marriage relationship, i.e. to the "wife".<sup>25</sup> This is actually the usage of the terms in 1 Tim 3:2 where the context unambiguously speaks of the bishop as "the husband of one wife" or the deacon as "the husband of one wife". On the other hand, the "women" (gynaikas) in 3:11 are not necessarily "wives". The context would argue for "women" in this case. It is, therefore, precarious to take gyne as necessarily referring to a "wife." The meaning "woman" has good contextual support.

There are also other passages in the NT where the terminology of "men" and "women" uses the Greek terms andres and gyne with the clear connotation of "men and women" (andres kai gynaikes) as in Acts 5:14; 8:3, among others. The two terms andres and gyne distinguish male from female.<sup>26</sup> They can refer to "husband" and "wife" and equally to "man" and "woman". The terms in themselves are not a decisive indicator that the marriage or husband/wife relationship is in view in 1 Tim 2:11-15. If the husband/wife relationship were in view, then the instruction in vss 9-10 about women's dress and adornment would have to be limited to wives only, a position hardly warranted, because this instruction is given without qualification or limitation.



2. 1 Tim 2:9-10. The exhortation of the role of women in the church begins in 1 Tim 2:9. The opening term "likewise" (*hosautos*) refers back to vs 8. The injunction of women refraining from ostentatious dress and outward adornment is as serious as what follows in vss 11-15.<sup>27</sup> These high standards are transcultural and are opposed to the larger societal contexts of the world. The progression in Paul's thought moves from public prayer by men (vs 8) to women's dress and adornment standards (vss 9-10) to women's role in public worship (vss 11-12).

3. 1 Tim 2:11-12. The opening phrase "I permit not" (*ouk epitrepo*) in vs 12 has been the subject of heated debate. Some interpreters have wished to limit vss 11-12 to be Paul's personal opinion that does not carry binding authority.<sup>28</sup> However, Paul often expresses his authority in personal terms such as in 1 Cor 4:16; 7:12, 40; 12:3; Rom 12:1; Eph 4:1; 1 Thess 4:1; 5:12, 14.<sup>29</sup> This Pauline phrase should not be construed to limit Paul's teaching to personal opinion.<sup>30</sup>

The exhortation in vs 11 is that women are "to learn in silence and all submissiveness" (RSV) or "quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness" (NASB). The reconstructed context is a situation where heretical or uninstructed women teachers were seeking to expound their beliefs.<sup>31</sup> However, in view of the lack of explicit information despite 2 Tim 3:6-7, it is not possible to provide conclusive demonstration for such a hypothesis.

It is claimed that women in the Greco-Roman world frequently had an inferior position and often were at a low level in society. This, however, was not always the case. Furthermore, to see the injunction in 1 Tim 2:11-12 "as directed against women involved in false teaching who have abused proper exercise of authority . . . by usurpation and domination of the male leaders and teachers in the church at Ephesus"<sup>32</sup> is to create a context for this passage that is absent from 1 Timothy. The learning "in quietness and full submission" is a positive statement given the fact of traditional Judaism of its time. Paul seems to break with rabbinic Judaism which ruled out such learning.

Particularly troublesome is the term "to exercise authority over" (NASB) or "to have authority over" (RSV) or the like. These phrases translate the Greek term *authentein*, a *hapax legomenon* in the NT and an extremely rare term in extra-Biblical Greek. It has been suggested in recent studies by the "Biblical feminist" Catherine C. Kroeger that this term or



its root connotes improper sexual advances.<sup>33</sup> This view Kroeger has now abandoned in favor of the interpretation "to represent herself as the originator or source of man"<sup>34</sup> in the sense that women engaged in Ephesus in "the propagation of a feminine geneological myth in which woman was the originator of man."<sup>35</sup> This superimposes a debatable comparative religious assessment. It is interesting but quite speculative, to say the least.

Opponents of "Biblical feminist" studies on the term authentēin have not been idle. They have produced several studies.<sup>36</sup> These scholars have effectively weakened the alleged special meanings assigned to the only occurrence of this word in Paul's writings and in the NT. The "Biblical feminist" David M. Scholer conceded in 1985 that "the precise meaning of authentēin and its use in 2:12 cannot be completely resolved at this time."<sup>37</sup> It may be safe for the moment to stay with the neutral meaning "to have authority over" for authentēin 1 Tim 2:12.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, women are not to have authority over men in the church.

Another troublesome term to be considered in 1 Tim 2:12 is the term to "teach" or didaskein. The form used is a present infinitive. In contrast to authentēin this word appears frequently in the NT, about 95 times. Roughly two thirds are in the Gospels and the book of Acts. There are ten usages in the writings of Paul.<sup>39</sup> Basically the term "has the unambiguous sense of 'to teach,' or 'to instruct'."<sup>40</sup> In 1 Tim 4:11 Timothy is instructed, "Command and teach (didaske) these things." In 1 Tim 6:2 he is again commanded, "Teach (didaske) and urge these things." In the NT teaching is typically bound to Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:15), an emphasis given in 1 Tim 4:13: "Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching (didaskalia)."

In 1 Tim 2:12 Paul's instruction is, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over man; she is to keep silent." One can understand the prohibition "to teach" as standing by itself and to be of universal significance. But it seems more likely that this injunction is to be understood in this context that a woman is not to teach a man in the sense of having authority over him, i.e. that a woman is not to be an authoritative teacher in the church.<sup>41</sup> It is difficult to see why this injunction should be understood as only directed "against women involved in false teaching . . ."<sup>42</sup> as "Biblical feminists" claim. The context does not point in this direction and the term didaskein is never used in the NT when employed by itself without an object to mean "to teach falsely." It seems inevitable that the meaning of



authoritative teaching over men is supported by the context and Paul's usage of this term in his other writings. If it seems sound contextually to understand "teaching" in 1 Tim 2:12 in the light of and explained by the phrase "to have authority over man" with the meaning of authoritative teaching over men, then by implication non-authoritative teaching would be permissible.

We need to consider briefly the marriage interpretation supported by but a few persons with the suggestion that "to teach" has "the sense of playing the boss over one's own husband."<sup>43</sup> This is meant to limit 1 Tim 2:11-12 to the marriage relationship. The "woman" is the wife and the "man" is the husband. N. J. Hommes proposed, "Paul forbids the married woman to teach for that would be equal to the exercise of authority over her husband or 'playing the boss' over him."<sup>44</sup> Thus "a veto against women in office, therefore, is not to be found here, . . ."<sup>45</sup>

This interpretation has, to our knowledge, not received widespread support among "Biblical feminists". Roger Nicole wonders, "It is not clear whether Paul is speaking in 1 Tim 2:8-15 with respect to church activities (cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35) or to relationships within the home (cf. Eph 5:22-32). The former would fit well the total context of 1 Timothy and specifically the previous and following pericopes, dealing respectively with prayer, presumably public prayer, and with the office of the episcopos."<sup>46</sup> While he considers that the whole passage could be understood as relating to husbands and wives only, he finds no compelling reason to go in this direction. David Scholer, a fervent "Biblical feminist" who has written in the words of Walter Liefied "the finest treatment from this [Biblical feminist] viewpoint of the passage in question,"<sup>47</sup> has rejected the marriage relationship interpretation of 1 Tim 2:9-15 on the ground of "the specific language and the context."<sup>48</sup> There are indeed formidable hurdles in the marriage interpretation: 1) The context of 1 Tim 2:8-15 within both the more immediate sections that precede and follow it as well as the larger context of the whole of 1 Tim puts it in a church setting. 2) The term "to teach" has to be totally subsumed under the expression "to have authority over."<sup>49</sup> It cannot have any meaning of its own in the marriage interpretation, a view not supported in other passages in 1 Tim where it appears or elsewhere in the NT. 3) The meaning "to have authority over" in the sense of "playing boss over" a husband lacks adequate etymological support.<sup>50</sup> 4) When Paul wishes to speak of



husband/wife relationships he makes this abundantly clear, but such indicators lack in this section. <sup>51</sup> If women are not to play boss over their husbands in the family setting, could they do so in the public arena? Even Hommes concludes, "The woman in the ecclesia must not take part in 'teaching', that is, in discussing things with each other and admonishing one another, because that would be the same as playing the boss over her husband and thus completely contrary to her calling to remain silent, quiet, and modest in her conduct."<sup>51</sup>

A final clarification is in order regarding the nature of the teaching Paul limits for women in the church in 1 Tim 2:12. In the NT there is ample evidence that women could have important roles in the church, contrary to much in the Greco-Roman culture. Women could pray and prophesy in church and also function in a type of teaching ministry as is amply demonstrated in 1 Cor 11:5,14; Acts 18:26; 21:8-9; Phil 4:3; Rom 16:12. Is the ministry of prophecy (1 Cor 11:5, 14; Acts 21:8-9) identical with authoritative teaching? It is claimed that "Paul's definition of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:3 makes it, along with the whole argument of 1 Corinthians 14:1-25, a functional equivalent of authoritative teaching."<sup>52</sup> In support of this view it is suggested that a distinction between prophesying, praying, and teaching is not known in Greco-Roman society.

There are, however, clear distinctions between prophecy and teaching. They are not identical. Teaching was a function of apostles, prophets as well as teachers,<sup>53</sup> but prophecy was the function of those who had the prophetic gift. The presence of "revelation" (apokalypsis) distinguished prophecy from teaching.<sup>54</sup>

4. 1 Tim 2:13-14. This section opens with the particle gar ("for") which some have taken as an explanatory "for", whereas others have seen it as being causal in nature. If taken as in an "explanatory" sense, then Paul explains his previous comments by appeal to the creation ordinance. If taken in a causal sense, then the cause or reason for the previous instruction is provided. "Biblical feminists" generally prefer the "explanatory" sense. There is general agreement, however, that Paul refers to Gen 2-3 in vss. 13-14.

Paul says, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (vs 13). This affirmation states a normative principle or fact based on the creation ordinance. This statement affirms two ideas: a) Both Adam and Eve were created. Woman as well as man is a created human being; both were created in the image of God (Gen 1). b) The sequence of creation of Adam and Eve is



affirmed. Adam is created first and then Eve is created.

The affirmation about the deception of Eve in vs 14 is drawn from Gen 3. When Paul says, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor," he does not attempt to deny that Adam was no transgressor.<sup>55</sup> It may be that Paul is pointing out "that the chronology of the Fall is the reverse of creation."<sup>56</sup> Another opinion is that "both the Adam and Eve image are interpreted and applied in a very rabbinic fashion and according to the cultural fashions of the day."<sup>57</sup> These or similar arguments are used to demonstrate that Paul's affirmations are culture-bound and of limited application only.

The point of Paul in speaking about Eve's deception is difficult to come by. It hardly seems that Paul wishes to suggest that women are more susceptible in falling into sin than men<sup>58</sup> or more prone to deception. Some have, therefore, suggested that "the woman" of vs 14 is a type of all women in the sense that it points to women taking a different role. It is suggested that Eve's deception is the result of her asserting a role independent of and above Adam. In asserting leadership Eve placed herself above equality and lost by falling into sin first. Therefore, Paul suggests women in the church ought not to assert leadership, but to take seriously the role differentiation made part of the creation order. If roles are exchanged, then disaster can take place as in the events that led to the deception and fall of Eve. Paul concentrates on Eve because he discusses the role of women. The essence here is the role of women in the church. Women ought not to teach authoritatively and have authority over men because this is not their role. They can teach children and women (Titus 2:3-4; cf. 2 Tim 1:5; 3:15); they can pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:5,14; Acts 18:26; 21:8-9; Phil 4:3; Rom 16:12), but Paul suggests that they should not teach in a manner where they have authority over men. This may mean that they should not hold the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1-7), because he is to be an "apt teacher" (vs 2) who teaches with authority. Women can engage in various forms of church ministries. Their functions are broad but seem to be circumscribed by what appears to be teaching authoritatively and exercising authority over men, an injunction which Paul supports by the theological use of the creation order.

5. 1 Tim 2:15. Paul's argument closes with the statement, "Yet woman will be saved by the birth of the child" (RSV "through bearing children"). This is a very difficult passage and has caused much comment. Some scholars reconstruct Gnostic or semi-Gnostic ideas "to



provide the background for the positive mention of 'childbearing' (tekno<sup>g</sup>onia) in 1 Timothy." The author who it is said is a man of the second generation, i.e. a man other than Paul, according to M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, "had to withstand the mighty assault of syncretistic and ascetic tendencies and movements."<sup>59</sup> W. Schmithals also sees the role of woman as childbearer as one that "can be rightly understood only against the background of the anti-Gnostic or semi-Gnostic orientation of the entire epistle."<sup>60</sup> This reconstruction of Gnostic or semi-Gnostic ideas presupposes that Paul is not the author of 1 Tim. If Paul is the author of 1 Tim, then the background of the epistle with the anti-Gnostic orientation cannot be supported because of the development of Gnosticism later than the writing of 1 Timothy.

There is another school of thought suggesting that "the woman" is to be understood as a collective singular that stands for women in general. In this view "what is meant is that child-bearing (including nurture?) can be called a work which promotes salvation and is well-pleasing to God."<sup>61</sup>

Does it mean that women find salvation by means of giving birth to children? Is there an alternate way to salvation "through bearing children" (RSV)? Is this alternative available only to fertile women (wives) and single women who become pregnant? Or, is Paul indicating "God's seal of approval on motherhood as a career for women"?<sup>62</sup> It is suggested that childbearing is not "the only basis of salvation."<sup>63</sup> It is easy to agree that childbearing is not a basis of salvation,<sup>64</sup> "nor that it is a penance for the original sexual fault of the woman."<sup>65</sup> Another fairly common interpretation is to understand (a) "the woman" (he gyne) a singular in the Greek text, as a reference to the primal woman Eve, (b) the term "childbearing" (tekno<sup>g</sup>onia) to refer to the birth of the Messiah Jesus, and (c) the single verb "will be saved" (sothesetai) to imply that Eve's sin (vs 14) is reversed with the coming, work, and death of Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup> This interpretation has been criticized, too, because it does not take sufficient account of the second verb meinosin "to abide, remain, continue" which in Greek is in the plural. To overcome these changes from singular to plural it has been said that Eve mentioned in vs 13 represents woman in vs 14 or women in vss 9, 10, 11. In vs 15 "the woman" refers to womenkind and the plural verb refers to individual women.

An alternate view holds that "the woman" in vs 15 is womankind that "will be saved" or "kept safe" in the church in that women find their place among the saved, provided they



remain in faith, love and holiness, "through the maternal and domestic roles"<sup>67</sup> Whether this is to have limited applicability<sup>68</sup> or is transcultural<sup>69</sup> is, of course, where the opinion remains divided. Nevertheless this latter position has the most in its favor.

We can draw some conclusions: 1) It seems certain that motherhood is not spoken of as a means to salvation in the phrase "through childbearing". It is a way in which salvation takes place.<sup>70</sup> 2) Vs 15 is best understood in relationship with its immediate context of 1 Tim 2:9-14 and within the larger context of 1 Tim as a whole. 3) Women find a proper role among the saved who continue in faith, love, and holiness through the maternal or motherhood role. This fits well with Paul's positive view of marriage and his fundamentally anti-ascetic teaching (cf. 1 Tim 5:3-16; 1 Thess 4:4; 1 Cor 7:10-15).

As a general conclusion it can be stated that a limited and/or culturally- conditioned interpretation of 1 Tim 2:8-15 is strained. The appeal to the creation order and to the Fall in vss 14-15 seems to place a universal emphasis on this instruction. Furthermore, if the function of women in authoritative teaching settings in the church is to be of a limited nature as applicable only to Ephesus or in some other setting, then the prior instruction on adornment in vss 9-10 is to be limited to those settings as well. This would be equally true of the instruction of prayer by men in vs 8. The larger context of 1 Tim 2:8-15 with the instruction on elders (1 Tim 3:1-7) and deacons (1 Tim 3:8-13) puts the passage on men and women in 1 Tim 2:8-15 that precedes it in a setting of universal application for the church.



# ENDNOTES

1. David M. Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," Women, Authority and the Bible, ed. A. Mickelsen (Downers Grove, ILL, 1986), p. 192.
2. George W. Knight III, The New Testament Teachings on the Role Relationship of Men and Women (Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), p. 29.
3. J. B. Hurley, Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), pp. 195-233.
4. Roger Nicole, "Biblical Authority and Feminist Aspirations," Women, Authority and the Bible, p. 46.
5. Patricia Gundry, Heirs Together (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982), pp. 68-69, from which we cite. She gave a more detailed account in her earlier publication, Women Be Free (Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), pp. 75-77.
6. Scholer, p. 202, for this argument against Knight and Hurley.
7. Ibid.
8. Nicole, p. 46.
9. Ibid.
10. So for example, L. Cope, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16: One Step Further," JB 97 (1978) 435-463; W. O. Walker, "1 Cor 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women," JB 94 (1975) 94-110; R. Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," JAAR 40 (1972) 284; G. W. Trompf, "On Attitudes Toward Women in Paul and Paulinist Literature," CBQ 42 (1980) 196-215.
11. J. Murphy-O'Connor, "The Non-Pauline Character of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?" JB 95 (1976) 615-621; idem, "Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," CBQ 42 (1980) 482-500.
12. Mary Elizabeth Hayter, The New Eve in Christ: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in the Debate About Women's Ministry (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1985), p. 212. The published title, The New Eve in Christ (London/Grand Rapids, MI, 1987) was not available to me.
13. Richard N. Longenecker, "Authority, Hierarchy and Leadership Patterns in the Bible," Women, Authority and the Bible, pp. 80-85. See also his earlier items, "On the Concept of Development in Pauline Thought," Perspectives on Evangelical Theology, eds. K. S. Kantzer and S. N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), pp. 195-207; idem, New Testament Social Ethics for Today (Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), pp. 16-28.
14. Longenecker, "Authority, Hierarchy, and Leadership Patterns," pp. 80-84.
15. Ibid., p. 84.
16. Ibid., p. 82.
17. Willard M. Swartley, "Response," Women, Authority and the Bible, p. 89.



18. Ibid., p. 90.
19. It is inadequate to limit the discussion to 1 Tim 2:11-15 as is done by D. J. Moo, "1 Tim 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance," Trinity Journal 1 (1980) 62-83; K. W. Hoover, "Creative Tension in 1 Tim 2:11-15," Brethren Life and Thought 22 (1977) 163-166; A. B. D. Spencer, "Eve at Ephesus (Should Women Be Ordained as Pastors According to the First Letter of Timothy 2:11-15?)," JETS 17 (1974) 215-222; and others.
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## D. BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND HERMENEUTICS

Having surveyed in Part A above the two main types of feminists in the Christian Church at large, their presuppositions, epistemology, hermeneutics, view of Scripture, and understanding of contemporary culture as norms for life and practice, we may now be in a position to better understand the "new hermeneutic" used by feminists, both women and men. In Parts B and C we have attempted to show how feminists have interpreted the key passage of the NT cited in favor of the feminist point of view, viz. Gal 3:28, and the key passage understood by them and their opponents to oppose the feminist point of view, viz. 1 Tim 2:8-15. These two "opposing" texts of the NT were chosen so as to allow the reader to enter into the issues of Biblical authority and hermeneutics from the perspectives of pro-ordinationists and anti-ordinationists.

### I. Biblical Authority: Limited or Full?

It is apparent that the most pressing issue in such an important and sensitive matter as the proper roles of women in the church is the matter of Biblical authority. What authority does the Bible have for the interpreter of Scripture in the 20th century as he/she seeks the meaning and significance of the Bible for faith and life, realizing our 20th century perspective and setting in the culture of our time and place without yielding to social pressures from secular feminist or anti-feminist movements?<sup>1</sup> Shall we "work out a balance between ultra-radical culture-relativism and conservative fundamentalism"?<sup>2</sup> Shall we declare that whatever in the Bible does not fit the "Christian feminist" perspective must be either culturally conditioned, or reflective of patriarchy or depict local problems of the church in the past, and, therefore, needs to be rendered as nonauthoritative for today?<sup>3</sup> Shall we use an approach that makes a distinction in the Bible between "form" and "content" where patriarchal language is the "form" but not the "content"?<sup>4</sup> Shall the movement of the Bible's process of authority go from "the liberating Word" to "liberating the Word" and end up as "the liberated Word"?<sup>5</sup> Does the



Bible need to be "liberated"? If this were the case, what norms in, above, and beyond the Bible should be used? These and other questions are actually proposals by various feminists who have considered the Bible to be authoritative, at least in a relative or limited sense.

Basically there are but two positions on the authority of the Bible. One position maintains the full and unlimited authority of the Bible without qualification and the other holds to some kind of a limited authority of the Bible. Extensive reading in both books and essays on the matter of the role of women and the feminist perspective of interpreters, who have generally the noblest of goals and frequently many helpful observations, reveals that the full authority of the Bible has been altered in some form or shape. The Bible turns out to be of limited authority for faith and life. The discussion in the three previous parts of this paper contains representative illustrations and appeals on the basis of which the Bible has been relativized and has become limited in its authority.

The evangelical scholar Willard Swartley, a supporter of feminist interpretation,<sup>6</sup> produced a widely read book under the title Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women. One item in his list of twenty-two hermeneutical conclusions relates to "the temporal and cultural distance between the world of the Bible and the world of the believer today."<sup>7</sup> This distance is related to slavery, war and the role of women. He maintains that the meaning of the "same word, command, or instruction may differ significantly, depending on the historical and cultural place and time in which it was and is spoken."<sup>8</sup> What about slavery and the Sabbath? If "slavery was recognized and approved by Jesus Christ and the apostles,"<sup>9</sup> so Swartley claims, and yet is done away with today, should not also the Sabbath, which is recognized and approved by Jesus Christ and the apostles, be done away with today. If the Bible has limited authority even in the matter of the Sabbath that is based upon a direct command of God, then the NT instruction on women can be understood as well to be limited to its "historical and cultural place and time." Some scholars use this in their line of arguments. This could mean that if Adventists were to limit the authority of the Bible in matters of women speaking authoritatively, then we could limit the authority of the Bible as it regards the Sabbath as well. Or conversely, the lasting validity of the Sabbath is undermined with a limited authority of the Bible in the case of the role of women.

We have seen in Part C that in 1 Tim 2:11-15 Paul uses "doctrine" or a theological



argument to support his teaching that women should not teach authoritatively. There are those who argue in extenso that the intent of the passage supposedly relates a special circumstance tied to a particular historical situation. Only under a special circumstance a restriction for women to teach authoritatively in church is to be maintained. "When women are the source of heresy, they are not to be allowed to teach."<sup>10</sup> This suggested limited and special historical setting (as "illuminated by historical criticism"<sup>11</sup>) indicates that the injunction given by Paul is of limited application.<sup>12</sup> This case is made on the dubious reconstruction of women teaching heresy in Ephesus.

Adventists generally hold regarding women's adornment in 1 Tim 2:9-10 that these two vss are non-limited and non-culture bound. When the instruction on the limitation of women teaching heresy? It makes little sense to restrict the teaching of heresy in Ephesus to women. This interpretation does not seem to have much to recommend it. These earlier vss are in the same context and part of the same passage and even appear without appeal to an order established at creation. Can we say that the adornment section of 1 Tim 2:9-10 is transcultural and universally applicable, but the following section in vss 11-15 on women speaking authoritatively in church are cultural and limited? Those who restrict the injunction in 1 Tim 2:11-12 regarding women speaking authoritatively certainly would have even more reason to argue that the vss on women's adornment and modesty are restricted to Ephesus. Why should vss 9-10 still be valid when there is not even an appeal made to Scripture in them? In the matter of limited Biblical authority, there is a domino effect. If one part is no longer applicable, should the other part still be valid? If the injunction of women speaking authoritatively is no longer valid, it follows that the injunction on women's adornment is likewise no longer valid. The domino effect implies that consistency on women's instruction is upheld. The authority of one holds for the other or vice versa the limitation of one applies to the other.

These examples regarding the limitation of Biblical authority with reference to the Sabbath and women's adornment are but two that feminists use to indicate that the Bible is limited in its authority. Another one that appears in the literature is footwashing. G. R. Osborne<sup>13</sup> has argued on the basis of John 13 that Jesus based his injunction on footwashing upon "doctrine", i.e. the followers of Jesus ought to wash one another's feet as Jesus washed



their feet, because Jesus builds it upon his own authority by saying, "I am your Lord and Teacher" (vs 14). Yet Christians today generally refrain from footwashing, because it is clearly related to the culture of that time<sup>14</sup> even though the command is based on Jesus' own command. If Christians can depart from Jesus' own command, Paul's use of a command or argument from Scripture, it is held, does not make the injunction of women speaking authoritatively binding for today. The argument is that regardless of a command given on Mt. Sinai or by Jesus Christ or an appeal to creation order and the Fall by Paul as an appeal to Biblical authority, the instruction remains limited and nonbinding.

These arguments for the limited authority of the Bible, based on what is local or culturally conditioned, have important implications for church life and practice. These arguments have been used to abandon the seventh-day Sabbath,<sup>15</sup> to remove the binding nature of the injunctions on women's modesty and adornment, and to do away with footwashing. These examples are cited by evangelical scholars to justify a limited authority of the Bible.

It seems evident that a totally and completely egalitarian stance on women without any male and female role differentiation demands a limitation of the authority of the Bible. The limitation of such authority in these matters is justified by the limitation of the binding nature of the Sabbath (culturally limited to Jews),<sup>16</sup> the adornment of women (culturally limited to Ephesus),<sup>17</sup> and the footwashing ceremony (culturally limited to the disciples of Jesus)<sup>18</sup> in current evangelical feminist literature. In short, whatever position is taken on the issue of the role of women in the church cannot be separated from such items as the Biblical authority for the Sabbath, footwashing, and adornment (and we could easily add other practices or teachings based on the authority of Scripture such as dietary regulations, adult baptism by water, the literal nature of Gen 1-11, etc.). Once the Pandora's box of limited authority is opened, who can close it? If we use principles or norms of our culture for decisions as to what in the Bible is or is not of a binding and lasting transcultural nature, then the Bible no longer transforms culture but culture transforms the Bible. In this case the Bible is transformed into a word that contains the Word of God here and there where it does not conflict with modern and other cultural norms. This is a neo-orthodox position. Another approach is that of progressive revelation where later revelation is taken to replace earlier revelation. A third



approach is that of process theology in which nothing is absolute and everything is becoming or perishing. These are options left for understanding the Bible when limited authority is assigned to it.

Those who wish to insist that "the entire Bible consists of historically conditioned (i.e. culturally conditioned) texts"<sup>19</sup> need to have norms outside of the Bible to determine which texts or parts of the Bible contain principles of a directly transcultural or universal nature. In this case the basic and historic rule of the self-interpretation of the Bible is compromised to such a degree so as to render it meaningless. Subjectivity and relativity will in these areas replace Biblical authority.

The full and unlimited authority of the Bible is taught by Jesus, the apostles, and Bible writers. The high view of the inspired Bible as a true, reliable, and trustworthy account of God's revelation is a basic prerequisite for the Bible as rule of faith and life. The Bible is the "unerring standard" by which everything else has to be judged. The Bible is the "perfect standard of truth." The Bible is inspired by God and constitutes divine revelation (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). The Bible both is and contains the Word of God and must not be limited in its authority for both faith and life.

## II. Hermeneutical Principles

It has been evident throughout the entire discussion in this paper how decisive the matter of the authority and the interpretation of the Bible has been for feminists and others alike. The "new hermeneutic"<sup>20</sup> of the more radical "Christian feminists" is unacceptable to evangelical feminists. The latter, however, have also developed a "new hermeneutic"<sup>21</sup> which we have seen functioning in a variety of ways. The fact that two "new hermeneutics" have been developed indicates that the time-honored principles of Biblical interpretation do not yield the results desired by those who argue for full egalitarianism. A recent dissertation from Oxford University by a "Christian feminist" on the use and abuse of the Bible in the debate about women's ministry<sup>22</sup> (now published as a book)<sup>23</sup> concludes that those who assert that "female-subordinationist teachings are binding upon the Church today reach their conclusions by minimizing critical methods or by using them erratically."<sup>24</sup> In other words, only the



consistent use of "critical methods" can lead to an interpretation of the Bible that removes the restraints for the ordination of women. This view is shared by many others.<sup>25</sup>

Within this context of the development of two "new hermeneutics," it is incumbent on us to state some general hermeneutical principles that may assist us in our quest for recovering the true meaning of the Bible, including the Biblical meaning of the role of women in the church and society:

1. **The Bible must be its own interpreter.** This principle of sola Scripture, if rightly understood, will prevent the interpreter from superimposing his/her own views on the Bible. Since there is no totally objective interpreter, the Bible's own testimony will function as an inner scriptural control over the superimposition upon Scripture of culture-bound norms or convictions.

2. **The Bible must not be interpreted on the basis of a principle derived from a selected part of Scripture at the expense of the entire message of the Bible.** The approach of a "canon within the canon" as widely used as it is in many circles will not yield the full message of the Bible. Feminists use

Gal 3:28 which is interpreted as teaching full egalitarianism in every respect as the "canon within the canon" on the basis of which the seemingly subordinationist passages of Paul are relativized in their scope and applicability.<sup>26</sup> Vice versa anti-feminist interpreters may select 1 Tim 2:9-3:13 "as the locus classicus for determining leadership roles with the church."<sup>27</sup> Either approach is misplaced. The entire Biblical teaching on the subject needs careful study and in relationship to the full message of Scripture in all its aspects and parts.

3. **Each passage of Scripture must be studied within the immediate and the larger contexts in which it is found.** The immediate context relates to the preceding section or verses and those following. As regards the passages of Gal 3:28 and 1 Tim 2:11-15 this obviously means that the immediate context provides a larger setting. In Gal 3:26-27 baptism appears as a context and in 1 Tim 2-3 the setting consists in instructions for men and women in church such as on prayer, adornment, speaking, and leadership roles. This seems to remove from Gal 3:28 a universal application that goes beyond the intention of the context. It also seems to remove from 1 Tim 2:8-15 a culturally conditioned limitation that is unfaithful to its context.

4. **Texts (scripture) must be compared with other texts (scripture) by the same author.**

Very good point.



They must also be compared with texts on the same subject written by other authors of the Bible. This means that Paul must be compared with Paul, John with John, Peter with Peter, etc. It may be helpful to compare texts in chronological order so that matters of sequence may be considered. It also implies that no single part of Scripture can become a "proof-text" or a canon of authority that is pitched against other Scriptures or the entire canonical Scriptures. **The unity of the Bible remains a foundational key to the total teaching of the Bible.**

5. **Difficult texts on a given subject must be explained on the basis of those that are plain or clear on the same subject and not vice versa.** It is usually not too difficult to discover what texts on a given subject have a clear meaning. They may be applied in the case of those texts that are problematic, difficult, or obscure.

6. **The unity of the Bible must be maintained.** All who accept that the books of the canon of the Bible are divinely originated will view the Bible also as a canonical unity. There is variety in the unity of the Bible, such variety, however, is not contradictory.<sup>28</sup> There are legitimate uses of harmonization. Some persons recognize certain portions of the Bible to be supportive of their view. Yet other parts of Scripture are seen to be conflicting and as a result it is concluded that the Bible contradicts itself. Based on this alleged contradiction those Scriptures are chosen that agree with what "we" already believe. In so doing, the authority of the reader is placed above the authority of the Bible. The Bible becomes the handmaiden or secondary source to enhance what we already have chosen to believe. This is a subjective use of the Bible, making the Bible subordinate to "our" superior knowledge.

7. Exegetical possibilities should not be used to establish Biblical teaching, church doctrine and practice. In Rom 15:1-2 Paul refers to Phoebe, a "deacon" from Cenchreae, and commends her as his "helper" or "patron." It is possible that Pheobe held the office of "deacon." But we do not know what this office she seems to have held entailed and what authority she had. It reveals that Paul is a believer in women's ministry as a "deacon." In Rom 16:3 he refers to the wife-husband team of Priscilla and Aquila "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." Rom 16:7 refers to a Junia (feminine) or Junias (masculine). Whether Paul believed in female apostles is much less certain and it is also not certain how Paul would want us to understand the phrase "they are outstanding among the apostles (masculine)." **It is very precarious to build a normative doctrine or practice on an exegetical possibility or some**



uncertainty. Clear passages must give guidance in all such matters.

8. Scriptures that are circumstantial or culturally conditioned and tied to a command or injunction are not necessarily of limited or temporal application. Is the circumstantial and culturally conditioned experience of Jesus washing the disciple's feet a time-limited or transcultural ordinance? Evidently what was an occasional event based on a practice of the culture of the past is intended as a binding practice for all times and all other cultural settings. The setting of John 13 has a relationship to the specific situations in Ephesus and Corinth, where Paul addressed the matter of the role of women in the church. The contexts usually appeal to the orders established by God at creation and the Fall. Instructions that have specific cultural points of reference can be made to have timeless validity for the life and practice of God's church throughout time.

9. There are texts in the NT that have an interrelationship between contextual commands (injunctions) and normative principles. Normative principles are expressed by appeal to a) creation, b) the Law, and c) the argument from the Fall. It is clear that Gal 3:28 with its allusion to Gen 1:27 offers the equality of "male and female" as equal bearers of God's image with equal standing in and before Christ. There is full and complete ontological (personal) equality and at the same time there is a functional (role) differentiation. Neither male nor female is superior or inferior, but there are role distinctions. The functional differentiation must not disallow women to teach or minister in the church, but it seems to disallow her from teaching authoritatively (1 Tim 2:8-15; 3:1-7).

Feminist interpretations attempt to remove the restriction on authoritative teaching for women; anti-feminist interpretations disallow any kind of teaching and ministering of women in the church. The centrist Biblical position recognizes women's ministry and teaching in the NT without limiting the passages which define the parameters of such activity as non-authoritative (cf. 1 Tim 2:8-15). In this way harmony and unity can be seen in the entire Biblical teaching on the role of women. Biblical authority remains uncompromised. Relativism based on 20th century culture conditioning as regards the Bible is held in check. The Bible in its entirety continues to function properly in the life and faith of the church and believers in the end-time. It is in the time of the end when "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms" (GC



595).

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