

A Minority Opinion  
on  
“The Service of Women in Congregational Offices of  
Executive Director/President or Assistant Director/Vice-President”

The Minnesota South District Convention requested the CTCR’s recommendation regarding “the *appropriateness* of women serving as Executive Director or President or Assistant Director or Vice President of congregations.” *[emphasis added]*

The Commission’s response fails to do this. No where does the Commission clearly state: “yes, this is *appropriate*” or “no, this is not *appropriate*”. Though our Synod cannot “walk together” along two diverging paths, the Commission merely concludes that:

*Scripture does not prohibit women from holding these humanly-established offices, assuming that the occupants of these offices do not ‘perform those functions that are distinctive to the public exercise of the ministry of Word and sacraments.’*

This “opened door” invites departures from the historic position our Synod consistently maintained up to the 1960s’ Sexual Revolution. In 1995 the Synod in Convention assigned the task of producing a “*Comprehensive Study of the Scriptural Relationship Between Men and Women*” to the CTCR (Resolution 3-10). Nine years later, the Commission has yet to complete this assignment. At one time Commission members intended to address the Image of God, Orders of Creation, and the meaning of *authentsein* before addressing questions such as these. To issue this opinion in the absence of that comprehensive study and without carefully and thoroughly engaging these issues should be seen as woefully premature. The opinion does not get to the roots of the Scriptural position on these matters. The reasoning employed also lacks the weight accumulated by centuries of Christian interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

Despite its many fine statements on behalf of male headship in the family and God’s created order, this CTCR opinion will foster exactly the opposite of what it professes to “encourage.” Opening these congregational offices to the service of women *will* subvert and negate male headship in the home and pastoral office. The CTCR recognizes this as undesirable, yet its opinion manifests a willingness to legitimize a change in our polity, making such an outcome possible and more likely. More women leaders will reduce male congregational involvement. Scolding men not to “neglect” or “abdicate” their responsibilities will not suffice to offset this tendency.

At its 2001 Convention, the Synod endorsed C.F.W. Walther’s *Church and Ministry* as its official position. Walther insisted that congregational officers must meet the same qualifications as lay-elders, who can only be male (Thesis VIII, pp 289-290 in J.T. Mueller’s translation). To

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<sup>1</sup> At the same time, our Christian forefathers’ shared understanding of the scriptural relationship between men and women may never have reached full expression simply because it was not challenged (as it is today). Martin Marty quotes Jacob Burckhardt on the silent history of accepted truths: “*Everywhere in the past we encounter things which remain unexplained only because they were completely self-understood in their time and, like all daily matters, were not thought necessary to write down.*” *A Nation of Behavers*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. xi.

permit or endorse a position contrary to the Synod's official position requires a more extensive theological rationale than the Commission's opinion has provided.

In their receipt of God's grace in and through Jesus Christ, men and women are *equal*, but in their responsibilities before God, and in their relation to one another in the home and in the church, they are *not interchangeable*. God gives the right and privilege of procreation to a married couple, but the wife alone may exercise the childbearing activity. Both within the family and without, equality is not identity. Differences between men and women are part of God's created order, and they are good.

1 TIMOTHY 2:12 clearly states: "BUT I DO NOT ALLOW A WOMAN TO TEACH OR TO EXERCISE AUTHORITY OVER A MAN, BUT TO REMAIN QUIET." This categorical statement reaffirms the principle of male spiritual leadership that runs throughout the entire Scriptures.

The Commission itself notes that "*While the Scriptural restriction may contradict the prevailing winds of the egalitarian Zeitgeist, the church belongs to Jesus Christ and not to the world.*" Yet the Commission wrongly limits this statement to the pastoral office.

Scripture here speaks of "A WOMAN" and "A MAN" – no "office" is mentioned. Regardless of the offices we do or do not occupy, our gender remains part of our very identity. Gender precedes and supercedes any and all offices. God created man in his own image as "MALE AND FEMALE" before He ever created or mandated any office, and certainly before the church established any offices. We are not free to ignore our manhood or womanhood – this gift of God is no *adiaphoron*.<sup>2</sup> It is a platonic or Gnostic myth to imagine that anyone can occupy an office and exercise its functions as a genderless person. One's speech, actions, and choices can be nothing other than those of a man or a woman. *All* that the Scriptures have to say regarding the relationship between men and women applies to each person in a congregational office.

The Commission has bypassed or overlooked the full implications of important Scripture texts such as GENESIS 1:26-28, 1 CORINTHIANS 11 and 14 and 1 TIMOTHY 2<sup>3</sup> in order to open this door. What the Commission said of EPHESIANS 5 ("*the gospel does not destroy this created design, but rather purifies it of sinful distortion*") applies to these other Scripture texts as well.

"*Especially in our cultural context,*" notes the Commission, "*a congregation should be concerned about what its polity says and in what way its polity supports the church's teaching.*" Our Lutheran Confessions state (FC SD X) that during a time of controversy, *adiaphora* cease being matters of indifference and become matters of confessing our faith. Appearances become important. We must avoid giving the impression that we are somehow capitulating to an unbelieving world or submitting to its influences. In the context of our culture's unremitting hostility to Holy Scripture and historic Christian teachings on the relationship between men and

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<sup>2</sup> The Lord calls cross-dressing "AN ABOMINATION" (DEUTERONOMY 22:5). Men are commanded to "ACT LIKE MEN" (1 CORINTHIANS 16:13).

<sup>3</sup> Months ago, every member of the CTCR Committee which developed this recommendation received a personal copy of an excellent book: *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (edited by Kostenberger, Schreiner and Baldwin and published by Baker in 1995). The Commission has not refuted this book's thorough analysis and careful conclusions. These decisively validate the Scriptural principle of male spiritual leadership.

women, this aspect of *adiaphora* should have borne greater weight in the Commission's conclusions. If nothing is commanded or forbidden in Holy Scripture in matters of polity, what then establishes the "*rights, privileges and responsibilities*" of the church's members?

Whatever responsibilities a congregation may assign to a "President," "Vice-President," Executive Director" or "Assistant Director," these titles would poorly fit any offices not involved somehow in guiding, directing, and exercising authority over others (including men) in the Christian congregation. The Commission's argument (from silence) that the Scriptures do not mention these offices affords no valid support for its conclusion that there are "*no mandates*" regarding the polity of a congregation. Scripture establishes principles and precepts as well as laws, commands and "*mandates,*"<sup>4</sup> and these principles do preclude certain options. These principles apply to the congregation no less than any other part of God's created order. The decisions of any LCMS Committee, Council or Voters' Assembly are to be guided by the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. The President, Vice-President and other officers are responsible before God to ensure that they do so. Fulfilling this responsibility requires the exercise of spiritual leadership.

A presiding or directing officer sets the agenda, proposes decisions, allocates resources, determines who will (and will not) speak in an assembly or meeting, and rules statements in and out of order. Without this authority, a congregational officer could not be effective. Some proposals set a precedent for similar actions in the future, or take on the enduring and ongoing character of "*policies.*" These should be recognized as a type of organizational "*teaching.*" They are "*authoritative*" in that they bind, direct or permit some actions and options in preference to others. As Dr. David Scaer has said elsewhere, "*fruits identify the tree (MATT 7:17-19). Doctrines are embedded in our practices even before they are articulated. ... Yes, doctrine and practice are inseparably related as two sides of one coin.*"

The aphorism that "*personnel is policy*" acknowledges the incarnational implications of our offices and organizations. Officers often play a significant role in the nomination or appointment of people to the Board of Elders, Personnel Committee, or Call Committee. An LCMS Pastor's "*Diploma of Vocation*" (call document) is often signed by the President of the congregation. This signature "*authorizes*" – it is a mark of "*authority.*" Anyone to whom the Pastor and Elders must answer or account is thereby involved in matters of pastoral care. A woman's service in

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<sup>4</sup> In *Outlines of Doctrinal Theology*, A.L. Graebner defined the perspicuity of Scripture as "*that clearness of Holy Writ which renders all the doctrines and precepts laid down in the inspired Word freely accessible to every reader or hearer of average human intelligence and sufficient knowledge of the languages employed.*" Years later, Theodore Graebner joined Paul Kretzmann to build on this definition in their explanation of "*The Limitations of Reason in Apprehending the Truth of Scripture.*" To the extent that God has given human reason the ability to "*apprehend*" certain doctrines (though not without faith to "*comprehend*" them), they insisted, "*all the powers of appropriation, induction, deduction, inference, of which the human mind is capable, [are to be] employed in this act of apprehending what the Bible offers for acceptance to our mind.*" Certain doctrines are apprehended in Scriptural study through such processes as **induction** (including the Holy Trinity and the communication of Christ's attributes) and **deduction** (such as the right to serve in just wars, and the recognition that Mary may truly and properly described as the "Mother of God," since she is the mother of Jesus, the Son of God). These are no less valid than those which are directly stated in the Scriptures. "*We shall not overlook the fact,*" they stated, "*that in some points our church practice rests upon deductions strung out over quite a series of syllogisms.*" ***Toward Lutheran Union: A Scriptural and Historical Approach***, Theodore Graebner and Paul E. Kretzmann, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), pp. 37-46).

such an office would diminish the office of the Holy Ministry and contradict Scripture. These practical considerations deserved greater attention in the Commission's opinion.

Strong forces are eroding the foundations of our Western society. Antagonistic to Jesus Christ and His Word, these postmodern attitudes and liberalizing tendencies would sweep away all distinctions between men's and women's identities and roles. Christians in The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod should retain its historic position on the relationship between men and women as taught in God's divine Word, addressed to us all. Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions will strengthen us to stand fast and press forward against these onrushing tides.

Paul Nus - April 30, 2004