

A CLARIFICATION OF THE OPINION OF THE EXEGETICAL DEPARTMENT,
CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA,
ON WOMAN SUFFRAGE

1. The members of the department individually and as a group hold to the Biblical teaching concerning the relation of the sexes, namely, of man's superordination with reference to woman and woman's subordination with reference to man (1 Cor 11:3,7c-9; 14:34-37; 1 Tm 2:12-14); and that, therefore, the woman is not to exercise authority over the man. This divine arrangement is to be manifested specifically by God's people in the home, according to the instruction of Ephesians 5:21-24, and at the worshipping assemblies of the congregation, according to the instruction of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Woman's subordination to man in no way renders her inferior to man, of less worth or importance in the sight of the Lord, or as a second-class citizen in the Kingdom of God. The apostle Paul declares that believing woman and believing man are "one," are on a par and are equals in the sight of God (Ga 3:26-28). We department members understand this to be the clear teaching also of the Synod and rejoice that there appears to be general agreement in the Synod on this Scriptural doctrine.

2. The department asserts that the New Testament does not in express words speak to the matter of voters' assemblies (or district and synodical convention assemblies) and of their conduct of the business of the congregation (or synod), as these assemblies function in our congregations and in the church today, or of the permissibility of woman suffrage in these assemblies.

3. There appears to be difference of opinion in the Synod (and this has been evident since 1969) as to whether the act of voting constitutes an exercise of authority. In drawing up its original theological opinion of 1976, in response to a request for such from a congregation of the Synod, the department took the position, on the basis of common understanding, that the act of voting did constitute an exercise of authority and concluded that, if the right were extended to women in assemblies charged with the governance of the church, this would put women exercising this right in the position of exercising authority over men, and thus contravening the divine will. It is of the same opinion today.

4. The department has recognized, and recognizes, that its view of suffrage cannot be imposed on other Christians in the Synod who are of the opinion that the act of voting does not constitute an exercise of authority and that women ought, therefore, have the right to vote in congregational voters' assemblies and at district and synodical conventions. The difference in views in the church relative to woman suffrage lies not in the area of clear Bible doctrine, on which we are agreed in the Synod, but in our various understandings of suffrage. Because the Scriptures do not explicitly instruct us in this latter matter, the issue of woman suffrage is one with reference to which the right of disagreement must be upheld and which ought not be divisive of fellowship in the church.

5. The department requests, however, that the Synod remind all its congregations of Resolution 2-17 of the 1969 Synod convention which, while allowing congregations so minded to adopt the practice of woman suffrage, also offers as an application of Scriptural instruction the counsel that "women ought not to hold the pastoral office or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive function of

this office," and that in developing their congregational polity congregations take care that this polity "conforms to the general Scriptural principles that women neither hold the pastoral office nor 'exercise authority over men.'" The department also requests that the Synod, in the spirit of Resolution 2-17, respect the conscience scruples of those congregations which have not adopted this (woman suffrage) practice.

(April 29, 1985)