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Theological Observer

SBL AND S.N.T.S. IN 1985

The third annual International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) and the Fortieth General Meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (S.N.T.S.) were held in August in the Netherlands and Norway respectively. The contrast between the two meetings was marked—even more so than last year. The SBL, an American-based organization, exhibited typical Yankee characteristics—well organized with first-class physical arrangements (meals, hotel, location), and a slightly mediocre product (program)—while the S.N.T.S., a British-based society with heavy German and French representation, was typically European—slightly disorganized, spartan physical arrangements, and a top-class product. The SBL met in the swank Royal Sonesta Hotel in the very heart of the canal city of Amsterdam. Everything ran perfectly, and the hotel was a superb place in which to stay and meet (if anything, too nice). The S.N.T.S., by contrast, met in Trondheim, eight hours north of Oslo by train; the rooms and accommodations and meeting places were at the University of Trondheim-Dravoll, some three miles or more from the city center; and, unfortunately, the dormitories were some twenty minutes walk from the auditoriums and classrooms in which the lectures and seminars actually took place—an extremely inconvenient arrangement.

But the programs contrasted in the reverse way. The SBL's was, in a word, "adequate." The usual format was followed, i.e., two major sections ran simultaneously, one essentially for Old Testament topics, another for New Testament (the first afternoon also had a special section on problems relating to "Q"). This format, as always, occasioned conflicts in the mind of participants, for it seemed almost uncanny how the two lectures one really wanted to hear were at precisely the same time in different sections. This problem was noted on the second day at a well-attended luncheon designed to elicit participants' suggestions for improvements of future conferences, at which time this writer also suggested that plenary lectures be considered, so that all participants could be sure to hear major figures and major contributions. The papers themselves were of quite uneven quality. The best this writer personally heard were by Daniel Boyarin ("Conflict of Meaning in the Midrash: Conflict of Meaning in the Text") and Shaye J.D. Cohen ("Was Timothy Jewish [Acts 16:1-3]? Patristic Exegesis, Rabbinic Law, and Matrilineal Descent"). The former argued that the tension between two rabbinic treatments of Old Testament texts reflects the inner tension found in the Biblical texts themselves, which tension is also represented in the entire canon of Sacred Scripture and, indeed, reflects how one may interpret the very events themselves. The latter showed rather convincingly that at his time Timothy was considered a Gentile, not a Jew, so that attempts to read later rabbinic principles of matrilineal descent back into the text of the New Testament are anachronisms. Also of interest were the presentations of G. Quispel ("Judaism, Gnosis, and the New Testament"), which argued strongly for a totally

Jewish setting for Gnosticism; and, in a perverse sort of way, that of Malcolm Spicer ("Mark 1:1-13; Opening Up the New Testament"), which contained gems such as the following (which was only too typical): "There are seven words in the first sentence [of Mark]—it's a planetary text, it's cosmological."

The program of the S.N.T.S. was, as usual, of high quality (though not, it might be judged, as fine as that of the Basel meeting in 1984). Unlike the SBL, the S.N.T.S. format consisted of major plenary papers, minor plenary papers, a few minor simultaneous presentations, and fourteen seminar groups, each of which met three times for periods of two hours each—an excellent arrangement (one's only regret was restriction to one seminar group). Though it is hard to pick several presentations as *primi inter pares*, to this writer the following stand out: (1) J. Jervell in "Paulus in der Apostelgeschichte" argued that in Acts Paul is portrayed as "Superapostle," the apostle of the Jews and the world (on the basis of his call, the parallels between him and Jesus, and the fact that only *his* farewell speech is recorded by Luke). (2) D.T. Holtz in "Der Antiochenische Zwischenfall (Gal. 2:11-14)" provided an attractively "Lutheran" exposition (criticized as such by Christian Beker); his main assertion was that the encounter in Antioch between Peter and Paul centered on the relationship between the Gospel and history, viz., that Paul was concerned with doctrinal implications of certain actions of Christians, while Peter (and the church at Jerusalem) felt that the *Geschichte* of God's people could not be ignored. (The conclusion was this: "Erst die radikale Durchsetzung einer der beiden Entscheidungen in der Gnosis einerseits, im Ebionitismus andererseits führte in die 'Häresie'") (3) Leander Keck's "Toward the Renewal of New Testament Christology" was truly outstanding and (to quote Don Meredith) "what the fans pay their money to see." In it Keck challenged New Testament scholarship to produce once again a true New Testament Christology—not a study of the "history of Christological motifs" and their forerunners, which procedure is preoccupied with historical questions and (following Wrede) totally divorced from theological concerns. Such a true Christology must recover its true subject matter, namely, Christ, and restrict itself to its true field, the New Testament—not early Christian literature, including forerunners of the New Testament. Significant (and, in this writer's view, the cornerstone of his entire position and plan) was Keck's positive citation of C.F.D. Moule's observation that "Jesus Christ was from the beginning one who could be described as he was described." In the theology contained in the New Testament, therefore, we may have stages of development of perception but not invention, an unfolding of thought but not an evolution (thus historical questions may still be addressed). As may be expected, this proposal elicited cries of criticism and howls of derision, but also quite open admiration from many traditional Christian scholars in the group.

This writer's seminar group, "The Role of the Reader in the Interpretation of the New Testament," worked with the somewhat new field of Reception Theory and Reader-Response Criticism, which, rather than studying the text in its historical isolation, also views it from the standpoint of its impact on the reader. Thus, scholars working in this area consider the reader as he confronts a text: how a reader reads; how he makes sense of the signs of the text; the difference between critics and readers; etc. The seminar itself considered major presentations by Bernard Latagan and Robert Fowler and minor papers by Detlev Dormeyer, Bernard Combrink, and this writer, which were responses to Wolfgang

Schenk's new commentary, *Die Philipperbriefe*. While the discussion in this group was a little diffuse, progress was made in defining what has been called the "implied reader" of a text, as well as in delineating the difference between the impact of a text and the information it conveys.

Finally, it must be noted that each international meeting was graced with fine social occasions. The SBL offered a fine reception for participants on the first evening and a gala banquet on the last, while the S.N.T.S. participants were given a special concert in and tour of Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, received by the bishop and the lord mayor of the city of the bishop's residence thereafter, and then served a fine evening meal (accompanied by Norwegian folk songs), all of which was followed by an outstanding concert given by the members of the college of music in the University of Trondheim-Dravvoll.

James Voelz

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

A recent issue of the *Lutheran Standard*, the official periodical of the American Lutheran Church, ascribes "a hard heart" to those who reject the ordination of women to the office of the public ministry ("Question Box," *Lutheran Standard*, October 4, 1985, p. 36). E.P. (the initials evidently of an ALC layman), whose sister accuses the ALC of "straying from the Bible," poses the essential question: "What scriptural basis do we have for ordaining women?" The response substantiates the charge of E.P.'s sister. It seeks to evade the obvious by making several wide detours around the Word of God.

(1.) The *Lutheran Standard* first counters query with query: "We could turn the question around and ask why some churches still refuse to ordain women." The answer to this question is, of course, already implied in the accusation of E.P.'s sister—the practice is contrary to Scripture. Leaving aside at present the testimony of a host of related passages, the Apostle Paul expresses the mind of God as clearly as could possibly be done in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2: "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, even as the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. What! Did the Word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized" (1 Cor. 14:33-38). "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:11-14).

Thus the Apostle forbids women to speak (*lalein*) in church (1 Cor. 14:34-35), commanding them rather to keep silence (*en hēsuchia*, 1 Tim. 2:12), and to remain in silence (*en hēsuchia*, 1 Tim. 2:13). The various Greek words employed by Paul do not, according to their general usage, preclude corporate participation by women in the liturgy and singing of the church; on other grounds, indeed, we can assert that Paul encouraged such participation. But the Apostle does reject all forms of individual female verbal expression in the church—preaching, reading Scripture lessons, leading prayers, conducting the liturgy, giving testimonies. All these activities are embraced by the word *lalein* and, therefore, are actions which are *shameful* for women in the church (1 Cor. 14:35). Indeed, even asking a question in church is, asserts Paul, a distinctly unwomanly activity. But it is of the essence of a pastor, of course, that he preaches, reads the Scripture, leads prayer, conducts the liturgy, asks questions, etc. in the church. Paul in writing to Timothy, moreover, specifically bars women from teaching men or exercising authority over them in the church. But again a pastor necessarily teaches men and exercises authority over them in the church. It follows, therefore, that a “woman pastor” is a contradiction in terms. While the world may grant its recognition, no such creature exists in the sight of God. The call and ordination of a woman to the ministry is *eo ipso* invalid and sacrilegious.

(2.) The only serious attempt of the *Lutheran Standard* to justify female ordination scripturally is the wearisome appeal to Galatians 3:28. There, according to the *Lutheran Standard*, “Paul says there is no difference between Jew and Greek, between slave and free, between male and female, and that all are one in Christ Jesus. This puts all humanity on the same plane and allows the ordination of anyone called by God to that responsibility.” In actuality, Paul states that Christians “are all *one* in Christ Jesus.” Nowhere does he assert that there is *no difference* between male and female! (Indeed, one would scarcely expect such a claim from any sane person.) The *Standard’s* exegesis of Galatians 3:28 confuses spiritual unity with an identity of roles. One could argue equally well from the truth that there is neither child nor adult in Christ Jesus to the conclusion that a child too may serve as pastor. St. Paul is making the important point that both male and female Christians are children of God (v. 26). It scarcely follows from this truth that male and female Christians have the same roles to fulfill. To be sure, Scripture “allows the ordination of anyone called by God” to the responsibilities of the ministry. The point is, however, that God according to His own clear testimony, calls only men to this responsibility. If the church calls a woman to the pastorate, the call is an offense to God.

(3.) The *Lutheran Standard* then attempts to escape the point of Paul’s prescription of priestesses with a sociological sidestep: “That seemed proper for a particular situation and for the time and culture in which he lived. But he almost certainly was not attempting to lay down rules for all times and places—his statement in Galatians is too clear.” Having already dispensed with the irrelevant appeal to Galatians, we turn to the basic claim that Paul was speaking to the church of his time alone on account of its particular social circumstances, namely, the attitude toward women prevalent in the first century. In the first place, however, those who are familiar with the Graeco-Roman society of the first century will realize that, in actuality, women did hold high ecclesiastical office in other religions, including the teaching office, and that first-century men must have found Paul’s views on this matter quite strange.

Secondly and more importantly, Paul does not base his doctrine of woman's place in the church merely on passing social circumstances. Rather, he deduces it from universal truths which can never be altered—so long, at least, as this world endures. In 1 Corinthians 14 he appeals to the Law (a common designation of the Old Testament) in support of his position (v. 34); Paul is talking, then, about an enduring precept rather than a momentary expedient. We learn from the parallel passage in 1 Timothy that the Old Testament section which Paul has particularly in mind is Genesis 2-3, the account of the creation and fall of mankind, specific historical events of universal significance which define for all time the correct relationship between man and woman. The Apostle points his pen at two elements in this Genesis account which substantiate his thesis that the role of woman in the church is silent submissiveness in the presence of men. The first is that woman was created from man and for man and is, therefore, by nature subordinate to man (Genesis 2:18-23; 1 Timothy 2:13). The second is that woman was deceived by Satan into sinning against God when she coveted a place in the scheme of things higher than that allocated to her by God; and man yielded himself to sin when, against better knowledge, he acceded authority over him to the woman as she urged him to eat of the fruit which God had forbidden (Gen. 3:6, 17; 1 Tim. 2:14). These historical facts, Paul rightly argues, show how perverted it is for women to teach men. To accept a woman pastor, then, is to attack the divine order of creation, the relationship in which the various creatures of God stand to each other and to Him on the basis of their creation by Him.

Some of our contemporaries, to be sure, would have us believe that this order of creation does not apply in the Church of Christ; they assume that Christians are all equal in authority by virtue of their common faith. But Paul makes clear in the passages before us that one's position in the order of creation is, in fact, hallowed by one's incorporation through faith into Christ and His Church. Our Lord Himself, indeed, directs His followers to the original pattern of this order as a pure expression of God's will and the ideal form of Christian conduct (Matt. 19:8). The divine order of creation, then, so far from being alien to the church, ought to be more manifest there than anywhere else. Women have, to be sure, many important roles to fulfil in the church, but the ministry is not one of them. Just as the bearing of children is assigned exclusively to the woman (1 Tim. 2:15), so the duties of the pastor are assigned exclusively to the man (1 Tim. 3:2).

(4.) The *Lutheran Standard* finally admits the real reason behind the ordination of women in the ALC by observing that "the ordination of women was helped by society's movement for women's equality." For the female pastorate in liberal Lutheranism has, in fact, arisen, not from the study of Scripture, but rather from the women's liberation movement which forms such an important part of the current American social-political scene. The advocates of female ordination thereby violate the formal principle of Lutheran theology, *sola scriptura*. For, by virtue of its divine authorship, Holy Scripture constitutes the sole legitimate source and norm of doctrine. Consequently, no external evidence may be used to change the otherwise apparent understanding of any assertion of Scripture. Only the Word of the Ancient of Days, not the words of modern

men, is a safe guide for the Christian Church. And the introduction of women into the ministry, like so much else in current American thought, runs directly contrary to the Word of God.

(5.) Quite appropriately, then, the *Lutheran Standard* finds the most cogent justification of the female pastorate outside of Scripture: "The best argument for the ordination of women is that growing numbers of women are serving successfully in the ordained ministry. They are winning people for Christ. They are proclaiming the gospel. They are doing everything that male clergy have been doing for centuries." Here the renunciation of *sola scriptura* reaches rock-bottom with the appeal to personal experience as the criterion of doctrine. In particular, not Scripture, but success, here determines the tenets of the ALC. Modernism in this case has succumbed to the success-orientation which pervades popular American religion as well as to the *theologia gloriae* which permeates all of heterodoxy. Nevertheless, despite its attractiveness to natural man, this line of argument is as illogical as it is unscriptural. Tape recorders and computers, too, can proclaim the Gospel and people will come to faith in Jesus Christ by virtue of the innate power of the Word. The ordination of machines, however, does not follow. The effectiveness of the Divine Word does not depend upon the credentials of its mortal preachers.

As to the more general point, the rejection of *sola scriptura* and the use of higher criticism by ALC theologians are simply two sides of the same coin. After all, the basic assumption of the critical method is the fallibility of Scripture. The "female pastors," therefore, of the ALC are not, in fact, proclaiming the Gospel in its purity, nor are those male pastors who accept the ordination of these women. For, in actuality, the teaching of the Apostle Paul consists exclusively in the words taught him by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13). Thus, anticipating any protest which might be lodged against his demand for female silence in the church, he reminds his readers with a rhetorical question that God speaks through him, not them: "What! Did the Word of God originate with you . . .?" (1 Cor. 14:36). Paul rightly demands, therefore, that what he wrote on the place of women be acknowledged as a command of the Lord (v. 37) and suspends from the congregational fellowship anyone who does not so recognize it (v. 38).

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