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Twenty-Three Theses on The Holy Scriptures, The Woman, and The Office of The Ministry

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THE FOLLOWING THESES were worked out in Winter 1958 at the request of the Synod of Bishops of the Church of Sweden as part of their internal deliberations. Through duplication they were made accessible to a wider circle. Since the author has repeatedly been asked to do so, they are now published, albeit in shortened form.

1. *The Bible is God's Word.* This means it pleased God to reveal Himself through these Scriptures, which came to be what they are by God's design. God chose this method that He might speak to all peoples and at all times. The Bible does not only describe the history of salvation; the Bible itself is a tool for the continued history of salvation that takes place from the ascension of Christ to His Second Coming. The special status of the Bible does not rest alone in the fact that it describes unique events and personalities. In the word of the Bible itself (*Bibelwort*) there is something that makes it different from any other word. It has been sent into the world by God to accomplish His work. In its nature it is Spirit and Life.

2. *For this reason, God's Church at all times must turn to the Scriptures to receive light and guidance.* God builds His Church through Word and Sacraments. At all times and in every new situation the watchword is: *retro ad Bibliam*.

3. *Only he who submits himself to the Word can properly understand the Word.* The Scriptures are to be used as Means of Grace. Certainly they can also be read as historical documents. But if the Bible is read only as a historical work one never gets to that which is the essential thing in the Scriptures. The proper view of the Bible is from the view of salvation history. In the Scriptures we meet the living and acting God. In the Bible God addresses us. God addresses us from the first verse of the Bible to the last.

4. *The centre of the Scriptures is Jesus Christ.* It is their purpose to bring about faith in Him. If Christ receives His proper place as Redeemer, everything else in the Bible will also receive its proper place. Some things appear as preparation or fore-shadowing, some things appear as ordinances that are valid only until the beginning of the New Order (Heb. 9:10). But everything forms one great

unity. That is why the Scriptures are to be interpreted with Scriptures, whereby we must remember that the truth of justification through faith in Him is the key that grants us access to the innermost meaning of the Scriptures. But that does *not* mean that the whole content of the Scriptures can be concentrated in a few "main thoughts" from which we can then logically deduce the answers to the questions that face us today.

5. *To be loyal to the Scriptures includes that we really seek out the message and the meaning of the Scriptures with the honest desire to have the Word as a light for our path.* It is a misuse of the Scriptures when we tear individual statements out of their context or when we appeal to individual passages that are in agreement with our own point of view without taking into consideration the tremendous richness of the Biblical material. On the other hand, having objectively and extensively examined the Biblical witness and having found that the Bible really has a definite opinion on a matter, then in all humility we ought to recognize this as an expression of the good and gracious will of God. And this is what the Church is to proclaim, even if it is not in agreement with presently acceptable opinions and value judgments.

6. *The corrective against a legalistic misuse of the Scriptures lies in the Scriptures themselves.* When we go into the Scriptures and conscientiously attempt to find out what God really means in His Word, then the Scriptures themselves point out what is binding and obligatory and what is not. We cannot find the lines of division outside the Scriptures, e.g. in generally accepted notions, nor can we establish theoretical rules by which we then decide on a purely logical basis what is binding for all times. This must always be the decisive question: What does God mean in His Word? In this only the Word itself can lead us.

7. *There are things in the Scriptures that, according to the witness of the Scriptures, are not designed to be obligatory for all times and peoples.* What God stipulated for Israel was to have validity until the time was fulfilled and Christ had come. Other things are valid for certain situations and for those alone. Here we can point to the prohibition to eat blood (Acts 15:29). This is the apostolic solution to the great problem that arose when Jewish Christianity came into contact with Gentile Christianity; but this solution did not have validity in the purely Gentile Christian churches, as we can see for instance from I Cor. 8:8, 10:25f., I Tim. 4:3f. We have here a classic application of the rule not to give offense, an obligation of every Christian out of love for the brethren and in deference to their qualms of conscience (Rom. 14:15, 20f., I Cor. 8:9-13, 10:23f.). There is a long series of apostolic admonitions and advice which in the same way were always given in a certain situation but which were never designed to be applied universally. When Paul and Peter, in a series of letter endings, call upon the recipients to greet one another with a holy kiss, then we are obviously deal-

ing with a method of passing on the apostolic greeting of the letter. It is in the nature of the matter that in other situations such a custom cannot be made the norm. (However, during debate in the Imperial Diet, the Swedish Parliament, and in certain academic quarters it was asserted that this, too, was binding if any of the other instructions of the New Testament were valid). Jesus' demands in the Sermon on the Mount, to be pure in heart, to love one's enemies, to be good and meek, yes, even to be perfect, are real demands. God's command demands that much. But this cannot be changed into civil law nor into church or canon law. In fact, all this cannot be fulfilled by those who stand under the law. Only he who lives in the Kingdom of Forgiveness by the grace of reconciliation can take up these demands of Christ and fulfill them in such moments as God grants him for this. Every Christian knows that over and over again he must confess how badly he has failed to fulfill all these demands. But he also knows that this failure in no wise entitles him to do away with any of the commands of the Lord.

8. *The fact that there is much in God's Word that is valid only in a certain situation, and much that puts us on the short end of things, does not give us the right to change God's command.* On every point we must humbly and obediently listen to God's Word, try to understand it correctly and ask ourselves, "What does God mean here?" We must stand on guard against having people isolate a number of examples from God's Word that cannot be made into church or canon law, and then have them arrive at deductions that the Church is at liberty so to arrange her life and order as contradicts the Word of God.

9. *It will not do to draw lines of distinctions in the Bible between "matters dealing with salvation" and "matters having to do with order in the Church" and then to say that only for matters dealing with salvation does the Bible give an answer that is obligatory for all times.* Admittedly this distinction has some merit. Christ did not give His Church a new law that can be compared to the Levitical Law, and the New Testament is not designed for use as church or canon law. But it will not do to divide the content of the Scriptures into matters of order and matters of salvation. The Bible itself does not make this distinction. Even the Mosaic ceremonial laws have meaning as revelations of salvation. They are "symbolic for the present age" (Heb. 9:9) and are "a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb. 10:1). In certain cases a definite outward order is necessary (as in the matter of the sacraments) because it is indissolubly connected with God's desire to save. Frequently the apostolic admonitions are of such nature that they have obvious validity for all of Christian life at all times.

10. *If the concern is to determine the content of a Biblical statement and to find out what it means today, then in every single instance the matter must be examined from the Bible itself.* The concern must be to understand what God intends with His Word.

On the basis of such a conclusion it can and may be said that, for instance, I Tim. 5:9f. (regarding the widows of the congregation) is not for all times an obligatory law in the Church. This becomes clear primarily in the New Testament doctrine of Evangelical Liberty (Gal. 4:9f., 5:1f., Col. 2:16-23, *et al.*). From this it becomes also clear that such instruction (*e.g.*, that a widow of the church ought to be at least 60 years old) do not necessarily have an inner connection with the Christian faith.

On the other hand it is equally clear that, for instance, marriage under all circumstances is to be indissoluble, and this principle (with due regard to cases of emergencies and exceptions, as the Scriptures themselves indicate) in one way or another should find expression in the dealings and arrangements of Church life. The Church does not have the liberty to dissolve what God has bound together. Polygamy or a universally assumed right to have a divorce would stand in absolute contradiction to the conception of marriage as it is set forth, for example, in Eph. 5. Here we are dealing with a "matter pertaining to order" that is indissolubly connected with faith in Christ and life in Christ. It is not difficult to find further examples of the fact that the Christian faith has necessary consequences for how the Church is ordered. The Christian Church cannot, for example, make membership dependent upon sex or race. The Church must establish certain rules for the reception of Baptism or the admission to the Lord's Supper. There must be a ministry in the Church, and its incumbents have the right to receive a salary, etc. Such arrangements are based in God's will which is revealed to us in the Word.

One cannot deny *a priori* that the problem of women pastors belongs to this category. We must at least submit this matter to an investigation.

11. *We can only answer the question, whether the Pastoral Office may be entrusted to women, after a conscientious examination of the Biblical material in its entirety.* Only after such an examination can we decide whether this question stands in organic relationship to essential elements of the Christian faith. We cannot answer the question by taking as our starting point some postulated thesis, *e.g.*, the thesis claiming that Christianity has the tendency to overstep certain limits. Such a thesis cannot but be incorrect, or in this case has been applied incorrectly once it is shown that it contradicts what the Scriptures have to say on this particular point.

The material to be considered here is rather comprehensive, beginning with the view about the relationship of man and woman represented in the Creation Accounts, Jesus' attitude about women and about the Office of the Ministry, to the interpretation and application of the Gospel by the apostles where the Gospel's concern is: Man and Woman, the Office of the Ministry and Spiritual Gifts, Equality and Diversity, and other things. I can only give a few indications of what the Biblical material, in my conviction, has to

say to us. Our first task must be the attempt to determine accurately what the frequently cited passage of Paul really means when we consider it from the background of the rest of the Biblical material.

12. *Appealing to a command of the Lord and to his apostolic authority Paul teaches that the woman is not intended to hold a Teaching Office in the church (Gemeinde).* As is known, his appeal to the command of the Lord is in I Cor. 14. The authority which belongs to Paul by virtue of the fact that he is an apostle is the basis for the formulation in I Tim. 2:12.

Both passages have to do with the worship service. When in I Tim. 2:12 the word *didaskain* is used, it is a rather pregnant expression (the word means: to be a teacher in the church and to be charged by God with the proclamation of His Word). Compare the Missionary Command to the apostles in Matt. 28:20 and a number of other passages that shed light on this, among other things the combination which makes this very clear: "Teaching and proclaiming the Word of the Lord", or "to command and teach in apostolic commission and with commensurate authority" (I Tim. 4:11) or "teaching and admonishing" (I Tim. 6:2). Accordingly, the meaning of the word "teacher" in the New Testament is: Teacher of God's Word. This was already applied to Jesus as translation of the Hebrew word "rabbi". As an appellation for servants of the Word in the church we find it, among other places, in Acts 13:1, I Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11. In the last mentioned passage "shepherd and teacher" is used as an appellation for one and the same commission. When the Bible of the Swedish Church renders the word *didaskain* in I Tim. 2:12 as "acting as teacher", then this is quite justified. Contrariwise it would be a misinterpretation or a misuse of this passage to conclude from it that a woman should not be teacher in the Sunday School, secretary in youth groups or in any other position which obviously does not coincide with that commission to which the New Testament refers when using the words *didaskalos* or *didaskain*. The classic example, that women in the early church taught God's Word in a connection *other* than the community worship service, is Priscilla (Acts 18:26). She had heard Apollos preach and saw that he only knew the baptism of John; together with Aquila she took him in and "expounded (*exethento*) the way of God more accurately".

I Cor. 14:34f., too, is designed to prohibit the woman from proclaiming God's Word in the worship service of the church. Any other interpretation appears to be extremely artificial and improbable. The whole chapter deals with participation in the worship service. All the decisive words used in this connection ("be silent", "speak", "church") Paul used immediately preceding in the same chapter (vs. 27-30), and it is quite clear that we are dealing here with the right publicly to participate in the worship service and there to speak of God's ways. For this reason alone the claim that the word in v. 34 (*lalein*) has a different meaning and refers only

to disturbing chatter, is extremely improbable. In addition we know of Paul's preference of this term for religious speech and preaching (comp. 2 Cor. 2:17, Phil. 1:14, Titus 2:15, Eph. 5:19). Where this word has a different meaning—I have seen that Else Kähler in a specific investigation notes three such passages—this is emphasized by an object or an adverb: to speak like a fool, to speak like a child, to speak unseemly. Incidentally, I should like to point out that v. 35 would most appropriately be translated: But in case they would like to be enlightened on a certain topic they can ask their husbands at home. The Greek text uses here the little word *de*. This indicates that Paul takes up a new thought, probably a response to the objection that the prohibition to speak was all too categorical.

13. *All this the New Testament does not treat as a matter of order, but rather as a necessary consequence of a command of the law and will of Christ, based in that order which God already laid down in creation and which is now realized in Christ.* It is striking to note Paul's concern to give reasons for his standpoint. It is equally striking that Paul here does not merely point to contemporary customs and outward decency, as he does in several passages. Rather, he really attempts to give theological proof from God's Word which would be for the church undisputed authority. Having appealed to the Old Testament (to the Law in I Cor. 14:34; the Creation Accounts and the Fall into Sin in I Tim. 2:13f.), Paul points to the highest authority the early church knew, the command of the Lord Himself. Added to this is then the witness of the Spirit. Paul dares to say that anyone claiming to be filled with the Spirit would have to admit that this really is a command of the Lord. Thus, he marshalls the highest authorities of ancient Christianity: The Scriptures, Jesus' Word, and the Witness of the Spirit. Under these circumstances it is not very well possible to regard this question as "merely a matter pertaining to order" that does not have some inner relationship with the Christian revelation. And even if we say, with Wendland, that "the command of the Lord" has validity only as a principle that makes for order in the worship service, nevertheless the fact remains that according to the conviction of Paul it is part and parcel of this order that a woman is not to preach in the church.

14. *This order has an inner, organic connection with the New Testament's characteristic view of the church. On the one hand its members have become one in Christ; on the other hand they are different from one another, equipped with different gifts and entrusted with different responsibilities.* The Church is Christ's Body in which we have become members by Baptism. Thus considered, there exists among us an indissoluble unity (I Cor. 12:20). All have equal honour and all are subject to the same gracious care (I Cor. 12:22).

One of the classic passages for this unity is Gal. 3:28. Here we are concerned no longer with Jew or Greek, no more with slave or free man, no more with man or woman. For you are all one in

Christ Jesus. Frequently it is concluded at this point that between all members of the Church there must exist complete similarity. People are of the opinion that in these words we find a different, in fact, a more genuine basic New Testament stance than, for instance, in I Cor. 14:34. However, that is to tear the words from their context and to give them a meaning they do not have. For in Gal. 3:28 we are speaking of the *unity of Christ* (all are one). This unity, which finds its basis in Baptism (v. 27), is realized in fellowship with Christ, where, despite the most extreme outward differences, we form an indissoluble unity.

Therefore, the New Testament here emphasizes, as in other passages, these two: unity and diversity. In I Cor. 12 the identical thought recurs as in Gal. 3:28: "For in *one* Spirit we were all baptized into *one* body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men—and all were made to drink of *one and the same* Spirit." Here, too, it is shown how indissolubly this thought is connected with the actual diversities in the equipment of gifts and functions. Gifts and responsibilities differ, but they are given in such a way that in their effect they contribute to the common good. The Spirit grants to each a special gift. Yet we are one. Here Paul inserts the words cited above, but immediately he continues: "For the body does not consist of *one* member, but of many." Then he expounds on his topic: It is clear that we are different, have different functions; yet we form *one and the same* body. From this he draws at the end certain conclusions for the Office of the Ministry in the Church: "Within the church God has appointed, in the first place apostles, in the second place prophets, thirdly teachers Are all apostles? all prophets? all teachers?"

It is a misinterpretation of Gal. 3:28, therefore, to appeal to this passage as proof for the fact that the unity of man and woman must include the self-evident right of both to take up the Office of the Ministry in the Church. Here the thought of a secularized equality has pushed aside the Biblical concept.

A theology of the Body of Christ is undoubtedly one of the most central thoughts in the New Testament. Here we find ourselves quite close to the very heart of the Christian view of redemption and life with Christ. Thus the problem of women pastors has an inner and logical connection with the central thought of the Christian faith. That the ancient Christians accepted such an arrangement and carried it out is based on the fact that they had a definite view of the diversity *and* unity of Christians. The diversity of function was not regarded as insulting or degrading for anyone.

15. *The fact that man and woman are different is a gift of God, and it is as a result of God's will that the man and the woman have different functions both in the home and in the Church. "Male and female He created them." The difference exists from the very beginning; it is not abolished in Christ. The New Testament directs different admonitions to the man and to the woman, accord-*

ing to the gifts and responsibilities entrusted to each (Eph. 5, Col. 3, I Peter 3).

Man and woman were created for one another for mutual service. Only after a joining of their abilities is the intention realized which God has with human beings. This joining finds expression in marriage and the home (see the above cited admonitions), but also in the church.

16. *This difference does not imply less esteem for the position of the woman.* That this has not been understood in some cases derives from a misunderstanding of the frequently recurring admonitions for women to submit themselves (I Cor. 14:34, Eph. 5:22, Col. 3:18, I Peter 3:1). If these passages are interpreted in a legal and patriarchal sense, then their meaning is different from what the Bible would have it be.

If we wish rightly to understand the command to submit oneself, then we must remember above all that we are dealing here with a Christian command that has validity for everyone (Eph. 5:21—to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ). In the New Testament, "to be subject" (*hypotassesthai*) has a specifically Christian meaning like the word *agape*, for example, as Rengstorf, Greeven and Schlier, among others, have proven. As Else Käbler has proven in a yet unpublished doctoral dissertation (to the manuscript form of which I have access) the key to this word is to be found in I Cor. 15. There the word is used repeatedly in the well known exposition of Christ's cosmic rule (v. 25-28). There is depicted how everything has been subjected to the Son, until finally He subjects Himself to the Father who has subjected all things to Himself. Here God's grand plan is described, the order to which also the Son subjects Himself. There is not the slightest indication that this subjection was commanded. It is taken as self-evident, it is part of God's order of things. God does not establish this order for His own sake but for the benefit of His creatures. In this order Christ has been entrusted with a decisive role. Christ does not enter into this order of God by constraint, as response to a demand, but He enters into it out of love for the Father and for man.

Wherever the Bible makes mention of subjection we must keep in mind this subjection of Christ to the Father. It is a subjection not compelled through a demand or by force, rather it is a consequence of insight into God's order of things. Just as the subjection of Christ does not mean His degradation or disdain for Him, so there is no degradation in such a subjection to God's plan, God's will and God's order as the Bible demands of Christians and as is beneficial to properly arranging life in its different walks: among subjects of government, among wives, servants, children, etc. All this is based in the fact that we have gained insight into God's order of things. It means to have recognized and accepted the responsi-

bility God entrusted to a person. People really serve God in this, not man (Eph. 6:5-8).

Again an intimate connection with the central thought of the New Testament is emphasized here. The position of the early Christians in the question of the woman and the Office of the Ministry is connected not only with the *corpus Christi* concept, but also with the concept *hypotassethai*—fitting oneself into God's order of things, and that certainly is genuinely evangelical.

17. *The command to subject oneself cannot be made the norm for legislating the church.* Since it is a voluntary subjection based upon insight into God's purpose and will, the admonition is always directed to the person who is to subject himself. At no time does the Bible establish it as a right for the other party, for him to whom a person is to be subject. Rather, by means of appropriate admonitions to the other party, to exercise love, kindness and concern, a sort of balance is established. The command to subject oneself is directed to everyone. Everyone, each in the position in which he finds himself, is to fit himself into God's order of things and there to serve his neighbour. The authorities are to be God's servants for the good of the subjects (Rom. 13:4). Husbands are to love their wives "as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25). This demand really goes beyond what is demanded of women and it is more difficult to fulfill.

This relationship between man and woman, as it is depicted, for instance, in Eph. 5, concerns marriage and can only be realized between two people who have become "one" body (comp. Eph. 5:28—as they love their own bodies). Such a mutual relationship in love and service cannot be applied to the relation of men and women in their life in society, in their life on the job, etc. This is again reason that the command to subject oneself cannot be made the norm for relationships in society. Thus, it is not an inconsistency but rather the consequence of rightly understanding the Scriptures if we maintain that this is valid only where the Scriptures say that it is valid, that is, in marriage and in the church.

For obviously there is a parallel between the church and marriage, and between the responsibilities of the woman in the home and her responsibilities in the church. This parallel is pre-eminent in the entire depiction of marriage in Eph. 5, and it is also emphasized in I Tim. 2:12.

18. *On the other hand, the chief office in the Church is to be arranged in a way that is conditioned by essential Christian considerations.* "We may not accommodate the Pastoral Office of the Church to the viewpoints prevalent in the civil community so that the factors intrinsic to being the Church are erased" (A. Nygren). The Church has a right to expect that its own members honour the order which is based in the Gospel's own view of the purpose of man. Here subjection, which without faith in Christ makes no sense, becomes natural. The Church is not guilty

of demanding too much when it asks everyone who wants to be a servant of Christ to be prepared to submit to this order. The Church, therefore, has no reason to annul this order of things. Naturally a problem arises here. Since honouring such an order of things requires faith in God's purpose and the preparedness to take up a way of life in which we relinquish any assertion of the self and follow Christ on the road of self-denial, it is easy to understand that the state holds legislation in this matter incompatible with principles the state applies at other times. But the Church must insist "that in coming to conclusions about the arrangement of the Office of the Pastors the point of departure must be the intrinsic nature of the Church as based in the Gospel" (A. Nygren).

19. *In this matter Christ's own actions and the directions given by Him were decisive for the Church.* Christ's relationship to women around Him is marked on the one hand by a superior freedom over against human ordinances and conventional rules. He makes a clean break with any degrading of the woman. All His dealings proclaim the similarity of all men. On the other hand there exists a dissimilarity of functions. Among the greatest of His disciples there are a number of women. They, too, followed Him on His journeys. But He does not entrust to them a special commission nor a place among those who are to hold office in the Church. He calls only men to be apostles and to them He entrusts the Missionary Command, the Proclamation of the Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper and the Power of the Keys.

The office of the apostle is not as unique and as restricted to the original incumbents as some considerations in our day and age would acclaim. On the one hand it is surely the charge to be a witness of the Resurrection commissioned by Christ Himself. But on the other hand the office of the apostle gives rise to the Pastoral Office of proclamation. The great Missionary Command was given to the apostles. It applies to all peoples and extends to the end of time. Thus, the office of the apostle requires a continuation. It is overlooked all too often that on the one hand the New Testament itself bases the office responsible for leadership of the church and for proclamation on the apostles and on their authority; that on the other hand I Clement, a letter which on account of its early date (prior to 100 A.D.) is of unique historical value, expressly states that Jesus Himself gave precise instructions to His apostles how other proven men were to take over their duties once they died.

If we did not have the Letters of Paul, Jesus' choosing apostles and similar facts would hardly be conclusive. But the same would be true even of the work of reconciliation. Christ's work in our behalf is made comprehensible and is put into the proper light through the apostolic witness. Now, Christ's own actions and the manner in which the apostles continued His work form a unity without contradictions. It simply is not permissible to create a contrast here which is not present in the sources, for instance, by en-

dowing Jesus' actions with intentions other than those which the apostles believed their Lord to have.

20. *To traditions we cannot attribute decisive significance.* Of course, there must be *very* cogent reasons to change a two-thousand-year-old tradition. Nevertheless, it can be done if it is merely a tradition. The Church is not bound to *traditiones humanae* (*Augsburg Confession VII and XV*).

But the matter is different when the traditions confirm that we have correctly interpreted the Scriptures. No one was in a better position to understand the New Testament linguistically and materially than the contemporaries of the apostles and their immediate successors. When we come upon a homogeneous tradition that reaches all the way back to their days, then this is *a very strong indication that a differing interpretation of the Scriptures cannot be right.*

21. *If we loyally hold to the Scriptures, then on the one hand we must say NO to the question of women pastors, on the other hand we must say YES to a utilization of women's abilities in the Church in a more intensive way than has been the practice up to now.* The New Testament presents to us a more comprehensive image than does church life in Sweden about the different gifts "in each of which the Spirit is manifested" and "which serve the common good of all" (I Cor. 12:7). A number of women are mentioned among those who with their gifts thus served the church.

Above all there is the gift of "prophecy". I Cor. 11:5 and Acts 21:9 consider it perfectly natural that a woman should have this gift. Prophecy is speech directly inspired by God. The prophet does not take His message from the Word but he received it through a revelation. In our churches prophecy is no longer a normal occurrence. Perhaps one reason is that now in its place we have the New Testament, and perhaps we find an indication of this development in I Cor. 13:8. But we must count on the recurrence of prophecy where and when God pleases. Something of the gift of prophecy can appear also in the Christian witness in daily life. When good, courageous women stand up and speak a clear Christian word as the individual situations may give opportunity, whether it be in the home, in the life in society, in sewing circles, on the job or wherever, then this can be on the same level as that to which the Bible refers as prophecy. The same can be true when a woman makes a presentation in a subject God has put very close to her heart, for example, Mission work. I will not undertake to draw the line in detail between such prophecy and Christian proclamation. I believe no man is in a position to do that. But the Bible does tell us that a line has been drawn and that the line cannot be redrawn at will, so that the Pastoral and Teaching Office ends up as one of those responsibilities which Christ entrusted also to His women disciples. It must further be considered that prophecy is not an office in the sense of being a commission entrusted through the

church nor does a person possess prophecy as an ever on-going opportunity to serve.

But there also seem to have been occasions for such on-going service. In any case, we have indications of women "who shared the struggles in the cause of the Gospel" and who were "fellow-workers" of the apostle (Phil. 4:3) and who "toiled in the Lord's service" (Rom. 16:12). It is said of Phoebe that she was "a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae" and that "she has been of assistance to many", including the apostle himself (Rom. 16.1f.).

In any case, these indications prove that the early church made active use of the various talents of women.

22. *If it is our concern today to prepare the way for the expanded utilization of the talents of women in the Church, then we will have to take cognizance of the differences between the man and the woman and not disregard them.* An essential part of the New Testament position is the rich *diversity* in functions which is necessary because of the *diversity* of gifts. If the Office of the Pastor as office of preacher and church leader is not intended or designed for women, then it must be our concern to find such forms of service that do full justice to the differing gifts of the woman. Such forms of service must on the one hand satisfy the desire for fairness and offer the women thus working for the church an adequate salary; on the other hand they must coincide with the New Testament position in the belief that the working together of the different members works for the common good.

Among the Nordic churches the Church of Finland has probably made the most progress in this matter. In our country (Sweden) the request of the Synod of Bishops probably is the most carefully pondered and formulated request pointing in this direction.

23. *If there is serious disagreement in the Church about the proper course of action, then the Scriptures demand of us above all things to maintain two things inviolate: One is the unity of the Church, the other is loving regard for all serious qualms of conscience.*

a) *Unity.* It is probably sufficient to point to Jesus' high-priestly prayer (John 17:21f.) and to the Apostle Paul's vehement intervention in the divisiveness at Corinth (I Cor. 1:10). Risking a division is always a most serious matter. This may become necessary when the concern is the purity of the Gospel, but when we are dealing with matters of order in the Church and propriety it is irresponsible.

b) *Regard for the conscience of others.* If some Christians are sincerely troubled by a certain matter so that they cannot participate without an injured conscience or are led by that into overpowering doubt and despair, then the New Testament admonishes us rather to leave the matter be than to insist on it, even though in and of itself the matter might be perfectly correct.

The early Christians had to take a position on a number of

such problems. Was it permitted to consume blood, sacrificial meat or other things which for some were inextricably connected with paganism and idolatry? Was it permitted to drink wine? etc.

The answer can point in two opposite directions. When we are concerned with the basis of our salvation and if the consequence would be the reintroduction of the Law as the way of salvation, the New Testament speaks an unrelenting NO. "Not for one moment did I yield to their dictation; I was determined that the full truth of the Gospel should be maintained for you" (Gal. 2:5). But when the concern is matters of how to live, where faith in Christ and the will of commitment to Him have led people to different conclusions, there the New Testament equally openly asks us, as much as is possible, to have due regard for the conscience of the brethren. "Therefore if food be the downfall of my brother, I will never eat meat anymore, for I will not be the cause of my brother's downfall" (I Cor. 8:13; cf. all of Romans 14 as well as I Cor. 10:32-33).

These two aspects, the unity of the Church and regard for the conscience of others, ought to point the way for our Church particularly at this time. Perhaps the leaders of the Church, regardless of all differences of opinion, should arrive at complete unity and a program of action which is based on the experiences of the early Christians in their most difficult times of crises. In such a case it would be the message of mutual regard and love that would have to precede everything else. If I gauge the practical consequences correctly, the result would be that the Church with more deeply Biblical reasoning would insist that in this matter no decision be forcibly arrived at. The proposal of the Synod of Bishops, therefore, ought to be rejected. This does not mean that we all wish this rejection to be final. At the same time something ought to be done to create opportunities for the utilization of the talents of women in church positions, something the Synod of the Church has demanded previously. This must be achieved in such a way that *all* women can accept it, even those for whom the possibility of women pastors is unthinkable.