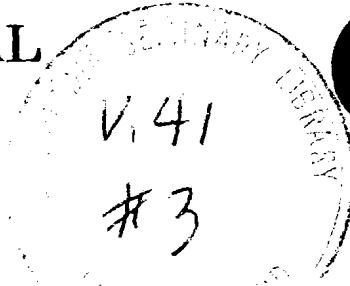


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Theses on Woman Suffrage in the Church

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In 1956 the Committee on Woman's Suffrage concluded its thorough report to the Synod at St. Paul with these words: "We believe that Scripture fully sanctions the basic polity set up in our church, and we foresee only evil results in any change of the polity under which our church has been so signally blessed for more than a century."¹ In 1969, nevertheless, the Synod at Denver changed that basic polity by allowing women to exercise the franchise in congregational or synodical assemblies,² and the evil results foreseen have ensued in many places. The Synod has already experienced female presidents of congregations and female vicars.³ The Denver resolution (2-17) was a strange one. It commends two contradictory studies on the question of woman's suffrage, one of which, the 1956 report mentioned above, obviously undermines the resolution itself. It further negates itself by permitting congregations to alter their polity with respect to woman's place in the church, *provided* that such alteration not allow women to "exercise authority over men."⁴ Such a sweeping proviso, however, eliminates woman suffrage in congregational and synodical assemblies, since voting is obviously an exercise of authority (except in the pseudo-elections of Communist countries) and since congregational and synodical assemblies, equally obviously, exercise authority over men. (It may be noted, by the way, that Denver Resolution 2-17 is in no way a doctrinal resolution requiring some special form of dissent, since it leaves the practice of woman suffrage as an option.)⁵ The author must admit, to be sure, that he favoured the resolution concerned at the convention in Denver, considering woman suffrage a necessary concession to the spirit of the times. His witness of the evil results of this arrangement, however, has driven him back to a thorough study of the matter in the light of the Word of God. The time has come for others in the Synod to reconsider their stance in the same light.

1. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to Genesis 2 and the Order of Creation established by God.
 - a. Woman was created from man and for man and is, therefore, by nature subordinate to man,⁶ vv. 18-23: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man

should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.' So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'" Woman suffrage, on the contrary, gives woman an authority equal to man and so overthrows the natural order. By the "natural order" or the "Order of Creation" is meant the relationship in which the various creatures of God stand to each other on the basis of their creation by Him, while the "Order of Redemption" refers to the relationship in which the various creatures of God stand to each other on the basis of their redemption by Him, that is, within the Church of Christ. Note that one's position in the Order of Creation is not abolished by incorporation into Christ and His church; rather one's position in the Order of Creation is thereby hallowed as one's position in the Order of Redemption. Thus, in I Corinthians 7:7-20, Paul urges Jews not to try to become Gentiles and Gentiles not to try to become Jews, but rather that "every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him" (v. 17) and that "every one should remain in the state in which he was called" (v. 20). Our Lord Himself, indeed, directs His followers to the original pattern of the natural order as a pure expression of God's will and the ideal form of Christian conduct; in Matthew 19:3-8 Christ warns His disciples against divorce on the grounds that "in the beginning it was not so." The Order of Creation, then, so far from being alien to the church, ought to be more manifest there than anywhere else. For this reason one must reject the exegesis of those who use Galatians 3:28 to show that woman possesses an authority equal to man in the church. This notion confuses spiritual unity with identity of roles. Children, after all, are one with adults in Christ Jesus, but it does not follow that children have an authority equal to adults in the church.

b. Woman was created as an assistant (*'ēzer*) to man and by nature, therefore, possesses less authority than man. vv. 18, 20: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.' . . . The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him." Woman suffrage, on the contrary, again gives woman an authority equal to man and so overthrows the natural order. Some may object that the word *'ēzer* is also applied to God (e.g., Ps. 70:5, "Thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not tarry!"). No one would argue that God possesses less authority than man because He is called man's helper, and so some might question why we argue in this manner with respect to woman. We must observe, however, that woman, unlike God, is not man's assistant by a simple act of her will; although, of course, the Christian woman delights in her position. The point here is that woman was *created* as man's assistant *par excellence*; assisting man is her special role in the scheme of the universe. Thus, although the Lord is the Christian's shield (Ps. 28:7) and is not under the Christian's authority, yet a metal plate which is specifically made as a shield for a Christian is under his authority. So too one who is specifically made as a helper for man is under his authority.

2. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to Genesis 3 and the Order of Creation established by God.

a. Woman fell into sin when Satan deceived her into seeking a place in the natural order higher than that allocated to her by God, and man yielded himself to sin when he acceded to woman's exercise of authority over him, vv. 6, 17: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. . . . And to Adam God said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.' " Woman suffrage, on the other hand, allows woman to exercise authority over man, thus overthrowing the natural order. For any vote which determines or is capable of determining a certain course of action is, by nature, an exercise of authority; suffrage in

any group implies the exercise of authority unless the vote granted to a person is purely advisory. A woman exercises authority over men every time that her vote contributes to the passage or defeat of some measure on which some men voted the opposite way. A woman likewise exercises authority over men every time that her vote contributes to the passage or defeat of a measure which requires action to be carried out by men who act as the executive personnel of the group in question. A congregational assembly in almost every measure adopted prescribes some course of action to be taken by the pastor, male teachers, or officers of the congregation (e.g., holding a certain number of services each week, purchasing equipment, etc.), so that a woman, by voting in the assembly, continually exercises authority over men.

- b. The Order of Creation established by God is that the husband is to rule over the wife, v.16: "Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Woman suffrage, on the other hand, gives the wife an authority equal to the husband and so overthrows the natural order. Some might object that this rule of the husband over the wife is not part of the Order of Creation because it comes into existence only as part of God's curse on mankind in response to the fall into sin. Such is not the case, however. The subordination of woman to man in general and of the wife to the husband in particular existed even in paradise. The reason that it is mentioned in the curse on the woman is this: Her special role of assistant to man formerly brought only blissful satisfaction to woman, but now sin would render even it liable to abuse, problems, and pain. It is the same with woman's other main role in life, the raising of children. Woman would have borne children in paradise, but now she would do so in pain because of her sin (3:16a). It is the same with man's work too. He was created to work (2:15), but now, by virtue of his sin and God's curse, his work would be difficult, burdensome, and of itself futile (3:17-19).
3. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to Isaiah 3. It is as shameful for woman to rule over man as for children to oppress adults, v. 12: "My people—children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths." Woman suffrage, on the contrary, allows woman to rule over man.

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4. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to I Corinthians 11 and the Orders of Creation and Redemption established by God.
- a. Man is the head (*kephalē*) of woman just as Christ is the head of man, v.3: "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." Therefore, just as it would be reprehensible to give man an authority equal to Christ, so is it reprehensible to give woman an authority equal to man (as woman suffrage does). Some might wonder how the apostle can call God the head of Christ and so give the Father greater authority than the Son. The reason is that Paul is referring to Christ according His human nature; compare chapter 15:28. Some have objected to the citation of I Corinthians 11 as proof of the proper relationship between man and woman in the church. Their rationale is that even the most conservative pastors and churches now apparently allow women to worship without veils (or hats), even though Paul demands in this chapter that women wear them as a sign of man's authority over woman. If Paul's command as to the sign of male authority is dispensible, argue the objectors, then so too is his assertion of male authority itself. This reasoning is, however, quite unsound. In the first place, even the most conservative pastors and congregations can stray from some points of God's Word, but that does not give us a free hand to throw out other points, especially more important ones. Secondly, the word "veil" occurs in the English translations of I Corinthians 11, but not in the original Greek. The covering with which Paul tells a woman to cover herself in worship as a sign of male authority is defined in verse 15 as her hair.
 - b. Paul reiterates thesis 1a, namely, that woman was created from man and for man, vv. 8-9: "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." The same conclusion follows as was enunciated at thesis 1a, namely, that woman is by nature subordinate to man.
5. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to I Corinthians 14.
- a. Woman ought to be subject to man (*hupotassesthai*) in the churches, vv. 33b-34: "As in all the churches of the saints, . . . the women should be subordinate, as even the law says." Woman suffrage, on the contrary, gives

woman an authority equal to man in the churches. Now, some students of Scripture refer the word *ecclesiāi* ("churches") in this verse to all congregational assemblies, whether they be convened for the purpose of worship or for the purpose of business. For in Acts 15:22, certainly, the word *ecclesiā* is used to denote an assembly convoked for the purpose of deliberation and decision, rather than worship. In this case, the application of the verse to the question of woman suffrage would be direct. Other students, however, refer the word *ecclesiāi* to congregational assemblies in the apostolic church at which both worship and business were conducted, on the grounds that the New Testament authors do not distinguish between various kinds of assemblies of the church and that Paul uses similar terminology for a meeting at which business is conducted, I Corinthians 5:4, and for one at which worship is conducted, I Corinthians 14:26. In this case, the application of verse 34 to the question of woman suffrage would still be a direct one, even if churches now hold separate meetings for the purposes of worship and business respectively. Perhaps most exegetes, however, prefer a third option, that the direct reference of the word *ecclesiāi* is to those meetings of the church in particular which are convened for the purposes of worship, since Paul is mainly discussing the proper conduct of worship in this chapter. In this case, verse 34 still applies to the question of woman suffrage in an indirect, nevertheless very real, sense. For if woman must be subject to man in worship assemblies, she must also be subject to him in such assemblies as determine the nature, time, place, leadership, conduct, and other circumstances of such worship assemblies. Paul, indeed, is here commanding the Corinthians to follow in the practice of woman's subjection the established custom of the other Christian churches, vv. 33, 36. And it is clear from Acts 1:16, where Peter uses the word *andres* (a word used only of males), that when in what we should call "business matters" the earliest New Testament church took action, only the men voted. Like the other verses cited in these theses, then, the verse under discussion, whether directly or indirectly, precludes woman from voting in any ecclesiastical institution possessing authority over men—worship assemblies, congregational business assemblies, synodical assemblies and commissions, etc.

- b. Woman is forbidden even to speak (*lalein*) in the churches, vv. 33b-35: "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, as even 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." Thus, it follows *a minori ad maius* that woman is also forbidden to vote in the churches, since then, as now, suffrage in a certain group constituted a greater degree of authority than the mere right to speak. Evidently even the immature Corinthian congregation did not go to the extreme of instituting woman suffrage. But if it be shameful for a woman to speak in the churches, v. 35, how much more shameful it is for her to vote there. Note that the verb *lalein* embraces all forms of individual verbal expression—preaching, reading a Scripture lesson, leading a prayer, conducting the liturgy, giving a testimony, etc.—but does not include corporate participation in liturgy and singing. This stricture, moreover, for the same reasons as enunciated above, applies to all ecclesiastical institutions possessing authority over men—worship assemblies, congregational business assemblies, synodical assemblies and commissions, etc.—but not to women's organizations, classes for children, etc.⁷ Note also that the Apostle describes the principle of the silent submissiveness of women in the churches as a command of the Lord, v. 37; part and parcel of the Word of God, v. 36; and a clear statement of the law, that is, the Old Testament, v. 34.

6. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to Ephesians 5 and the Order of Redemption.
 - a. The wife ought to be subject (*hupotassesthai*) to the husband in everything, just as the church is subject to Christ her Lord, vv. 22, 24: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. . . As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands." Therefore, just as it would be reprehensible to give the church an authority equal to Christ, so it is reprehensible to give the wife an authority equal to the husband (as woman suffrage does).
 - b. The husband is the head (*kephalē*) of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, v. 23: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour." The same conclusion follows as in thesis 6a, namely, that just as it would be reprehensible to give the church an authority

equal to Christ, so it is reprehensible to give the wife an authority equal to the husband (as woman suffrage does).

7. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to Colossians 3 and the Order of Redemption: The wife ought to be subject (*hupotassesthai*) to the husband, v. 18: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." Woman suffrage, on the contrary, again gives the wife an authority equal to the husband. Note that the Apostle describes the principle enunciated here as "fitting in the Lord"; it definitely obtains within the Order of Redemption.
8. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to I Timothy 2 and the Order of Creation.
 - a. Woman ought to remain in silence (*en hēsuchia*) in the church, vv. 11, 12: "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." The same conclusion follows as in thesis 5b, namely, that woman is also forbidden to vote in all ecclesiastical institutions possessing authority over men. The raising of children, on the other hand, including their education in the church, is the special province of woman, 2:15.
 - b. Woman must not be permitted to exercise authority (*authentēin*) over man, v. 12: "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men"; whereas woman suffrage does, in fact, give woman an authority over man. (Refer back to thesis 2a for elaboration of this point.) Note that the verb *authentēin* in this passage, contrary to some translations, applies not merely to certain forms of the exercise of authority—such as abuse of authority, domineering, lording it over someone—but to *any* exercise of authority. Any restriction of the full connotation of the word in this passage is devoid of exegetical warrant. Woman's exercise of authority over man cannot be abused; it is already an abuse in and of itself.
 - c. Paul reiterates thesis 1a, namely, that woman was created from man and for man, v. 13: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." The same conclusion follows as was previously enunciated, namely, that woman is by nature subordinate to man.
 - d. Paul reiterates thesis 2a, namely, that woman fell into sin when Satan deceived her into seeking a place in the natural order higher than that allocated to her by God, and man yielded himself to sin when he acceded to woman's exercise of authority over him, v. 14: "And

Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”

9. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to Titus 2. Paul reiterates thesis 7, namely, that the wife ought to be subject (*hupotassesthai*) to the husband, v. 4-5: “And so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the Word of God may not be discredited.” Note that women who are not submissive discredit the Word of God.
10. Woman suffrage in the church is contrary to 1 Peter 3.
 - a. Peter reiterates thesis 7, namely, that the wife ought to be subject (*hupotassesthai*) to the husband, vv. 1, 5: “Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behaviour of their wives. . . So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands.”
 - b. The wife ought to obey the husband and consider him lord, following the example of Sarah and the other holy women of the Old Testament Church, vv. 5, 6: “So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you.” Woman suffrage, on the contrary, again gives the wife an authority equal to the husband.

In conclusion, woman suffrage in the church is contrary to at least ten clear testimonies of the Word of God and to the Order of Creation established by God from the beginning and hallowed as the Order of Redemption by the atoning blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For woman was created from man and for man, as an assistant to man, to live under man’s authority; and she is redeemed to fulfill this same role as fully as is possible in a world corrupted by sin. Man sins, therefore, when he gives woman an authority equal to or over him, and the woman who assumes such a role denies what she really is by nature and by grace. The correct understanding of the respective responsibilities of the two sexes in the church is not a doctrine necessary to salvation, but it is a doctrine of great import to the body of Christ. Men and women who try to fill roles of their own invention, misunderstanding or ignoring the roles assigned to them by God, cannot expect to experience as full a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their midst as if

they were satisfied to be what they are. Wanting to make themselves what God has not made them, they waste much spiritual energy by attempting to swim against the stream. Quite understandably, then, the warming rays of the Divine Countenance beam more abundantly on those men and women who see themselves as they really are in the mirror of God's Word and see clearly their distinct roles in God's Orders of Creation and Redemption. Wanting to be ever more fully what God has made them, they are at peace with themselves and with the God who created and redeemed them.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, 1956), p. 569.
2. *Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, 1969), pp. 88-89.
3. Cf. Judicius, "Women in Authority," *THE SPRINGFIELDER*, XL, pp. 136-137.
4. *Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention*, p. 88.
5. *Ibid.* We may also note that the later Resolution 2-27 states that the Synod "has not found it necessary to disavow any of its doctrinal statements and does not today." *Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention*, p. 91. Resolution 2-17, however, presumably abrogates the pertinent Resolutions of the Synod at St. Louis in 1938, at Houston in 1953, and at St. Paul in 1956. The Synod at Denver, therefore, clearly did not consider Resolution 2-17 a doctrinal one.
6. The word "subordinate" here in no way suggests inferiority. It is important to understand that these theses use the word "subordinate" in the strict sense only, that is, "lesser in rank." The author rejects any idea that woman is morally or spiritually inferior to man. Nor does he mean to imply that woman is intellectually or physically inferior. There is no question, indeed, that some women are morally, spiritually, intellectually, and physically superior to some men, but this is not the point under consideration. To illustrate with an analogy from military life, a certain colonel may be more virtuous, more intelligent, and more fit than his commanding general; yet he is still subordinate to the general.
7. Congregational officers ought, however, to announce ahead of time matters of business which are due to appear on the agenda of congregational assemblies in order to allow women to express their feelings to their husbands, fathers, brothers, elders, or pastors. For it is especially important in this individualistic day that the church foster the proper view of each family as a distinct unit represented by its men—whether they be the husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, brothers-in-law, or sons-in-laws of the women and children of the family. If a woman has no male relative to relay her ideas to the voters' assembly, then it is the duty of the pastor and elders to act as her brothers in Christ by representing her views to the other men in the family of God. And women who wish to present a formal case on a certain measure to a voters' assembly possess the privilege of doing so in writing. Indeed, congregational and synodical assemblies and commissions should be readier to seek out the counsel of such women as are especially qualified to advise them on the particular questions with which they deal; woman can provide such expert counsel to an authoritative ecclesiastical group, once again, either in writing or through an individual member of the group.