

# Woman Suffrage in the Church

## Parts I and II

A Report of the  
Commission on Theology and Church Relations  
of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

### CONTENTS

- I. Declaration
- II. Historical Background
  - A. Early Pastoral Theology
  - B. A Question Before Synod
  - C. Summary to Date
- III. Exegetical Evaluation
- IV. Some Practical Observations

### WOMAN SUFFRAGE

From the New York convention (1967) the Commission on Theology and Church Relations received the assignment to do a study on the subject of woman suffrage "to establish a policy for congregations of the Synod" (2-05) and to provide guidance in the matter of full membership on the part of women on synodical boards, commissions, and committees (2-06). On the basis of its study this commission submits the following declarations and supporting documentation to the Denver convention (1969) of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

The basic recommendation of the commission is forwarded to the convention on the fundamental assumption that both the exercise of the franchise and the holding of church office, whether by men or women, are to be viewed as opportunities for service rather than occasions for an insistence on individual rights. An interest in the exercise of power as such is a characteristic of unredeemed life. The Lord of the church has asked His followers not to have an interest in the prerogatives of rule and authority (cf. Luke 22:25).

It is well to remember, moreover, that it is not possible in a presentation of this kind to offer solutions for every aspect of the problem before us. The declarations offered

herewith, instead, were designed to provide general guidance for a very complex area of church life. They flow from the historical and exegetical materials given in subsequent sections.

In light of a thorough study of the issues involved, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations recommends adoption of the following declarations as guides in the matter of woman suffrage, including both the issue of the franchise and the matter of holding office:

## **I DECLARATIONS**

1. We find nothing in Scripture which prohibits women from exercising the franchise in voters' assemblies.
2. Those statements of Scripture which direct women to keep silent in the church, and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office.
3. Such passages, we hold, indicate that women ought not to hold any other office in the church whose function it is to assist the pastor in the exercise and administration of the Office of the Keys.
4. The principles set forth in such passages, we believe, apply also to holding any other kind of office in the institutional structures of the church which might involve women in a violation of the order of creation.
5. We find no statement in Scripture which prohibits women from holding office on the boards and committees of Synod whether such offices are filled by election or by appointment.
6. We conclude that the Synod itself and the congregations of the Synod are at liberty to alter their constitutions and their practices to conform to these declarations if they believe that such changes are in the best interest of the congregation and of the church at large.

In the discussion which follows, a distinction is made at certain points between the exercise of the franchise and the matter of holding office. The former question has been before the Synod in some form or other for more than a century. The issue of holding office, specifically on synodical boards and committees, was not taken up until the

Detroit convention of 1965 (cf. Proceedings, p. 100, Res. 2-24). At New York these two aspects of the suffrage question were covered by the two resolutions cited in the opening paragraph of this document (2-05 and 2-06). In the following sections the two items are dealt with separately wherever the need occurred.

## **II Historical Background**

As we have already noted, the question of women voting in voter's assemblies has been before Synod for a long time, even though it did not become a pressing problem until recent decades.

### **A. Early Pastoral Theologies**

Dr. C. F. W. Walther takes cognizance of the question in *Die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staate unabhängigen Evangelisch Lutherischen Ortsgemeinde* (Saint Louis, 1864). In a discussion of congregational meetings he observes (p. 50):

All the adult male members of the congregation are entitled to active participation in the transactions of such meetings by way of speaking, deliberating, voting and resolving. But women and the young are excluded from such participation.

Dr. Walther quotes 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 as his authority for this observation.

Later on he took up the question of woman suffrage again. This time he discussed it in his *Amerikanisch Lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (St. Louis, 1872), p. 371: All adult male members (that is, those who can vote in civic matters) ought to have the right to take active part in speaking, deliberating, voting, and passing of resolutions as these occur in the meetings of the congregation, since this right appertains to the whole congregation. Compare Matt. 18:17-18, Acts 1:15, 23-26, 15: 5, 12-13 22-23; 1 Cor. 5:2; 6:2; 10:15; 12:7; 2 Cor. 2: 6-8; 2 Thess. 3:15. Excluded from the exercise of this right are young people (1 Peter 5:5) and female members of the congregation (1 Cor. 14: 34-35).

It should be noted that Dr. Walther simply appeals to 1 Cor. 14: 34-35 for his position on the right of women to vote. He does not stop to show how this passage proves his point. Walther's position was adopted by John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, (St. Louis, 1932). Under the heading "The Congregational Meeting" he has the following statement on "The Right of Suffrage" (p. 315):

*Since Scripture itself excludes children, I Peter 5:5, and women, 1 Cor. 14: 34-35, 1 Tim. 2: 11-12, from speaking and voting in congregational meetings, only the men of the congregation have the right to take part in the public discussions and the right of suffrage. The reason given in Scripture why women are not permitted to speak in the church and to take an active part in the government of the church is that they "are commanded to be under obedience" and "not usurp authority over the man."*

Articles espousing the identical position on woman suffrage in the church appeared over the initials of Dr. Georg Stoeckhardt in *Der Lutheraner*, 1895, pp. 103105, and in *Lehre And Wehre*, 1897, pp. 6574.

All of the statements quoted appear to have assumed that the passages quoted could be applied directly to the issue of woman suffrage in the church. None of the statements indicate that the writer felt that his use of the passages could be challenged.

In passing it might be noted that woman suffrage had not yet been established in the American way of life. Voting rights were not equalized for men and women until 1928. Not long thereafter the whole question of woman suffrage in the church took on new significance.

## **B. A Question Before Synod**

In time the position espoused by Walther, Stoeckhardt, and Fritz came to be challenged in the Synod. As an official matter the question of woman suffrage came before a synodical convention in 1938. Dr. John Theodore Mueller had read the formal essay for that assembly. In his presentation, Dr. Mueller had made the observation that women must not have the right to vote in the congregation. One delegate objected to this remark.

### **1. St. Louis, 1938**

By way of response the issue was referred to a committee consisting of Dr. Frederick Pfothner, Dr. Arthur Brunn, and Mr. John Piepkorn. The report of this committee referred to Dr. Francis Pieper's position in this matter as expressed in his *Christliche Dogmatik, I* (St. Louis, 1924), pp. 626629, to provide supporting evidence for the accepted position and practice of Synod that women

not be granted such voting membership. But these three men did not let the matter rest there. As a committee they offered a resolution asking that the whole matter be restudied. This resolution was adopted. There is no evidence, however, in the official proceedings that any persons were appointed to carry out this resolve. In fact, 15 years elapsed before the question came up again as an item of synodical business.

## **2. Houston, 1953**

The Houston convention of 1953 considered two unprinted memorials. Floor Committee 6 drew up a resolution asking the President of Synod to "appoint a committee of five members to prepare for the next convention a thorough exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2, and all other applicable texts as they relate to the question of woman suffrage in our congregations." On this whole matter the Proceedings of the Houston convention (1953) carries the following entry (pp. 483-484):

Concerning this matter Committee 6 recommended, and Synod resolved:

### **RESOLUTION 27**

**WHEREAS**, It is a general principle of Holy Scripture that woman should not usurp authority over men in the home and in the church; and

**WHEREAS**, Synod has based its position in the field of woman suffrage in the church on this general principle of the Bible, as expressed in various passages, including 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2: 11, 12; and

**WHEREAS**, However, there is a sincere difference of opinion among clergy and laity concerning the full and correct application of these texts to the question of woman suffrage in the church, as indicated by Unprinted Memorials 21 and 47; and

**WHEREAS**, Many women of our Church are eager to be of greatest service to their Lord in the church; therefore be it

**Resolved**, That the President of Synod appoint a committee of five members to prepare for the next convention a thorough exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2, and all other applicable texts as they relate to the question of woman suffrage in our congregations; and be it further

**Resolved**, That, in the meantime, our congregations be urged to continue the present practice of our Synod in restricting the privileges of voting membership to qualified male communicants.

**Note:** Synod by a rising vote expressed its esteem for the women of the Church and their work. This resolution was adopted, and a committee was appointed. It consisted of Professors Victor Bartling, Albert Merkens, Fred Kramer, Pastors Theodore Nickel and Martin Zschoche.

### **3. St. Paul, 1956**

The St. Paul convention of 1956 accepted the report prepared by this committee, which chose to offer not only an exegetical study of the passages involved but also appended a number of applications to specific problems and some recommendations to Synod. On the basis of this document, Floor Committee 3 formulated a set of five resolutions which upheld the previously accepted position and practice despite the fact that the President's committee could find no "express words in the Scriptures" forbidding woman suffrage. Very significantly, 10 members of the convention assembly voted against the adoption of the proposed resolutions and were "encouraged to give the reasons for their negative vote to the Secretary, as a matter of record."

The report of this committee is of such crucial significance that it merits being quoted at some length. The following lengthy excerpts are taken from the Proceedings of the St. Paul convention (1956), pp. 553569. The report first offers a very comprehensive Biblical study of all the pertinent passages. Then it proceeds to an application of the specific problems. Under Section III, E, the committee formulated its best judgment in the matter as follows:

1. Scripture knows of only one type of church members, members of the body of Christ, male and female (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:23; 4:4-6; I Peter 2:9, etc.).
2. In the Church Visible these members are bound to "ether in the confession of their common faith (Ps. 116:10-14; 2 Cor. 4: 13; Rom. 10:10).
3. In the performance of the church's work (Matt. 28: 19 20), administration becomes inevitable and organization naturally develops, even becomes mandatory, where property holdings require incorporation.

4. The precise method of administration of congregational affairs in the early church is not ascertainable. We do not know whether rules and regulations were discussed and adopted in connection with the public services, with women present though not allowed to speak, or whether in Christian freedom the congregations placed all these matters into the hands of their elders (bishops, pastors).

5. Every congregation has the right to regulate its own affairs and establish its own polity provided only that God's Word be not disregarded. "All things are yours whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future, all are yours, and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

6. The fathers of our Synod found in America the greatly prized liberty of determining their own polity as a free church in a free country. They established the system of voters' meetings now in vogue among us in order to regulate and administer the congregation's affairs.

7. With minor variations of procedure the subjects of deliberation and action in such voters' meetings are still what they were in our fathers' days: "matters of doctrine (Acts 15), election or appointment of church officers (Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6; 2 Cor. 8:19); church discipline (Matt. 18:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:6-11, 1 Tim. 5:20) public offenses (Acts 21:20-22), quarrels among members (1 Cor. 6:1-8), matters of good order and ceremonial (1 Cor. 14:26-40; 16:1, 2), and the like." (Walther and the Church, [St. Louis: CPM], p. 95ff.)

8. In the early church matters of discipline, at any rate, were handled in the full congregational meeting, with only the men speaking. For this reason, and on the general conviction that in the discussion and action with regard to matters so vitally connected with the church's life and welfare as those listed in par. 7 above and which can be disassociated from the church's worship service only with great difficulty, it follows that under these circumstances the Pauline veto of woman's voice in teaching

and directing Men applies also here. Consequently it has been the general practice of our congregations to withhold voting privileges from women. This has not precluded asking the opinion of women in the congregation in any matter of the church's program.

**9.** Our church has prospered under this system. Through participation in the business of the local congregation there has been trained a steady stream of able and enlightened laymen who have become strong leaders in the work of our congregations and Synod. At times indeed, because of sinful human weakness, some meetings have been tumultuous and quarrelsome, below the dignity of Christian gentlemen. But at least the meetings were not an arena for battles between the sexes.

**10.** Our women generally have not been resentful about their exclusion from this voting membership as it has developed in our congregations. In faith and love they gladly exercise their rights as members of the royal priesthood, in this respect through the natural administrant sex to which the Scripture assigns the ruling function in the church. They, too, have read, and they willingly heed, the Pauline texts. Their Spirit-prompted urge to serve the church has not been wanting in opportunities for activity. There is so much for all to do, and there are things that none can do so well as women.

We believe that Scripture fully sanctions the basic polity set up in our church, and we can foresee only evil results in any change of the polity under which our church has been so signally blessed for more than a century.

After the committee had stated its best judgment under the 10 points just cited, it made the following recommendations to the Synod (Section IV):

- A.** That Synod, for the sake of peace and order, urge that our congregations continue the Scripture-sanctioned and time-tested policy of administering their affairs through the male voters' meetings;
- B.** That Synod, for the sake of peace and order, urge congregations which deviate from this policy to conform to the established procedures;
- C.** That Synod urge all congregations to inform their total membership male and female, on the transactions of the voters' meetings (printed and distributed minutes, Sunday bulletins, annual



"state of the church" messages etc.), to provide opportunity to ascertain the opinion of the women on important issues, and to examine and rightfully resolve all conscientious protests that may be lodged against the adoption of certain measures; and

**D.** That Synod urge our pastors and congregations to make diligent study of the Scriptural teachings concerning both the Order of Redemption and the Order of Creation, that we may ever fervently adore and obediently serve the Triune God, our Creator, as well as our Redeemer and Sanctifier.

This committee report together with the recommendations to the Synod was considered in several sessions. Thereafter the convention accepted the recommendation of Floor Committee 3.

We quote pertinent sections both from the *Whereases* and from the *Resolveds* of this somewhat lengthy resolution.

**The second Whereas:**

**WHEREAS**, The committee does not state that it finds woman suffrage in our congregations forbidden in express words in the Scriptures, but emphatically warns against any anti-Scriptural practice whereby the headship of man to woman in the affairs of the church would be surrendered;

**The last Whereas:**

**WHEREAS**, Above all, the committee urges continued diligent study of the Scriptural teachings relative to these matters, with special reference to the Order of Redemption and the Order of Creation;

**The second Resolved:**

**Resolved**, (b) That we recognize the problems involved in applying these texts of Scripture to woman suffrage in our congregations and all the issues involved therein;

**The fourth to sixth Resolveds:**

**Resolved**, (d) That all congregations who administer their affairs through the male voters' meeting be urged to continue this policy, but to inform the entire membership on the transactions of the voters meetings, and to impress upon the men the importance of utilizing this blessed privilege of suffrage to the utmost to the glory of God and the welfare of the church; and be it further

**Resolved**, (e) That we urge any congregation in the membership of Synod now, or applying for membership, which grants woman suffrage, to reconsider this practice in the light of Scripture and the glorious position of woman in marriage and in the home, and also in the light of the consequences of such practice in the history of the church, and to consider the danger of offense to others and to conform to the historic position of Synod in this matter; and be it further

**Resolved**, (l) That a standing committee of three members be appointed by the Presidium of Synod which will continue to study this entire area of the place of woman in the church and which

will provide guidance and direction through pamphlets, brochures, books, correspondence, and direct consultation wherever desired.

This resolution was accepted by the Synod.

#### **4. San Francisco, 1959**

Pursuant to the above resolution the President of the Synod appointed a committee of three to continue to study the entire question of the place of woman in the church. This committee reported to the Synod at San Francisco in 1959. Its report indicates that the committee had had personal interviews with both protagonists and opponents of woman suffrage in the church and that they had held a number of committee meetings.

This committee appropriated the first seven points from Section III, E of the report of the previous committee verbatim and added points 811, which we quote in full from Reports and Memorials of the San Francisco convention (1959), pp. 496-497:

**8.** Scripture teaches that for the administration of these matters two principles must not be violated: (a) women must not engage in preaching or in publicly teaching men in the church; (b) whatever participation of women in congregational affairs is granted, the principle must be upheld that women do not usurp authority over men, 1 Cor. 11: 2-16; 14: 34-36; 1 Tim. 2:11-15.

**9.** Recognizing this situation, attention is called to the necessity of a constant process of education directed to both men and women: (a) men should not relinquish to women their rights and obligations in the work of the church because of their own lack of stewardship consciousness; (b) women should not preempt areas of activities in which the principles stated above are violated, but should be directed into, and led to find opportunity for, service in the church where their potential of talent is fully utilized in harmony with Scriptural principles.

**10.** Meanwhile all congregations who administer their affairs through the male voters' meeting are urged to continue this policy, but are also urged to inform the entire membership of the transactions of the voters'

meetings, and to impress upon the men the importance of utilizing this blessed privilege of suffrage to the utmost to the glory of God and the welfare of the church.

**11.** Any congregation in the membership of Synod now or applying for membership which grants woman suffrage is urged to reconsider this practice in the light of Scripture and the glorious position of woman in marriage and in the home, and also in the light of the consequences of such practice in the history of the church, and to consider the danger of offense to others and to conform to the historic position of Synod in this matter.

Floor Committee 3, which studied this committee report, recommended approval by the Synod in Resolution 8, Proceedings, 1959, pp. 190191:

**Resolved,** That we reaffirm the position of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod on the place of woman in the church as indicated in the theses prepared by the committee and recorded in the book of Reports and Memorials, pages 495 and 496.

This resolution was adopted.

The Proceedings of the 1962 convention of the Synod do not indicate that the matter of woman suffrage was discussed in Cleveland.

## **5. Detroit, 1965**

The Detroit convention in 1965 had received four overtures concerning woman suffrage in the church. Committee 2 considered the overtures and submitted a resolution under the title "A Statement on Woman Suffrage in the Church." It was adopted by the convention in the following form (Proceedings, p. 103, Res 2-36):

**Resolved,** That we adopt the following statement for guidance in this matter:

- 1.** On the basis of 1 Cor. 14: 34, 35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 we hold that God forbids women publicly to preach and teach the Word to men and to hold any office or vote in the church where this involves exercising authority over men with respect to the public administration of the Office of the Keys. We regard this principle as of binding force also today because 1 Tim. 2:11-15 refers to what God established at creation.
- 2.** As stated at the St. Paul convention in 1956 and at the San Francisco convention in 1959, we consider woman suffrage in the church as contrary to Scripture only when it violates the above-mentioned Scriptural principles.

3. In Gal. 3:28 St. Paul speaks of the redeemed children of God and their blessed relationship with Christ and with one another. This blessed relationship through faith does not cancel the order God has established at the time of creation but sanctifies and hallows it.

This resolution may be regarded as expressing an awareness which had not explicitly come to the surface in previous synodical statements. When point 2 of the Detroit resolution says:

... we consider woman suffrage in the church as contrary to Scripture only when it violates the above-mentioned Scriptural principles,

it leaves open the possibility that there may be a use of woman suffrage in the church which is not antisciptural and therefore permissible, namely, when it does not involve publicly teaching the Word to men and exercising authority over men with respect to the public administration of the Office of the Keys. The Detroit "Statement" revealed a feeling that the passages usually cited to support the prohibition of woman suffrage (1 Cor. 14:33-35; 1 Tim. 2: 11-15) do not really address themselves to the question of the vote but set forth the more general principle of not putting or having a woman in the position of exercising authority over men. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that three memorials were submitted to the New York convention on this subject. One called on the convention to confirm Synod's previous Scriptural position; another asked the Synod to authorize woman suffrage; and a third suggested that our church body discourage any action that would restrict woman suffrage.

In view of the fact that the President of the Synod had meanwhile requested the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations to study the question of woman suffrage in the church, the floor committee recommended, and the Synod resolved, to await the report of that commission.

### **6. New York, 1967**

The Detroit convention, however, had passed another resolution which appears to have some significance in the matter of woman suffrage. At the direction of this convention a special committee had undertaken a study of the question of the eligibility of women for service on synodical boards, commissions, and

committees. Floor Committee 2 recommended and the Synod accepted the following (Proceedings, 1967, p. 89, Res. 2-06):

**Resolved**, That we reemphasize the wisdom of using men for service on synodical boards, commissions, and committees and that we urge all men to fulfill the full stewardship of their responsibility in the church; and be it further

**Resolved** That the Synod declare women eligible to serve as advisory on synodical boards, commissions, and committees within the framework of Scriptural principles; and be it further

**Resolved** That women be granted such membership ... by appointment only; and be it finally

**Resolved**, That the matter of full membership of women on synodical boards, commissions, and committees be referred to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations for further study since this involves broader issues beyond the purview of the assignment given to this committee.

### **C. Summary to Date**

It is clear from the notices given above that the question of woman suffrage has been with The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod a long time. Moreover, it is evident that through the years a large body of opinion opposed woman suffrage on the basis of certain Scripture passages which, it was assumed, specifically prohibited woman from exercising the franchise in a Christian congregation.

On the other hand, the record also indicates that the official position on this matter was challenged from time to time by persons who were persuaded that the Scripture passages in question did not in fact speak to the subject of woman suffrage directly. Many of these individuals were sure that the matter of franchise was a question of judgment rather than of doctrine.

Finally, the New York convention added the issue of holding office as a matter to be dealt with in the discussion of woman suffrage in the church. What follows is written with the New York resolutions in mind. It consists of a reexamination of the Biblical passages involved and of certain recommendations that follow from a study of these texts in the contemporary situation.

Before proceeding to the exegetical task, it will be useful to insert here a notice on the limitations of the present inquiry. The presentation to follow does not propose to deal with the very complex question of women occupying the office of the public ministry. The New York resolutions (2-05) and 2-06) call for a reexamination of the matter of woman suffrage as it relates to the issue of holding office, particularly on the level of

synodical responsibility. Since service on synodical boards, commissions, and committees can hardly be discussed without reference to offices within congregational structures, the present study has included the latter consideration within its purview.

### **III EXEGETICAL EVALUATION**

The first point to be made in this section is that the exegetical study presented to the St. Paul convention, as described above (I, B. 3), offers a rather detailed analysis of the passages generally cited in the course of our synodical life as prohibiting woman suffrage. That interpretation is given on pages 555 to 564 of the Proceedings of 1956. The following four passages are there dealt with: Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Cor. 14: 33b-38; and 1 Tim. 2: 11-15. The committee itself acknowledges its indebtedness to a book by Fritz Zerbst entitled, *Das Amt der Frau in der Kirche* (Vienna, 1950), translated by Albert C. Merckens under the title: *The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology* (St. Louis, 1955).

It may be useful to review the substance of the committee's exegetical work as presented to the St. Paul convention. It begins with a statement on the distinction between the orders of creation and of redemption. On the basis of the difference between these two kinds of structure, the committee correctly concludes that Galatians 3: 26-29, 1 Cor. 12: 13, and Col. 3:11 are passages which describe human relationships and personal identities in terms of redemption. In the redemptive order, social as well as racial and sexual distinctions are transcended by that unity which Christ has given to His church. In this context the statement of 1956 applies Gal. 3: 26-29 to the order of redemption and shows that it is improper to use this Pauline text as a basis for supporting the cause of woman suffrage.

Three other passages remain. They are 1 Cor. 11: 216; 1 Cor. 14: 33b-38; and 1 Tim. 1: 11-15. These are then discussed in some detail.

The first of these texts (1 Cor. 11: 2-16) reads as follows:

*I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. 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. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head. It is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.) That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head because of the angels. (Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.) Judge for yourselves, is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God. (RSV)*

Here the apostle insists that "a woman disgraces her head if she prays or prophesies bareheaded" (1 Cor. 11:5). Paul's point, as the committee indicates, is that a service of worship, related as it is to the order of redemption, ought not to serve as the occasion for vitiating the proper relationship of women to men in the order of creation. As C. K. Barrett has put it in his commentary on First Corinthians (New York, 1968), p. 251: "The oneness of male and female in Christ (Gal. 3:28) does not obliterate the distinction given in creation."

It is clear from the passage itself, in its context, that in the apostle's day the head covering symbolized woman's subordination to man in the order of creation. By "prophesying" bareheaded such women, endowed with this special gift, seemed to

imply that they were no longer bound to this functional relationship. In so doing they failed to take full cognizance of the fact that God their Redeemer was also their Creator, who had chosen to structure existence along certain lines.

Life in the church is not designed to destroy such institutions as government and marriage, for example. Both of these belong to what we call the orders of creation or preservation. They are so constituted as to require the exercise of authority on the part of some persons or person invested with the right to do so. In government, people who hold political office are expected to function with authority. In matrimony it is the husband that has the responsibility of decision as a way of preserving an orderly way of life.

We have put the matter in this way in order to suggest that the apostle did not intend to say that women are in some sense inferior to men in terms of nature or being. The quality of "subordination" flows from an act of faith in God as the Creator of certain basic relationships which keep life and society from degenerating into anarchy. The apostle Paul was determined that, by some misapprehension and misapplication of their oneness in Christ, his fellow Christians in Corinth might destroy these very structures.

In 1 Cor. 11: 2-16, the passage presently under discussion, Paul was not addressing himself to anything like a voters' meeting. The closest he seems to come to that matter is in a previous section, where he deals with a case of incest in the Christian community. In that connection (1 Cor. 5: 4b-5) he says:

*When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (RSV)*

Paul does not suggest any specific procedure to be followed in the handling of this problem. He writes in such a way as to indicate that the question of how this was to be done was not an issue. We may assume therefore that the congregation in Corinth followed a method known to its members, probably from their past experience and contacts in the synagogue. There the duly elected or appointed officials usually took care of such disciplinary problems. If that is how the congregation proceeded to act,



then this evil person was removed from the congregation by action of its male leadership. Women enjoyed neither the right nor the responsibility of sharing in the decision-making processes of the synagogue organization. This practice of excluding them was carried over into the early church; and so women would have found no occasion, under these circumstances, to flaunt their freedom and upset the hierarchy of functions established at creation and especially right after the Fall (Gen. 3:16).

The next major passage to receive consideration in the report of 1956 is 1 Cor. 14:33b-38. It reads as follows:

*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. 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. (RSV)*

This passage certainly calls for silence on the part of women in the church. The context clearly indicates that the word "church" (ekklesia) is to be understood here in the sense of a congregation at worship.

A distinction is made between the prophetesses of chapter 11 and women who are present at worship as ordinary members of a congregation (cf. Jean Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*. London, 1962, p. 154). While the former may speak, if properly attired, the latter are to remain silent. The context indicates that Paul was addressing his remarks to married women of the congregation. To suggest, on this basis, that unmarried women could speak in a public service would seem to be an unwarranted conclusion.

It has been suggested that the apostle used the verb *lalein* here to signify idle chatter. While the word at times had this meaning in classical Greek, it is not so used in the New Testament. In the present instance it refers to speaking in an assembly of Christians gathered for worship. The context suggests that, during such worship, questions arose with respect to the revelations given by the Spirit and proclaimed in the congregation. Paul here insists that it is a disgrace for a woman to do this kind of talking, since it would be disruptive. He commands silence in this instance for the same reason that he orders the first man who receives a revelation to be quiet when a second person has such an experience and wants to talk (v. 30).

The apostle's chief interest lay in avoiding disorder in the public worship service. He insisted that an order of service exhibit the will of that God who created order out of chaos and is eager to have His children pursue the art of peace (v. 33) and not engage in disruption.

Since verse 36 makes it clear that the apostle is here dealing with a phenomenon as it had manifested itself in Corinth, we may assume that he had been informed by visitors from that city (1 Cor. 1:11) of certain excesses which tended to create disorders in that congregation. He argues from a principle set forth "in the Law," as he puts it (v. 34). He must certainly have had Genesis 3:16 in mind, where woman is described, after the Fall, as being subject to her husband.

In other words the apostle has come back to the point that the subordination of a wife to her husband is part of the order of preservation. This basic arrangement was being disturbed by women wanting to talk in a public service, presumably as part of a discussion devoted to further inquiry as to what various revelations in the service meant. Wives were asked to inquire of their husbands at home if they were anxious to learn more of what they had heard in the service.

The apostle was interested in more than offering sound advice. He was determined to keep his Corinthian Christians from causing wholesale disorder and disruption by a practice which could only have been misunderstood and in fact represented a false

application of Christian freedom. He had spelled out this basic position previously when he wrote: "Everyone should remain in the state in which he was called" (7:20). That is to say, it was the apostle's conviction that the church in her life ought not to undermine but to sanctify the orders of creation.

Paul in fact insists on this point. He calls it a command of the Lord (v. 37) and describes anyone who does not recognize this fact as being the kind of person who is not acknowledged by God.

We must be clear on a number of points in this connection. First, we must note that the apostle is describing a public service and not a voters' assembly. Whatever is said here, therefore, can be applied only indirectly, if at all, to the question of woman suffrage. Second, Paul addresses himself to a specific situation. In the third instance he is committed to upholding the institution of matrimony as belonging to the orders of creation, where renewal is not properly accomplished by disorder and disruption but by observing and sanctifying the practice of authority on the part of the husband and subordination on the part of his spouse.

The Christians at Corinth, as so many others have done since, acted as though they believed that the gifts of the Spirit must of necessity disturb the existing order and that, the greater the disturbance, the greater the proof that He is at work. Paul counters this notion by maintaining that God is not the God of confusion and commotion but of order. His action is often quiet and peaceful; and worship ought to correspond to such a manifestation of God's Spirit.

The teaching given in 1 Tim. 2:11-15, the third major passage bearing on our subject matter, is very similar to what we have gleaned from 1 Cor. 14. It reads as follows:

*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. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (RSV)*

A brief note on translation may be helpful at this juncture. The Revised Standard Version renders the Greek word *authentein*, in verse 12, as "having authority." It would seem that such a translation does not fully reflect the significance of this particular term. The report submitted to the St. Paul convention of our Synod points out that this term really means "usurping authority, domineering, lording it over" someone. It is here understood in that sense. Verse 12, then prohibits women from engaging in activities that result in usurping authority over men. That is to say, they are not to undertake such things as give evidence of their exercising authority over men in their own right, as persons created to be subject to men.

Some of the Hellenistic mystery ceremonies in the apostolic age encouraged women to engage in such actions of domineering by inviting them to play a leading and directing essential part in their ecstatic and often immoral rites. The sobriety and silence of Jewish women in their synagogues stood out in stark contrast. The apostolic author is at pains to exhort Christian women to reject the vaunted liberty of pagan rites and follow the descendants of Sarah in their imitation of a great heroine of the faith (cf. 1 Peter 3 : 6).

The burden of the text falls on the thought of a woman destroying the created order by getting involved in the kind of activity which would suggest a desire to lord it over men. In those days teaching was considered to be one such activity, as witness the fact that in the synagogue a teacher was called "rabbi," "my great one."

As a matter of fact, in the Judaism of the first century even learning, going to school, was a right denied to women. To have insisted on the kind of opportunity for learning which was available to Jewish boys and men would have been considered an act of impudence. Woman's lot was to pursue her task in quietness and subordination. This is the principle set forth in verses 11 and 12. It is supported by an argument from the sacred account of man's creation.

The verse dealing with Adam and Eve does not intend to discourse on some presumed difference in the nature of male and female. Nor does it propose to exculpate Adam on the order of the apocryphal passage in Ecclesiasticus (25: 24): "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die." The intent of the words to Timothy is to insist that God's order of creation was not invalidated by mankind's fall into sin.

In the statement that follows, the sacred author exalts wedlock and motherhood as being the proper role of women. He does so perhaps with a view to countering some celibate tendencies developing in certain parts of the church. While Ignatius, Justin, Tertullian, and Irenaeus of old held that the childbearing referred to here was an allusion to the birth of Jesus Christ as the Savior also of women, the whole context argues against such an interpretation. "Salvation" is to be understood here in the sense in which the term occurs in some other New Testament passages, namely, as being healed or finding wholeness (e. g., Matt. 9: 21; Mark 5: 23; 6: 56). Accordingly, bearing children is here conjoined to faith love, and sanctification as a way to fullness in life.

We must now ask whether the texts that have been discussed deal directly with the issue of voting at all. The President's committee of 1956 already pointed out that none of them dealt expressly with voters' assemblies as they are structured today. In other words, none of the passages under study gives a clear answer to the questions of woman suffrage and of occupying church offices. Any application of them must be made on the basis of inference.

#### **IV SOME PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS**

Of special interest at the moment is the passage from First Timothy with its reference to silence in the church on the part of women lest they lord it over men. This text got into the discussion on woman suffrage on the principle that there is a connection between the franchise and church office as ways of exercising authority. This was the view of the New York convention in 1967 when it passed its resolution declaring "women to be

eligible to serve as advisory members on synodical boards, commissions, and committees within the framework of Scriptural principles."

We must observe in this connection that the New Testament is not very explicit on the issues of voting. While the word that can be translated as "voting" (cheirotoneostretching the hand) occurs twice (Acts 14:27; 2 Cor. 8: 19), it is not clear whether the term is actually to be so understood. The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon suggests that 2 Cor. 8:19 describes the churches as choosing a representative to accompany Paul on his journey to take the collection to Jerusalem. However, nothing is said here as to the method by which such a choice was made. Furthermore, the reference is less to an office in the church than to a mission of a number of congregations.

In the other passage, Acts 14: 23, the word appears to mean "appoint." There it is said that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders congregation by congregation. In other words, no kind of franchise seems to have been involved in filling these offices.

Some kind of group action was involved in the appointment of the Seven in Acts 6:3. But the word for voting does not occur there. The disciples are directed to select some men; but the word used (episkeptesthai) signalizes "examining" or "inspecting" rather than "voting." Under any circumstances, nothing is said about the way in which this was to be done.

When the church in Antioch was instructed to set aside Saul and Barnabas for the task of missionary expansion, nothing is said about voting. The members of the church are there described as being at worship, fasting and praying (Acts 13: 2-3) when these two men were designated by an action of the Holy Spirit and ordained for their work by the congregation.

All of these considerations suggest that the matter of the franchise as it relates to the participation of women is not sharply delineated in the New Testament. Since no doctrinal point can be established except on the basis of a clear passage, the church

cannot, on the basis of the texts discussed, adopt any binding regulations on these matters.

With these various points in mind, we need to return to the issue of voting in a meeting of the congregation. Does such an exercise of the franchise constitute an act of domination over someone else, especially over one's husband?

Suffrage is defined by The Oxford English Dictionary as "a vote given by a member of a body, state, or society, in assent to a proposition or in favor of the election of a person; in extended sense, a vote for or against any controverted question or nomination"; also, "the right or privilege of voting as a member of a body, state, etc."

Other dictionaries of the English language define suffrage in essentially the same manner. Common experience in a democratic society gives abundant evidence that this definition is correct.

From the definition of suffrage it is evident that public teaching in the church is not an essential or necessary part of suffrage in the church. The adult male members of the church who now enjoy the right of suffrage and of holding office are not thereby empowered to fill the pastoral office, which includes the responsibility of teaching publicly in the church. This right and privilege is for those who are called for this task by the church itself. Cp. Augsburg Confession, Art. XIV.

It is also evident from the definition of the franchise that it does not give to those who have the right of suffrage the power to lord it over others. On the contrary, the right of suffrage is given in order to prevent individuals or small groups from usurping authority over others.

In the matter of suffrage, then, we must conclude that there is nothing in Scripture to prohibit women from exercising the franchise in the voters' meetings of the congregations to which they belong. In such assemblies they are in no stronger position than anyone else to turn the franchise into an instrument of usurpation. The

parliamentary procedures normally followed in such meetings are designed for the express purpose of preventing the concentration of power with a view to domination. The temptation to abuse power, of course, is always present. The Scripture passages we have examined contain the extra caution to women that they are not to use their positions of responsibility and service as instruments for lording it over men.

When it comes to the matter of holding office in church, the Detroit convention already resolved that women are not to hold any such offices in the congregation as directly involve women in "the public administration of the Office of the Keys," (Proceedings, p. 103; Res. 2-36). This stricture would apply specifically to the pastoral office and membership on the board of elders. To this point we would need to add the observation that some offices in the congregation implicitly expect the exercise of authority over others, including men. Holding such offices might indeed be in violation of what has been called the order of creation or of preservation.

There are other kinds of offices, however; and in that sphere many of the principles are applicable which were set forth in the discussion of the franchise. Whether an individual is either appointed or elected to such an office in Synod or in the congregation is incidental. The method by which one is given office is not of the essence. The basic question remains: Does such office-holding, of itself, constitute an act of lording it over others?

Here we must keep in mind that both Synod and the individual congregations of Synod are to be thought of as instruments of service rather than as means of exercising power over others. While, of course, a measure of authority is exercised by anyone who holds an office, such power is always circumscribed by the prior considerations of both the service to be rendered and the act of delegation inherent in either appointment or election. After all, the church is the people of God, among whom the structures of organization exist as means of ministering to others (cf. Eph. 4:12; Luke 22: 25). In this understanding of the church, the exercise of the franchise offers the privilege of service to the body of Christ rather than the prerogative of power over a political entity.



All of this is meant to say that neither the exercise of the franchise nor the act of holding office in and of themselves provide the occasion to engage in what the apostle prohibits. The franchise is part of a method of delegating authority, not usurping it. Much the same may be said of holding those offices in the church which do not directly relate to the exercise of authority over others. Offices exist for the purpose of serving the people of God with that particular measure of authority which is entrusted to each officeholder by the exercise of the franchise on the part of church members.