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HEADSHIP:

DIVINELY IMPRESSED

UPON NATURE

Oscar Sommerfeld

“Ordination of women is still a controversial issue in the Church of Sweden, although it has been practiced officially since 1960,” read a recent Religious News Service release.¹ Several female priests are demanding of the state minister of religious affairs that the next episcopal vacancy in the state Church be filled by the consecrating of a woman. In addition, there is a demand that the “conscience clause” should now be abrogated; under it male priests had the right to refuse to accept women priests as colleagues in the ministry in dioceses. Finally, last June the Swedish Lutheran Primate warned that “the life of the Church cannot function properly” with continued opposition to women priests.

Why this continued opposition? Is it because some pastors and bishops do not care that “the Church cannot function properly”? Is it because of personality quirks concerning sexuality? Because of male chauvinism? Because of a “desire to retain control and authority of their domain”? If so, one might expect the controversy to die down as the old guard die out. In Sweden it is said that the state appointment of bishops who are pro-ordination of women will gradually resolve the problem. (Only three of thirteen bishops now are opposed to women priests; and the female demand is that at least half of the nation’s bishops be women).

But if the opposition has doctrinal grounds, will the dilemma go away so long as the Scriptures remain? My position is that the issue at hand is

1. Dated January 10, 1978, this release joins the bulging file on one of the decade’s most disruptive issues in churches of all denominations.

doctrinal and relates to part of the universal teaching tradition of the church in both east and west for 2,000 years. My view is that alteration of that doctrinal tradition is being attempted which results in a cultural novelty in the same category as purgatory or mandatory celibacy of priests -- deviations for which there is no biblical warrant.

A CONFSSIONAL ILLUSTRATION

There is powerful and relevant confessional warrant for the once-universally accepted doctrine of natural order.² In opposition to the pontifical law concerning perpetual celibacy, the confessors argue that such law conflicts with "divine and natural law." (See *Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXIII "Of the Marriage of Priests" and its defense in the *Apology*.)³ On the basis of Genesis 1:28, the confessors argue "that men were created to be fruitful, and that one sex in a proper way should desire the other." This love of one sex for the other -- this natural desire even in the state of innocency -- is "truly a divine ordinance (which) cannot be removed without an extraordinary work of God." The nature of mankind is so formed by the Word of God that it is fruitful not only in the beginning of the creation, "but as long as this nature of our bodies will exist." Thus, "where nature does not change, that ordinance also with which God has endowed nature does not change, and cannot be removed by human laws."

The union of male and female therefore belongs to natural right. "Moreover, a natural right is truly a divine right, because it is an ordinance divinely impressed upon nature." "The natural desire of sex for sex is an ordinance of God in nature, and for this reason is a right; otherwise why would both sexes have been created?" Marriage is therefore a holy, lawful, and Christian thing, instituted by God and sanctified by His word. "God does not wish His ordinances, His creations to be despised." It is, therefore, a doctrine of demons taught by deceitful spirits (1 Timothy 4:1-5) that would forbid marriage, "for everything created by God is good."

The sole argument used by the confessors against celibacy is the doctrine of creation (and its implications concerning sexuality in the New Testament). This doctrine is set over against the novel traditions of men. To summarize: human sexuality is "an ordinance divinely impressed upon nature" (*in der Natur gepflanzt, est ordinatio divinitus impressa naturae*). Sexuality is therefore a good creation of God. Nor was it good only at the beginning of the creation, but in believers "marriage is pure because it has been sanctified by the word of God, and is a matter permitted and approved by the Word, as Scripture abundantly testifies." This aspect of human nature remains as long as "this nature of our bodies will exist." Both human sexuality and marriage are subjects that belong to the doctrine of creation, which expresses aspects of the

2. It is my thesis that the issue is indeed doctrinal. The Lutheran Confessions do not deal with the ordination of women question because the practice of ordaining only men was not in dispute.

3. Quotations here are from the *Book of Concord*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), 17, 110-116, which make profitable reading in their entirety. See also Article XXVII, Of Monastic Vows, pp. 21-23.

divine purpose and intention in creating male and female as different creatures. Therefore, “this creation or divine ordinance in man is a natural right.” Thus divine and natural law conflict with imposed celibacy. Such an imposition must therefore be rejected as contrary to the Word of God. “We cannot approve this law concerning celibacy which the adversaries defend, because it conflicts with divine and natural law.”

HEADSHIP DIVINELY IMPRESSED IN NATURE

Just as St. Paul defends the creation doctrine of sanctified sexuality and sacred marriage, so he teaches another aspect of creation doctrine which must remain at the heart of the ordination of women controversy, and is alone capable of resolving it. St. Paul’s doctrine is that the headship and authority of the man and the subordination of the woman to that authority is a divine ordinance which is not to be despised. This ordinance has application not only in the state of marriage, but also in the governance (*episcopate*) of the church, especially with regard to the teaching authority of the pastoral office.

Peter Brunner in his classic study⁴ states it this way: “The *kephale*-structure governing the relationship between man and woman, which was given in the creation, and the command to subordination (*hypotage*), which is demanded of the woman in a unique way by this order, are in effect in the Christian church until the Last Judgement. Were anyone to contest in teaching and preaching the factual and effective existence of this order and the factual validity of the corresponding command, he would be proclaiming a false teaching in regard to this central point with which the whole Christian message hangs together; he would be a heretic.”

Does the Bible support such a dogmatic statement. We cannot deal exhaustively with all the biblical data here. Yet, we must look at some implications of at least two Pauline passages of paramount importance in the discussion, since some deny that the contentious issue even falls into the area of doctrine, and regard it merely as a matter of church practice.

HEADSHIP IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Paul cites the opening chapters of Genesis in defense of his theological doctrine concerning relationships between the sexes in at least two passages -- 1 Corinthians 11:3ff and 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3ff headship (*kephale*) is the principle point Paul wishes to make. “But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God” (v. 3). He further draws into his argument a cultural custom of his day which was a reflection and acknowledgement of such a *kephale*-structure -- the use or

4. Brunner, Peter, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971) (now out of print). First published in English translation in *Lutheran World*, Vol. VI, No. 3, 1959. (German original, “Das Hirtenamt und die Frau”).

non-use of a head covering as a sign of authority or subordination to authority. He does not use the cultural custom to establish the theological doctrine; only to indicate support for the doctrine. The doctrine itself he bases upon the creation account in Genesis 2 and 1 -- "man is the image and glory of God" while "woman is the glory of man" (v. 7). Furthermore, he teaches from Genesis 2 that there is doctrinal significance for the relationship between the sexes in the fact that "man is not of woman, but woman of man" and that "man was not created because of the woman, but woman for the man." This is data obtained from Genesis 2 which alone describes details of the creation of the sexes. Immediately following these references to the creation account, he concludes, "Therefore (*dia touto*) the woman ought to have *exousian* (veil, ⁵ or the sign of man's authority) upon the head."

It must be re-emphasized that the apostle here supports his doctrine as an interpreter of the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, and draws out of that account the theological implications of creation-doctrine for the practical relationship between the sexes. He views this relationship as a divinely impressed ordinance in nature, an expression of the divine will and purpose for man and woman, and therefore something that remains unmodified by any cultural situation or by imagined implications of the gospel. Although the creation of Adam and Eve is unique and not repeatable, and although man is now born of woman in the process of generation (verse 11 and 12), the principle remains unchanged. As the head of Christ is God and the head of every man is Christ, so also the head of a woman is the man.

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

In 1 Timothy, Paul, "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (2:7) touches frequently upon the teaching function of the pastoral office of the ministry.⁶ A bishop must be an apt *teacher* (3:2). Timothy will be "a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of faith and of the good *doctrine*" if he will put Paul's *instructions* before the brethren (4:6). Timothy is exhorted to "command and *teach* these things" (4:11) letting no one despise his youth. Until Paul's return, Timothy is to attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to *teaching*, (4:13). He is to take heed to himself and to his *teaching* (4:16). Those who are under the yoke of slavery are to regard their masters worthy of all honour "so that the name of God and the *teaching* may not be defamed" (6:1). Timothy is to "guard what has been entrusted (*ten paratheken, the pure doctrinal deposit or tradition of the gospel*)," 6:20; to

5. To Paul, the veil was the most appropriate symbol of his age to represent the woman's respect for the man's headship. Because of the divine ordinance in creation, it behoves (*opheilo*) the woman to show respect (cf. Eph. 5:33b), just as it behoves the man to love his wife as himself (Eph. 5:33a). But as the Augsburg Confession says, veiling is not to be considered a "necessary service" in the sense of "necessary for salvation" for "no one will say that a woman sins who goes out in public with her head uncovered, provided only that no offense be given" (C.A., Art. XXVIII, pp. 24-25). Thus, the veil is a truly cultural element in the discussion, hence a matter of Christian liberty; but the divine ordinance is not.

6. To treat of 1 Tim. 2:11-12 in its total context, the teaching function stressed so frequently and forcibly in the pastoral epistles must first be reviewed. Italics are added.

“teach and urge these duties” (6:2), for “if anyone *teaches* otherwise (*heterodidaskalei*, heterodox teaching) and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the *teaching* (*didaskalia*) which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit” (6:3). Such are those who “desiring to be *teachers* of the law” (1:7) *teach heterodox doctrines* (1:3) or the doctrines of demons and deceitful spirits (4:1) -- such as those who “forbid marriage” (4:3), for “everything created by God is good” (4:4).

In 2 Timothy, Paul calls himself one appointed as “a preacher and apostle and *teacher*” (1:11). Because of heterodoxy (2:17-19; 2:23-26; 3:6-9; 4:3-4), Timothy is exhorted to “follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me” (1:13) and to “guard the truth that has been entrusted to you, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (1:14). That deposit of doctrine, Timothy is to “entrust to faithful men who will be able to *teach* others also,” (2:2), for “the Lord’s servant must be . . . an apt *teacher* . . . correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2:24). he is therefore to “preach the word . . . convince, rebuke . . . be unfailing in patience and in *teaching*. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound *teaching*, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves *teachers* to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth,” (4:1ff). He is therefore to give close attention to the inspired scripture which is “profitable for *teaching*, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (3:14-17), and to rightly handle the word of truth (2:15).

Likewise in Titus, Paul commands that elders (presbyters, pastors, bishops, 1:5,7) be appointed in every town, who will hold firm to the sure word as *taught*, so that such pastors may be able “to give *instruction* in sound *doctrine*” and also to confute those who contradict it -- (that is, “insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers” who have no right to *teach*). They are to be rebuked for giving heed to commands of men who reject the truth (1:14). Titus is therefore to “exhort and reprove with all authority” or command (2:15).

Only with this detail on the function of teaching in the pastoral office, as described in the pastoral epistles, can we see 1 Timothy 2:11ff in its total context. “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 (*protos*), then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”

We cannot go into all of the delicate questions concerning this or other passages here. Such questions are on the circumference of the core question as to whether or not Paul bases the headship of men and the subordination of women in marriage and in the church on cultural or doctrinal or theological factors. We do want to indicate what is again incontrovertible fact -- Paul bases this prohibition on the doctrine of creation; Adam was formed first, then Eve (Genesis 2), and therefore woman is not to usurp man’s authority granted him as a trust and a duty by God himself in the creation ordinances. The office of headship also in the church -- in the public teaching office of the pastoral ministry -- belongs to man alone by divine intent. Because woman was created

after man, woman is to voluntarily subordinate herself in accord with God's will.

Without acknowledgement of Paul's creation-doctrine basis for this arrangement, there can be neither fruitful discussion nor peace in the church, for none of the other issues that have been raised can be seen in proper perspective. Paul utters as a command of the Lord, "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak (*lalein*),⁷ but should be subordinate, as even the law says" (1 Cor. 14:33, 37). That law is written indelibly in the creation for the welfare of God's people. Admission of women to the office of the pastoral ministry is therefore just as untenable as mandatory celibacy, for as Luther says, "a divine ordinance depends upon no changing custom, and cannot be altered by men."⁸ Until the consummation of human history, that which is "divinely impressed upon nature" remains unchanged. Nor does the gospel alter this fact of creation (though exceptions to the rule may be made in emergency situations), as Luther writes in his commentary on 1 Cor. 14: "For such is the difference which nature and God's creation gives, that women may not and are not to have any rule . . . The gospel however, does not annul such a natural right; rather it confirms it as God's ordinance and creation." (*Das Evangelium aber hebt solch natuerlich Recht nicht auf, sondern bestaetigt es als Gottes Ordnung and Geschoepf.*)⁹

IS IT REALLY SO IN THE GOSPEL?

Contrary to Paul, to Luther, and to a host of others in times past, there are now some who argue "that the subordination of women to men came about as judgement through the Fall into sin when humanity lost the image of God."¹⁰ Since Christ has come to restore the lost image, the Gospel sets us free to live our lives in Christ. As a result, male and female are one (Gal. 3:28, *heis*, not *isos*) in Christ. As we behold the glory of the Lord we are changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18) so that in Christ we become "a new creation" as the old passes away and the new comes (2 Cor. 5:17). In consequence, at the right moment in history, slavery was abolished. "So, also as we move from one degree of glory to another, the

7. *lalein* is very frequently used in the NT to express the teaching of the divine doctrine, promulgation and proclamation of the faith. Thus Thayer's *Lexicon*: "*lalein* is frequently used in the NT of teachers — of Jesus, the apostles, and others," p. 369. In this very context he cites 1 Cor. 14:34ff as an illustration of this meaning. See 11 Cor. 2:17; 1 Thess. 2:4; Col. 4:3, 4; Phil. 1:14; Acts 13:42-43; Heb. 9:19-20; 1 Cor. 2:6-7, 13; 3:1ff and especially Titus 2:1, 15, and Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 4:11; 2 Peter 1:21; 3:16. Thus, it is the public office of pastor-teacher that is forbidden. (The same word is used in NT of the OT prophets uttering their predictions, declarations and prophetic announcements of God).

8. Kostlin, Julius, *The Theology of Luther*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), p. 426.

9. Eberle, Chr. G., *Luther's Episteln-Auslegung* (Stuttgart: Verlag der Evangelischen Buecherstiftung, 1866), p. 313.

10. A Statement on the Ordination of Women, Division of Theology, Lutheran Council in Canada, Oct. 25, 1977, published in *Consensus*, Vol. 3, No. 4, Oct., 1977, p. 31.

subordination of women must also be abolished . . .” Hence the opportunity to *function in ministry* (emphasis mine) and to be ordained is not only permitted but desirable. This conviction is described as having been arrived at “in good faith under the Lordship of Christ.”¹¹

While I do not doubt the sincerity with which this conviction may be held, it is untenable on the basis of Scripture; there is no evidence (note the lack of biblical citations) that subordination is due to the fall into sin. To the contrary, as has been indicated, Paul clearly relates it to the divine wisdom in the work of creation. Only after the fall does the headship of man assume the negative connotations of “rule” (Gen. 3:16). Man, who no longer lives in obedient fellowship to God and in love toward his neighbour, tends to abuse his authority in unloving ways; what originally was subordinate rank in human governance tends to become an involuntary subjection to tyranny. (There is a difference between subordination and subjection.) Paul therefore illustrates to sinful yet redeemed man that his model for headship is not to be that of a tyrant, but of a loving servant. “The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh (cf. Genesis 2:23), but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one’ (cf. Gen. 2:24) . . . let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Christ’s rule of the church (which is subject to his lordship) is not lacking either in authority, headship, or selfless love and servanthood. The same must be true of the Christian husband, to whom the wife is exhorted to be in voluntary submission, even as she voluntarily submits “to the Lord.”

“FROM GLORY UNTO GLORY”

But as we pass from glory unto glory in the new creation, does this still apply? In addition to the previous citations from II Cor. 3:18 and 5:17, there are two major passages in which Paul deals with the new creation. In Ephesians, Paul writes: “Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:22-24). In bright contrast, the new nature stands in opposition to the old nature typified by the life of the Gentiles

11. The opportunity for Christians “to function in ministry” (note the lack of the definite article) is not at all the issue. All Christians are called to “function in ministry” as priests of God. Our concern is rather with the *office* of the pastoral ministry. It would help greatly in the dialogue if those concerned would consent to restrict the terminology to the office, rather than to confuse the office with the calling of all Christians to service. For it is beyond dispute that women have always functioned in ministry (diakonia); it is also plain that the office is forbidden them.

(4:17ff) who live “in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness . . .” (cf. Romans 1:18-32 concerning fallen man). Paul reminds the Ephesians, “You did not so learn Christ!” No, rather, in putting off their old nature and putting on the new creation, they are to put away falsehood, not let the sun go down on their anger, refrain from stealing and idleness; allow no evil talk to come forth; not grieve the Holy Spirit; put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice, immorality, impurity, covetousness, idolatry, filthiness and drunkenness and all “the unfruitful works of darkness.”

But they are also to be clothed in the new nature, “in true righteousness and holiness.” They are to be what they have become in Christ, new creatures (to whom the old nature still clings). Hence, they are “to understand what the will of the Lord is.” They are to be kind and tenderhearted to one another, forgiving; they are to be “imitators of God, as beloved children,” to walk in love as Christ loved, to disassociate themselves from darkness and expose its unfruitful works as they walk in the light of the Lord as those who are wise, always giving thanks. They are to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives are to be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, and husbands are to be loving toward their wives. Children are to obey their parents “in the Lord,” and fathers are not to provoke their children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

In summary, we see from Ephesians 4-6, that, as Christians advance from glory unto glory in true holiness and righteousness, they are in all things “to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (5:10). For Paul, to live in the new creation, “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24) includes, rather than abolishes the subordination of women, and the office of headship among the men.

A PERSPECTIVE FROM COLOSSIANS

In Colossians 3, Paul writes that Christians are to put to death what is earthly in them: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, idolatry. For it is on account of these things belonging to the old nature that the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience “among whom you also once walked when you lived in these things.” But now, as Christians being renewed, they are to put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk and lying -- “seeing that you have put off the old nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

Here, there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, man, “but Christ is all and in all” (3:9-10). This new nature is to put on compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness and love with Christ’s peace ruling in hearts. Whatever they do in word or in deed, they are to do “everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” giving thanks to God through him, (3:17). But there

is more that pertains to the life of those advancing from glory unto glory. "Wives, be subject to your husbands, *as is fitting in the Lord*. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them (cf. Gen. 3:16). Children, obey your parents in everything, *for this pleases the Lord*. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged . . . etc." (Colossians 3:18-21, Italics added).

The new creation is marked by the fruits of faith, fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:13-25), and not by remnants of the fall into sin. Both love and submission are such fruits according to Paul and Peter (1 Peter 3:1-12). Paul sees no contradiction between the renewal of the divine image in Christians and the ordinances of God in creation. To the contrary, as Christians move from glory unto glory in true righteousness and holiness (which is the character of the divine image in man), they ought all the more to acknowledge and walk in those divine ordinances as is fitting and as pleases the Lord. The argument of the *Apology* against mandatory celibacy, holds true also here, "God wishes the rest to use the common law of nature which He has instituted. For God does not wish His ordinances. His creations to be despised."¹² Or, as Luther wrote, the gospel does not annul, but rather confirms God's ordinance and creation.

The burden of proof, in opposition to Paul, to Luther, and to countless Christians during 2,000 years of history is upon those who argue otherwise. To date, such arguments remain unpersuasive because they are un-biblical.

Someone in the Canadian debate recently charged that those who oppose the ordination of women on the basis of the *kephale*-structure as taught by Paul, fail to accept the teaching of Paul that Christ fulfilled the whole of the law, that He has released those who believe in Him from the tyranny, dictatorship and slavery of the law and human traditions, that they place burdens upon the consciences of Christian women, that they obscure the grace of God and justification by faith, trample on Christian liberty, ignore Christian freedom and seek to put a yoke upon the shoulders of believers. Indeed -- that the opponents of admission of women to the New Testament office of pastor-teacher make Christ to be sin, refusing to acknowledge the power of Christ's death and resurrection in these matters!

Such charges are illustrative of the false conclusions that must be drawn from equally false basic premises. The false premise is that subordination originates from the Fall, rather than from God's design in the creation. But Paul teaches that the *kephale*-structure comes from creation. Hence, if opponents of women in the pastoral office make Christ to be sin, then the advocates of women in that office make Paul to be a liar and deceiver.

AN EXAMPLE OF FALSE HERMENEUTICS

An illustration of unacceptable hermeneutics on the subject at hand is the following: "In 1 Timothy 2) the author refers to the story of creation and fall

12. *Apology*, p. 111.

in Genesis 2-3 in order to prove that women are to be submissive and silent. The reasons given are because Adam was formed first and because Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. In this case, one part of the Bible (Genesis) is being interpreted by another part (Timothy). My argument is that on any scale of importance of biblical books, Genesis has to be of greater significance than Timothy, even though Timothy comes later and already knows about the historical Jesus. I disagree with Timothy's interpretation of what Genesis 2-3 means. I prefer to examine Genesis 2-3, using the best kind of exegetical approach possible to see what it really intends to say. When I have done that, I will put that interpretation in dialogue with what 1 Timothy says . . ." ¹³

One can have no argument with thorough exegetical study of Genesis 2-3. But to exegete any portion of Scripture while ignoring or even contradicting an apostle's interpretation of it, is to violate the old and trusted hermeneutical principle of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. It is setting one's own interpretation against an apostle's interpretation. To acknowledge that Paul bases the *kephale*-structure on the creation account, but flatly to disagree with Paul's interpretation and doctrine means the end of dialogue. What does such a hermeneutic do to the "nature and authority of Scripture"?

Peter Brunner's warning of several decades ago increases in relevance. "Even though the question of the ordination of women to the ministry has been decided by church law in individual churches, yet the theological importance of this decision has not been settled. It is still open to discussion whether an order that makes this allowance may not stand in direct contradiction to the content of the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel and therefore must be rejected as an heretical order . . ." ¹⁴ The ferment and disorder in much of Christendom today, triggered by the radical feminist movement (which is now being opposed by a growing number of Christian feminists), bears out the truth that the theological importance of the decision remains unsettled.

Brunner rightly argues that we must take into account "the theological doctrine of the sexual difference between man and woman." ¹⁵ It is extremely necessary for the church, he writes, to interpret this natural state doctrinally if she wants to present the message of the New Testament in a relevant fashion. He adds that the church cannot be satisfied simply to borrow the insights of biology, psychology, philosophy, sociology, or medicine. Rather, texts such as Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Peter 3, and Titus 2 show that the church must say something about what it means to be a man or a woman before God; it must say something that can be said in the light of its understanding of the gospel. He concludes: "It is my opinion that the question whether or not women should be ordained to the ministry depends on the theological doctrine of the nature and relationship between the God-given sexes." ¹⁶

There are some people today who say that one must be a woman-hater to uphold the biblical doctrine at this point. That is a little like saying one must

13. From *Lutherans Alert*, quoted by Dr. R.H. Redal.

14. Brunner, p. 15.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

16. *Ibid.*

be a wine-bibber to insist on wine in the eucharist, or a child-hater to uphold the divine counsel concerning obedience of children to parents, or a misogynist when defending the rights of unborn children against unnecessary elective abortion.

Peter Brunner defends the biblical doctrine for the sake of the biblical view, not because he sees no place for women in the various ministries that belong to the universal priesthood. But like Scripture, he distinguishes between Christian opportunities to “function in ministry” in the universal priesthood, and the New Testament office of *episcopos-presbyteros-didaskalos-euangelistes-poimen*. In the divine purpose, that office is open only to qualified men. For as Brunner says (in full agreement with the consistent position of Luther and others through the ages) the apostolic command “cannot be explained away as the result of the peculiar theological speculation of its (Pauline) author, who was bound by the cultural history and the special circumstances of his day. These instructions are based much more on certain hidden, but yet extraordinarily incisive, fundamental laws and commands that God Himself established in the creation and substantiated in the carrying out of His saving counsel.”¹⁷ Any ruling of church law that allows the ordination of women to this office attacks these fundamental laws and commands of God which still obtain in the new creation even as they did at the original creation. To alter the divine intent “will eventually take its toll in the total cultural structure of an era.”

DOCTRINAL QUESTIONS RAISED

Many questions have been raised that still need to be resolved: the nature and functions of the pastoral or ministerial office and its relationship to the variety of other ministries among the priesthood of all believers; the meaning of the Law or Gospel dichotomy and the interaction of both in those who are *simul justus et peccator*; the meaning of the new obedience under the Spirit’s guidance; the question about whether there are scriptural limitations on Christian freedom in the gospel; the proper distinction between custom or tradition, and theological doctrine or principle; a confessionally acceptable definition of “adiaphoron” and the relation of adiaphora to doctrine; whether the biblical doctrine of subordination is inconsistent with equality between the sexes; the appropriate qualities in a Christian exercise of headship and subordination in home and church; and finally, a definition of the gospel that agrees with the biblical witness.

In the Lutheran community, we may once have had widespread consensus on such questions, but the issue of the ordination of women has put them into contention. The Confessions and the writings of Luther and other scholars can serve as powerful aids to restore such consensus; but only if there is a patient will to study and discuss them from an attitude of fidelity to the content of the revealed and written Word, whereby we subordinate mind, heart, and will to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the supreme head of the church.

¹⁷. *Ibid.*, p. 35.