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The History of Women's Rights in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

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THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> We therefore conclude that the Synod itself and the congregations of the Synod are at liberty to alter their policies and practices in regard to women's involvement in the work of the church according to these declarations, provided the polity developed conforms to the general Scriptural principles that women neither hold the pastoral office nor "exercise authority over men. . . ."[1]

In these words woman suffrage came to The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in 1969. It had been thirty-one years since the question had first been asked in a way which attracted the attention of most of the church body.

Over the course of those years what events occurred to form the background for this shift in position? Why did this shift take so long? These were preliminary questions which led me into the subject matter of this study. I was not prepared for some of the questions which occurred during the course of the study, and so I was more than a little surprised by the theological implications involved.

The shift in the practical position was made possible by a new approach to the interpretation of the Scriptural passages historically used as guides for establishing policy in regard to the question of women's rights in the church. I am not here attempting to be an exegete or a hermeneutician. The nature of this study is historical. I have attempted to report what happened, when it happened, and why it happened, and to indicate the changes in the approach to the passages involved

which aid in understanding the shifts in practice which have occurred.

The action of the Synod has led to many questions whose answers lie in the future. I offer just a few. What impact does this shift have upon the question of ordaining women to the ministry of this particular church body? What constitutional changes must be made by the Synod and by its congregations? What legal problems will be involved in this? What changes will take place in the membership of various boards, commissions, and committees in the light of this shift?

The position of the Synod on this subject at the present time and the hermeneutical understanding of its Commission on Theology and Church Relations is well outlined in the report which that commission submitted to the Denver convention in 1969.[2]

Two other studies of the same basic nature are of interest to anyone concerned either with the question of women in the church or with hermeneutical methods employed today, although both would be judged unacceptable to so-called proper, orthodox Missouri Synod interpretation at this time. They are Woman in the Church by Russell Prohl and The Bible and the Role of Women by Krister Stendahl.[3]

One question in my opinion holds the key to understanding any position taken by a Scripturally-oriented church on the role of women in that church. What relationship is there between the orders of creation and redemption and Gal. 3:28? The two authors cited and the report of the Commission on

Theology and Church Relations differ on this question, and herein lies the interrelation of the interpretive disciplines and history. The historian continually collects and reports the findings of the interpreters, and the interpreters use previous findings as a basis for their continuing work.

I feel that this question of women's rights, like others, forces Biblical interpretation to be an on-going process, a never-ending search, and I believe that this question and others like it will never be fully answered. Therefore, that process must continue as the interpreters' understanding and skills develop in each new era of history.

[1] The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention, July 11-18, 1969 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), p. 88.

[2] The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Reports and Overtures to the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention, July 11-18, 1969 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), pp. 514-522.

[3] Russell C. Prohl, Woman in the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957). Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women, translated by Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

CHAPTER II

THE SITUATION PRIOR TO NATIONAL WOMAN SUFFRAGE, 1928

Prior to the movement in this country for woman suffrage, and even beyond that time, women in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod were thought to hold one position, that of wife and mother within the home. Women were not to be concerned with the affairs of either the world or the church. Their simple faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior was sufficient for their knowledge and understanding. They were not to concern themselves with problems outside their realm, the home. If they had any opinions, they were to make them known through the voice of their husbands, but in public, mixed assemblies they were to remain silent.

This was simply accepted practice, and it was not seriously challenged. Even ten years after women were enfranchised by the national constitution, the thirty-seventh convention of the Missouri Synod, meeting at St. Louis in 1938, adopted a resolution in response to a delegate's objection to a paper delivered by Dr. J. T. Mueller. The resolution used this interesting wording: "Resolved, that this <u>hitherto accepted position and practise</u> of Synod be restudied in the light of Scripture in our congregations, our pastoral conferences and our District conventions."[1] One could deduce that the Suffragette Movement at first had little effect on The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

However, the position of women in the home was held in high esteem. In 1924 Francis Pieper wrote:

> Woman ought not be dragged from her place of honor into public life, for it is universally acknowledged that woman is the most influential teacher of the human race. If women prove themselves good teachers in the home (Titus 2:3), they thereby wield a greater influence on the coming generation than the men, including the pastors and schoolteachers.[2]

Behind all of this was the basic assumption of the "supremacy of the male over the female sex."[3] In his interpretation of 1 Cor. 14:34–35 and 1 Tim. 2:11–12 W. H. T. Dau constantly appealed to the "Law" and the order of creation expressed in Gen. 3:16.[4] He further contended that Gal. 3:28 could be applied only when women were making confession of divine truth in matters of faith and Christian confession.[5]

Dau was speaking directly to the question of woman suffrage in the church in response to inquiries from a pastor of Synod and a married couple in his parish. This couple desired that women have the right to vote in the church so that they could take a more active part in the work of the church.[6]

C. F. W. Walther had spoken what was considered to be the definitive word on the subject of woman suffrage.

> 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.[7]

His authority for prohibiting women the right to such actions was 1 Cor. 14:34-35. In 1872 he stated:

> 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)[8]

In 1920 at Detroit the delegates of the thirty-first convention of Synod referred to committee a proposal to increase opportunities for women in higher education, so that they could use their talents for teaching and for assisting in heathen missions.[9] In 1923 at Fort Wayne that committee recommended that the proposal be declined and urged instead that Lutheran centers and chapels be established in the vicinity of some colleges and universities, presumably to recruit women from secular institutions for church service.[10]

The legal situation in Nebraska with regard to the education of women teachers caused Synod once again to study higher education for women, but the investigating committee stated that "while Synod favors a Lutheran education for Lutheran girls in Lutheran schools, it does not at this time see its way clear for opening the doors of its colleges for the education of our girls."[11]

[1]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention, June 15-24, 1938 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 346 (Emphasis added).

[2]Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 526.

[3]W. H. T. Dau, "Woman Suffrage in the Church," Pamphlets--Church Polity (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Print, 1916), p. 5.

[4]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[5]Ibid., p. 9.

[6]Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[7]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Reports and Overtures to the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention, July 11-18, 1969 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), p. 514.

[8]Ibid., p. 514.

[9]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Thirty-First National Convention, June 16-25, 1920 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1920), p. 29.

[10]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Regular Meeting, June 20-29, 1923 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923), p. 11.

[11]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Regular Convention, June 9-18, 1926 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1926), pp. 76-77.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF THE SYNODICAL POSITION FROM 1928 TO 1965

In 1928 the right of enfranchisement was extended to women throughout the nation by an amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The Suffragettes had won, but not within the Missouri Synod.

The 1929 convention of the Synod at River Forest, Illinois, received two different opinions about the importance of women teachers. Teacher H. A. Weinrich of St. Peter, Illinois, objected to the use of women teachers in the parochial schools of the Synod. The convention noted that male teachers were preferred to female teachers and that schools should seek to replace women with regularly called men wherever possible, but also noted that women were valuable for teaching the lower grades.[1]

A request came through the Northern Pastors' and Teachers' Conference of the California and Nevada District from California Concordia College for permission to open its doors to women as a coeducational institution. The request was postponed.[2]

John H. C. Fritz in his Pastoral Theology, published in 1932, dealt with the place of women in the church both directly and indirectly. Concerning the call and the office of the ministry he states, "Not any Christian, however, may be called as a minister of the Gospel, but only men. . . ."[3]

With regard to congregational meetings, he simply states that women and children are excluded from speaking and voting,

citing 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-12 for the exclusion of women. He does, however, allow that women are entitled to express opinions and to request that their opinions be given due consideration by congregational assemblies.[4] Their objections in cases of church discipline must also be given proper consideration.[4] This agrees with the position stated by Dau in 1916, but it does not allow as much. Dau permitted women and children to express also their opinions in regard to calling a pastor. Furthermore, he allowed the possibility that women and children could veto decisions in cases of discipline and call by stating their opinions and objections, though they would not be permitted to vote.[5]

Although women were not to teach in public assemblies, Fritz did acknowledge the possibility that women might teach anyone, even men, privately.[6] Moreover, in one sentence he alluded to an implication which Russell Prohl expands in Woman in the Church. Fritz says, "That relation which God Himself established between man and woman in the home He also would have honored in the church."[7]

The 1935 convention at Cleveland heard once more from California Concordia College through the California-Nevada Pastoral Conference. The school again requested permission to become coeducational, but the request was referred to study and thus received no action at that time.[8]

John T. Mueller presented a paper at the thirty-seventh convention at St. Louis in 1938 on the question of woman

suffrage in the church and observed that women must not have the right to vote in congregations. Because of a delegate's objection to his observation the resolution cited in chapter I was adopted to urge further study of the question.[9] A committee consisting of Dr. Frederick Pfotenhauer, Dr. Arthur Brunn, and Mr. John Piepkorn had been charged to respond to the paper and the delegate's objection and therefore proposed the resolution.

The same convention in 1938 received two memorials requesting permission to train women teachers at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest. Concordia Teachers College in Seward, Nebraska, had already begun a training program for women. Ultimately the convention received seven printed and seven unprinted memorials urging that various junior colleges and prep schools become coeducational institutions. Concordia College, Fort Wayne, had become coeducational in 1935, and St. John's College, Winfield, Kansas, had been coeducational since its beginning. Experiments in coeducation were recommended by this convention at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Concordia College, Bronxville, New York, and California Concordia College. Action on proposals for coeducation at Concordia College, Portland, Oregon, Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota, Concordia College, Austin, Texas, and St. Paul's College, Concordia, Missouri was delayed at this time to await the outcome of the experimental projects.[10]

The convention also received three memorials, two printed

and one unprinted, about the formation of a women's group similar to the young people's Walther League.[11] This request was specifically referred for study. In 1941 at Fort Wayne a rather complete study was presented. The resolution adopted proposed an organizational structure for a national group called the Federation of Lutheran Women. The name was merely a suggestion of no special significance.[12]

Women had slowly begun to receive extensive attention from the Missouri Synod. Indeed, five junior colleges and both teachers colleges had become coeducational institutions by the 1940's. In future years coeducation became an accepted fact, though for some time the Synod carefully watched its coeducational institutions and their programs and limited by a quota system the number of women students that could be enrolled at various institutions.[13] However, the question of woman suffrage was not raised again until 1953.

At Houston in 1953 the forty-second convention considered two unprinted memorials that dealt with woman suffrage. Finally the convention proposed to establish a special presidential committee, which consisted of Professors Victor Bartling, Albert Merkens, and Fred Kramer, and Pastors Theodore Nickel and Martin Zschoche. Their purpose was to study the question in the light of 1 Cor. 14, 1 Tim. 2, and any other pertinent passages. At the same time congregations were "to continue the practice of our Synod in restricting the privileges of voting membership to qualified male communicants."[14]

The report of that committee to the 1956 convention at St. Paul prompted Synod to adopt Resolution 22, in which the Synod expressed recognition of "the problems involved in applying these texts of Scripture to woman suffrage in our congregations and all the issues involved therein," urged continued personal study of the question, and further urged all congregations, whether those administering through male assemblies or those through mixed assemblies, to keep or conform their practices with the "historic position of Synod," that is, allowing male suffrage only. This resolution also established a standing committee of three to continue the study on an official basis and to offer guidance through any means available to the congregations of Synod concerned with this question.[15]

In response to two memorials the 1959 convention at San Francisco adopted a resolution reaffirming the "historic position of Synod" as outlined in the committee report that led to Resolution 22 in 1956 and as amplified by the committee which had been appointed at that time. However, this new resolution included encouragement to all congregations to establish a system for informing all members of congregational business so that the opinions of non-voting members could be properly expressed prior to any action of the voting body. Again, congregations permitting woman suffrage were urged to bring their practices into conformity with the accepted "historic position of Synod."[16]

Four overtures to the 1965 Detroit convention led to a new resolution which made possible the decisions on this subject in 1967 at New York and in 1969 at Denver. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations stated:

> 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.[17]

The Detroit convention called for woman suffrage but with very tight limitations. It stipulated that women were still forbidden to preach publicly and to teach the Word to men and that they were not to hold any office or vote in cases where this would involve their exercising authority over men in regard to the administration of the Office of the Keys. Again, I Cor. 14:34–35 and 1 Tim. 2:11–15 were cited as substantiating evidence along with the order of creation.[18]

However, the convention also introduced a new dimension to the problem of women's roles in the church by establishing a committee "to study the eligibility of women serving on the boards, committees, and commissions of the Synod."[19]

[1]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Regular Convention, June 19-28, 1929 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), pp. 73-74.

[2]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Reports and Memorials to the Thirty-Fourth Regular Convention, June 19-28, 1929 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 66.

[3]John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), p. 33.

[4]Ibid., p. 315.

[5]W. H. T. Dau, "Woman Suffrage in the Church," Pamphlets--Church Polity (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Print, 1916), p. 12.

[6]Fritz, p. 315.

[7]Ibid., p. 315 (Emphasis added).

[8]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Reports and Memorials to the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention, June 19-28, 1935 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), p. 38.

[9]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention, June 15-24, 1938 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 346.

[10]Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[11]Ibid., p. 345.

[12]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention, June 18-27, 1941 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), pp. 393-405.

[13]Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[14]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention, June 17-27, 1953 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 484.

[15]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention, June 20-30, 1956 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), pp. 570-571.

[16]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Regular Convention, June 17-27, 1959 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), pp. 190-191.

[17]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Reports and Overtures to the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention, July 11-18, 1969 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), p. 517.

[18]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Sixth Regular Convention, June 16-25, 1965 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. 103.

[19]Ibid., p. 100.

CHAPTER IV

SCRIPTURAL UNDERSTANDING AS THE BASIS FOR THE SYNODICAL POSITION FROM 1928 TO 1965

To try to force the Confessions to address the question of woman suffrage, or even the broader area of women's rights, is to force an answer that simply is just not there. Because the sixteenth century did not have the problem, the writers of the Confessions do not speak to it. However, one can deduce certain sentiments from the Apology of the Augsburg Confession.

Philip Melanchthon would have agreed with those who say, "A woman's place is in the home." He describes the marital functions of woman--marital intercourse, childbirth, and domestic duties--as "her calling." In addition, he says, "So a woman's duties please God because of faith, and a believing woman is saved if she serves faithfully in these duties of her calling."[1] Of all people he says, "Each should serve faithfully in what he has been given to do, believing that for Christ's sake he obtains the forgiveness of sins and that through faith he is accounted righteous before God."[2]

The assumption that a woman's only place is in the home seems to be an unwritten and unspoken presupposition behind all that had been written or said on the subject of a woman's place in the church up to the 1965 convention of the Missouri Synod in Detroit. This presupposition seems to be based on the order of creation and the subordination of woman to man

implied in Gen. 1-3.

Walther made no attempt to prove or defend his contention that women do not have the right of franchise. He merely cited 1 Cor. 14:34-35 as a "proof-text" and dropped the argument.[3]

Repeatedly Dau appealed to the "Law" in his answer to inquiries on the subject. He derived that "Law" from his interpretation of Gen. 3:16 and the order of creation.[4] He even stated that the male sex has supremacy over the female sex, but he did not supply any substantial defense for his position.[5]

In the Theological Monthly J. T. Mueller examined the various passages involved in the suffrage matter exegetically. One of his presuppositions states that it is "obvious that the apostle bases his arguments on woman's subordinate position as determined by the Creator."[6] Furthermore, he claimed that "the subordination of woman is the point which he (Paul) wishes to stress."[7] The basic concern in Mueller's paper is whether 1 Cor. 11:3-16 and 1 Cor. 14:33-40 are equally binding. If women are no longer obligated to cover their heads, why then is silence still obligatory for women? Simply stated, his answer was that "Paul adduces no direct command of God which makes it imperative for woman to be veiled in the assemblies."[8] Yet on the other hand, silence is commanded by the Law.[9] One must ask, then, what is the difference between an "ordinance of God" and a "law of God," since the

writer says that removal of the veil from the head of a woman is against the ordinance of God?[10] One further question should be posed. If "the harm done by unveiling is done only where the veiling of women is a symbol of her subordinate position," cannot the same be said about women's speaking?[11]

Francis Pieper clearly separated the orders of creation and redemption in his writing. While stating that "there is no difference made between male and female in regard to participation in the gifts of Christ," agreeing with Gal. 3:28, he argued that "Scripture teaches that woman in her relation to man occupied a position of subordination even before the fall." Here he cited Gen. 2:18 and 1 Cor. 11:9, noting especially the definition of woman in Genesis as "an helpmeet for" man.[12] This point of interpretation was later challenged by Russell Prohl.[13] The same point is further substantiated by reference to the fall and to Paul's interpretation of it in 1 Tim. 2:12-14. However, one must not judge Pieper a misogynist, because it was he who exalted woman's place in the home as a "place of honor."[14]

Two things should be remembered at this point. First, men in general, and Christian men in particular, were expected to hold women in loving concern, to protect them as the "weaker vessel," and to keep them informed in matters of their spiritual concern. To Christians this would be in keeping with the law of love; to the non-Christian it would simply be a matter of common courtesy.

Second, all of the men cited so far wrote before the Suffragette Movement had succeeded in winning voting rights for women in 1928. In this light it is somewhat surprising that scholars in the Lutheran Church did not write or speak more strongly against the "secular" practices as if they were contrary to "the will of God" as they understood it.

John H. C. Fritz was the first person to address the question of woman suffrage after the 1928 success of the Suffragettes, but like his predecessors he simply said "no" to woman suffrage, cited 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-13 as reasons for his prohibition, and left the matter there. He did not really show how these passages could prove his assertions, nor did he even expect to be challenged.[15]

William Arndt proceeded in much the same way as writers before him. He acknowledged the honor accorded to women as "heirs of the grace of life" by the New Testament, but then continued to appeal to "the relation between the sexes that God established when He created man and woman," in other words, the order of creation. He, too, argued "custom versus law" in much the same way Mueller did. He also emphasized the law of Christian love in the relationship between "husband" and "household." It is interesting to note how he used the terms "husband" and "men" interchangeably without any differentiation of their roles.[16]

The 1953 Houston convention noted that "it is a general principle of Holy Scripture that woman should not usurp author-

ity over men in the home and in the church." The question which this convention addressed to the presidential committee was this: Does this principle in the light of 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:11-12 deny suffrage to women?[17]

Between that convention and the 1956 meeting in St. Paul, the English translation of Fritz Zerbst's 1950 book appeared under the title The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology. The translator, Albert Merkens, was also a member of the committee that had been charged at Houston to do a thorough exegesis on the passages pertinent to the suffrage question. Zerbst attacked the problem basically from the point of "woman and office," because already in the mid-1950's there were movements in Europe for the ordination of women to the priesthood. Though he did not deal directly with woman suffrage in the church, his study did relate to that question. Investigating the problem from many different aspects, Zerbst's major contribution is in the area of the "subordination" of women based on the New Testament's understanding of the orders of creation and redemption. However, his exegesis is very literalistic, and his applications are severely legalistic, repeatedly referring to the order of creation.[18]

The rather comprehensive report of the Committee on Woman's Suffrage led Floor Committee 3 to urge the congregations of Synod to continue in the "Scripture-sanctioned and time-tested" manner of administering their business through male voters' assemblies.[19] But an opening to woman suffrage had

been created, because Resolution 22 noted that the study committee "does not state that it finds woman suffrage in our congregations forbidden in express words in the Scriptures." While warning "against any anti-Scriptural practices," that committee was in effect saying that the so-called "proof-texts" did not really prove anything, because they did not speak directly to the question of woman suffrage.[20]

The delegates at San Francisco in 1959 heard nothing new in the interpretation of Scripture on this problem. The Detroit meeting in 1965, however, grasped the implications of the second "Whereas" statement in Resolution 22 of 1956, and from that point the shift to woman suffrage was on.

To attempt to discern all the thinking that lay behind the interpretation of the various passages from Scripture which were applied to the question of woman suffrage would be presumptuous. However, it appears that the writers cited in this chapter (though not the Committee on Woman's Suffrage of 1956) suggested very literal, word-for-word interpretations, which carried the words of St. Paul from the "then" into the "now," with little attempt to investigate thoroughly the Sitz im Leben, or original background, of his remarks. They did not deal adequately with the possible reasons why Paul said things the way he did. They might have profited from some advice from Julius Bodensieck:

> A biblical, evangelical, Lutheran method of determining the principles for the role of women in church and society would include the rejection of any principle which,

a) conflicts with the unequivocal, universal, identical sinfulness of men and women;

b) conflicts with the unequivocal, universal, identical grace bestowed on men and women;

c) conflicts with the placing of equal responsibility upon men and women in the kingdom of God;

d) absolutizes any one historical order of society;

e) is based on a number of isolated texts; or

f) is not applicable to women in modern society, in totalitarian or welfare states, or to unmarried women, or to working women.[21]

[1]Philip Melanchthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," The Book of Concord, edited by T. G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), XXIII, 32.

[2]Ibid., XXIII, 39.

[3]The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention, July 11-18, 1969 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), p. 514.

[4]W. H. T. Dau, "Woman Suffrage in the Church," Pamphlets—Church Polity (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Print, 1916), pp. 6, 7.

[5]Ibid., p. 5.

[6]J. T. Mueller, "Are 1 Cor. 11:3-16 and 1 Cor. 14:33-40 Parallel Ordinances?" Theological Monthly, III (August-September, 1923), p. 245.

[7]Ibid., p. 246.

[8]Ibid., p. 245.

[9]Ibid., p. 247.

[10]Ibid., p. 245.

[11]Ibid., p. 248.

[12]Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 524.

[13]Infra, p. 33.

[14]Pieper, I, 526.

[15]John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), p. 315.

[16]William Arndt, "A Talk on Woman Suffrage" (unpublished paper read before the St. Louis Pastoral Conference, 23 May 1949), pp. 3-4.

[17]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention, June 17-27, 1953 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 483.

[18]Fritz Zerbst, The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology, translated by Albert G. Merkens (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), pp. 56-68.

[19]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Reports and Memorials to the Forty-Third Regular Convention, June 20-30, 1956 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 561.

[20]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention, June 20-30, 1956, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 570.

[21]Julius Bodensieck, "Theological Principles Determining the Role of Christian Women in Church and Society" (mimeographed paper read before the Lutheran Social Ethics Seminar, Valparaiso University, December, 1955), p. 1.

CHAPTER V

HISTORY OF THE SYNODICAL POSITION FROM 1965 TO 1969

At the 1967 convention in New York the delegates were faced with three overtures favoring woman suffrage, one favoring the "historic position of Synod," and the report of the committee concerning the eligibility of women to serve on the boards, committees, and commissions of Synod. The question of suffrage was postponed until the 1969 convention in Denver in order to await the outcome of a study undertaken by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Congregations were simply asked to be patient and await any action that might come from Denver.[1] Nevertheless congregations that administered their business through mixed assemblies were not requested to bring their practices into line with the "historic position of Synod" as they had been on three previous occasions, 1953, 1956, and 1959.[2]

Two decisions were reached on the basis of the report concerning women on the boards, committees, and commissions of Synod. The matter of full membership on such boards was referred to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations for further study. However, women were granted advisory membership by appointment in order to make use of their talents "within the framework of Scriptural principles."[3]

Thus, with two important considerations expected at the Denver convention, 1969 looked to be an interesting year for

women's rights in the Missouri Synod.

Although two printed overtures and one unprinted overture came to Denver, the matter was already incorporated in the report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Both the matter of woman suffrage and the matter of the eligibility of women to serve on the various boards of Synod were contained in the single resolution which came to the floor of the convention. The last two points of that resolution are here presented in their entirety.

> Resolved, That the Synod accept the following declarations as guides on this matter:
>
> 1. 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 or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive functions of this office.
>
> 2. The principles set forth in such passages, we believe, prohibit holding any other kind of office or membership on boards or committees in the institutional structures of a congregation, only if this involves women in a violation of the order of creation. We hold that they do not prohibit full membership of women on synodical boards, commissions, and committees. The manner of filling an office or establishing membership on a board or commission, in congregations or in the Synod, has no prohibitory Scriptural implications.
>
> 3. We hold likewise that Scripture does not prohibit women from exercising the franchise in congregational or synodical assemblies.
>
> 4. We therefore conclude that the Synod itself and the congregations of the Synod are at liberty to alter their policies and practices in regard to women's involvement in the work of the church according to these declarations, provided the polity developed conforms to the general Scriptural principles that women neither hold the pastoral office nor "exercise authority over men"; and be it finally

> Resolved, That in the implementation of any changes in this area of women's ministry in the church we urge cautious and deliberate action in the spirit of Christian love.[4]

The resolution was adopted as it came out of committee, and a substitute motion to decline altering the "historic position of Synod" was refused consideration.[5]

This is the situation which presently exists within The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. No new action has been proposed for the 1971 convention to consider, but in the meantime proposals for further change or for retraction may be submitted. It will be interesting to examine the workbook for the next convention to see what further action may be desired from groups and individuals within the Synod and what implications such action may have.

[1] The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Regular Convention, July 7-14, 1967 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 89.

[2] Supra, pp. 12-13.

[3] Mo. Synod, Proceedings, 1967, p. 89.

[4] The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention, July 11-18, 1969 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), pp. 88-89.

[5] Ibid., p. 89.

CHAPTER VI

SCRIPTURAL UNDERSTANDING AS THE BASIS FOR THE SYNODICAL POSITION FROM 1965 TO 1969

To an outsider looking into the situation within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod it would probably appear that women were treated almost as sub-human creatures and that the men found Biblical proof for such a stance toward the "weaker sex." Though that has not really been the case, it is only within the last fifteen years that the Synod has demonstrated that it recognizes the changes that have occurred in the world itself. These changes have opened up opportunities for women to serve in every facet of life, not the least of which is their service in church life.

One reason for all of this is that it was only after World War II that women truly began to take advantage of the educational opportunities presented to them. They began to develop their talents and abilities to be a creative force within society. The war might well have been a contributing factor for this, since society relied heavily on women to fill many occupations normally handled by the men who were then in uniform.

This is also about the same time that the educational policies in the Missouri Synod began to be modified in order to open up institutions to women, basically to train teachers, but also to train Christian laywomen.[1] With an available

corps of capable and talented women, who were eager to serve, the problem facing the Synod was how best to use women in the work in God's Kingdom on earth. In this church's early history that particular problem had not existed. Thus, it became necessary to re-investigate the Scriptural principles employed by the church in determining the extent of women's activity in the church.

The two extensive studies of the Synod on this subject were done by the Committee on Woman's Suffrage in 1956 and by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in 1969.[2] These two works were exegetical studies which led to practical conclusions, and they are the bases for the Synodical position as it stands today.

Two outside studies should be mentioned here for their exegetical, hermeneutical, and practical implications, because they show the trend of thinking in this day on the question of women's service in the church on the basis of more progressive, open-minded "liberal" principles of interpretation of Scripture. The first is a study in 1957 by Russell Prohl on Woman in the Church, and the other is The Bible and the Role of Women by Krister Stendahl in 1958.

In the final analysis it is the hermeneutical principles that are employed which determine the position developed on any question of practical theology that requires Scriptural guidance and understanding. The most important question which the interpretive process must face and answer is: What impact

does Gal. 3:28 have upon the Church's understanding of the orders of creation and redemption? In the very "liberal" schools of thought the question is ignored and is regarded as invalid in this day and age. However, it is a very real question for the Synodical studies and for the books by Prohl and Stendahl, a question which they all seem compelled to face in order to be honest with their traditions and backgrounds.

The term "order of creation" refers to the horizontal relationships which are found in creation. Relationships between all created things are dictated by the differences established in their natures by the Creator. Thus, man and woman hold different positions, or "callings," in the creation in relation to one another which are determined by the created differences in their sexes. On the other hand, the "order of redemption" refers to the vertical relationship between the individual Christian and the heavenly Father which was established by the redemptive act of Jesus Christ. In this relationship there is no difference between male and female, because all are sinners, either acquitted by their faith in the Savior or condemned by their lack thereof.

In discussing the two orders in the light of 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 Prohl contends

> that the Christian wife is the woman involved: that there is no law of creation which makes women in general subordinate to men in general, but that there is a law of creation which makes the husband the head of the wife.[3]

He would disagree with Dau's contention that the male sex is is superior to the female sex. The relationship which he sees

described by the order of creation is the relationship established by God through marriage in the home.[4]

Prohl also questions Pieper's interpretation of "helpmeet," although they both end up at the same point of understanding. Prohl just has to go a little further to get there.[5]

Prohl also counters Mueller's argument about the custom of covering the head and the law of silence. In his understanding of the marriage and divorce laws of the first century Prohl interprets the 1 Cor. 11 passage as more stringent and demanding legally that 1 Cor. 14, since the uncovered head was more shameful and insulting to the husband than the wife's speaking in mixed company.[7]

By placing limitations on his understanding of the order of creation, and by interpreting the Pauline statements in the light of the "household" understanding, Prohl reaches the final conclusion that, based upon Scriptural principles, no one, no group, no church has the right to place any restrictions on the activity of women anywhere in society or in the church. He even looks forward to the day when women will be proclaiming the Gospel from the pulpits of Missouri Synod churches.[6]

Why then did the early church place restrictions upon women, if indeed it is true that such restrictions are not really "Christian" and "Biblical"? Stendahl asks another question which may shed light on this. "Does the New Testament contain elements, glimpses which point beyond and even 'against' the prevailing view and practice of the New Testament church?"[8]

Both men answer Stendahl's question in the affirmative and offer as reasons for such an answer the church's position in time and society. The church, they contend, was in an extremely defensive position and dared not drastically upset the prevailing situations within society for fear of extinction. Also implied in their arguments is the concept of "giving offense." The example used to demonstrate their point is the dilemma of slavery. Slavery is incompatible with Christianity, but the first century church did nothing outwardly to upset the situation in the world concerning slavery at that time. Paul's actions with regard to Onesimus and Philemon should be noted here. The two authors contend that the same attitude is true on the part of the early church with regard to the "subordination" of women.[9]

Stendahl's work, besides dealing with the question of women in the church, is an example of the hermeneutical process of the popular "Uppsala School." In his second chapter he makes a strong argument on the subject of Gal. 3:28 and the two orders. He concludes, "And, finally, the most primary division of God's creation is overcome, that between <u>male and female</u>."[10] Furthermore,

> Just as Jews and Greeks remained what they were, so man and woman remain what they are; but in Christ, by baptism and hence <u>in the church</u>—not only in faith—something has happened which transcends the Law itself and thereby even the order of creation. . . . If one counters that this would lead to a conflict with the order of creation, and hence must be wrong, we must say that it does indeed lead to such a conflict, and that is precisely what it should do and intends to do.[11]

"If emancipation is right, then there is no valid 'biblical' reason not to ordain women," and by emancipation the author means the state of women within the secular world today.[12]

> Thus the question about the ordination of women is not a question about offices but a question about the right relationship between man and woman in Christ, whether it applies to political office, civil service, career, home life, the ministry or to the episcopate.[13]

Beside a conclusion such as this the question of woman suffrage in the church seems ridiculous. But it is not ridiculous in the case of the Missouri Synod. It is a very real question, and the conclusions of the two authors cited above would have to be considered unacceptable to the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations.

That Commission's report to the 1969 convention of the Synod maintained a very distinct difference between the order of creation and the order of redemption, and therefore, the interpretation of the relevant passages was colored by this understanding.[14]

The report finds in the order of creation a practical implication not found by the above-mentioned authors. That implication is that the order of creation establishes a "functional relationship" which the commissioners find in the first article of the creed in the doctrine of preservation. Thus the order of creation is closely tied to the order of preservation.[15] God created differences to preserve His creation. He established order in creating the world, and the order of creation is to prevent His handiwork from reverting to chaos. The

Commission's interpretation of Paul's words about women, then, suggests that the order of creation must not only be maintained but must also be determinative for their practical conclusions.

This report agrees with the 1956 report that Scripture is actually silent on the direct question of woman suffrage, and that therefore, any conclusions on the subject must be worked out in the light of Scripture's statements on women in general.

According to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, if women exercise the privileges of "voting" or "holding office," they are not violating any Scriptural principles.[16] This is completely different from the conclusions drawn by Dau in 1916.[17]

The commissioners try to explain from a historical point of view why Paul said what he did and from that viewpoint, the Apostle's understanding of the order of creation, but Prohl would not agree that they have interpreted sufficiently to warrant their conclusions.[18]

As the primary expression of the position of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod on the subject of women's roles in church affairs today, the report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations makes it unthinkable that one can even mention the possibility of ordained women ministers of the Gospel in this Church body.

[1]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention, June 18-27, 1941 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), pp. 49-50.

[2]The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention, June 20-30, 1956 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), pp. 555-564. Reports and Overtures to the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention, July 11-18, 1969 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), pp. 514-522.

[3]Russell C. Prohl, Woman in the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p. 35.

[4]Supra, p. 6.

[5]Prohl, pp. 37-38.

[6]Ibid., pp. 77-80.

[7]Ibid., pp. 24-35; 48-54.

[8]Krister Stendahl, The Bible and the Role of Women, translated by Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 34.

[9]Prohl, pp. 55-57. Stendahl, pp. 32-35.

[10]Stendahl, p.32.

[11]Ibid., p. 34.

[12]Ibid., p. 41.

[13]Ibid., p. 43.

[14]Mo. Synod, Reports and Overtures, 1969, p. 518.

[15]Ibid., p. 519.

[16]Ibid., pp. 521-522.

[17]W. H. T. Dau, "Woman Suffrage in the Church," Pamphlets--Church Polity (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House Print, 1916), pp. 8-11.

18 Mo. Synod, Reports and Overtures, 1969, pp. 519-520.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Who, then, is right in interpreting Paul on women? Was the Missouri Synod correct all those years in denying the right of suffrage to women? Is it correct now in permitting the exercise of that right? Should The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in future conventions consider the ordination of women as The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church in America will be doing? If The American Lutheran Church chooses to ordain women, how will this effect the recently enacted altar and pulpit fellowship between the two churches? Will the Missouri Synod begin "calling" its women teachers rather than hiring them by contract, a practice which has led to various inequities in wages, housing, responsibilities and privileges in some areas?

The answers to all of these questions and many more like them depend upon the exegetical and hermeneutical method of operation which is applied to the understanding of the New Testament and, specifically, to the Pauline passages involved.

I have attempted to show in this paper how and why the position of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has changed over the course of the years with regard to women. At the root of the question is the attitude with which this particular group approaches Scripture. As that attitude is constantly renewed and developed, the church's position on practical problems, such as this one, will perhaps change and develope.

This is a continuing process which will never find completion and which calls for the historian and the interpreter to work hand-in-hand. All of the technicians of theology must continue their investigations in their various disciplines, history, exegesis, hermeneutics, systematics, so that the proper practical applications can be made which will provide the most benefits for the growth of God's Kingdom on earth.

One thing which such a process demands is that the church or the individual technician involved must never be afraid to admit that a previous position or understanding may have been wrong. Too often in the past this process has been stalled because someone felt that to admit the possibility of error in interpretation and application would undermine his or his church's authority and shake the confidence which the people had placed in the leaders of their church. Such a fear arises when one forgets that it is Scripture alone which is inspired and not the interpretations and applications of Scripture which men make.

The Missouri Synod has taken its present position on the basis of the report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. At the same time, though, I would hope that further work in the areaof interpretation will be done especially on the problem of the order of creation and the order of redemption. Krister Stendahl's interpretation deserves study and comment by this church body. The question is not now closed, nor do I feel it will ever be.

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