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WOMEN'S ORDINATION: A LITMUS TEST FOR ANTINOMIANISM

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Theology

By

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May 2007

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PREFACE

When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK), to which I belong, established a deaconess college at the beginning of this century to train young women for parish work, it was not clear which kind of education they were going to be offered. Many observers, both from within and without, saw this as a signal that the church was moving towards the ordination of women. When the first crop of deaconesses graduated and were deployed into the parishes, a great confusion reigned among the members, both clergy and ordinary Christians, regarding the role of these new workers. To compound the situation, many of those deaconesses were not sure of their “job description” and what their roles were in relation to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. The situation has not improved. Although they have been mainly involved in social work, there is still no direction regarding what deaconesses should and should not do. At times, they lead Bible studies during spiritual meetings. Sometimes they are also assigned readings in the worship service. Many pastors, however, have reservations about this. ELCK is not alone in this situation, for many churches are struggling to determine the appropriate place for women in the life of the church.

In Africa—and Kenya in particular—almost all the mainstream churches are ordaining women today. The Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (CPEA), for example, have had women ministers for the last two decades. Judging by the rate at which churches are bringing women aboard the ministry,

one is not being an alarmist to think that ELCK will soon fall under this domino effect. This concern has precipitated the writing of this thesis. I feel the need to investigate the factors that have facilitated the rapid acceptance and approval of women's ordination in many churches in Africa, and elsewhere in the world. As such, the chief purpose of this thesis is to bring to the fore the dangers lurking in those theological moves involved in women's ordination, with a view to helping our church, ELCK, to identify and avoid them lest it be swayed from its confessional stand. I hope that this thesis will also stimulate more debate on this issue.

It would be unfair if I did not acknowledge the contribution of the following individuals: my wife, Pamela, for giving me peace of mind by caring for our children during my stay in St. Louis, where this paper was written; Rev. Osmo Harjula, the principal of Matongo Lutheran Theological College, for his support to me and my family; Dr. Joel Biermann, under whom I took all my Systematic Theology classes, for helping me to develop my thesis prospectus as well as introducing me to many valuable literary resources; and last but not least, seminarian Charles Sakpani, M.Div. student from Togo, for his warm company on the seminary campus.

It is my hope that those who read this paper will be enabled to identify and shun the theological errors leading to the ordination of women.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the role of women in the ministry has been a matter of debate in many church bodies for quite some time. People disagree whether or not it is appropriate theologically to have women in the ordained ministry. Generally speaking, there have been three kinds of responses to the question. There are those men and women who are supportive. Such people assert that women's ordination is a phenomenon whose time has come and anyone opposed is out of step with the reality of this age. On the other side, are those conservatives who are opposed to the inclusion of women in the pastoral office, arguing that this is a theological error that must not be accepted in the church. There are still others who are indifferent about the matter and can fall on either side depending on where the majority happens to be. The issue has divided many churches in Africa, and elsewhere in the world, as each church tries to assume an official position either for or against women's ordination. But whatever position is adopted, it seems that every church becomes embroiled in controversy. Evidence suggests that the number of churches that have women ministers is growing rapidly. In Kenya, for example, almost all of the mainstream churches, including the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC),¹ are resigned to this new position on ministry. The Anglican Church of Kenya, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and the Methodist Church of Kenya, just to mention

¹There are two chapters of the Lutheran church in Kenya with the same initials but ordered differently. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) does not ordain women. The Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) has women pastors.

a few, have women ministers. The Seventh Day Adventist Church of Kenya has also opened its door to women pastors.

The practice of ordaining women began in the middle of the twentieth century and has since enjoyed a remarkable popularity among many churches, even those once strongly opposed. This development, therefore, leaves one with the question: why is women's ordination rapidly gaining the acceptance and approval of so many churches today? In this thesis, it is my proposition that the practice of ordaining women into the pastoral office is a consequence of various factors emanating from a departure from God's design for His creation as reflected in the Law. This aberration is characterized by a polarized understanding of the relationship between the order of creation and the order of redemption.

In the second chapter, I will discuss how Law/Gospel reductionism, by denigrating the Law, has paved the way to antinomian tendencies in the church. Basing their arguments on the irrelevance of the Law, proponents of women's ordination have reasoned that the church is free under the Gospel to ordain women as ministers. I will, however, argue against the practice. In the third chapter, I will discuss the role that feminism has played in making women's ordination acceptable to many church bodies today. I will argue that the pressure of feminism has led many churches to give in to the demand for equality between man and woman, and hence to support the sharing of roles. I will also argue that the order of redemption has not dissolved the ordinances of the order of creation.

Chapter 4 treats the functional understanding of the ministry, by which the preaching office is viewed in terms of functions that any qualified person can discharge as

determined by the congregation. I will offer an opposing view, arguing that the office of the Public Ministry is divinely instituted. One of the qualifications for this office specified in the Scripture is that the occupant must be a man. In chapter 5 I will show how "ecumenism," in its quest for the visible unity of the church, has contributed to the ordination of women in many churches in Africa and around the world. Here I will show how resolutions by consultative forums such as the World Council of Churches have mounted pressure on member churches to succumb to women's ordination. Chapter 6 will provide a summary of the main issues discussed in the previous chapters. Each chapter will include a critical examination of the works of those who support women's ordination in order to understand their arguments, as well as my own position and the reasoning for it.

CHAPTER 2

LAW/GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM

Definition and Background

This chapter is not a treatise on the distinction between Law and Gospel. Rather, it surveys how “Law/Gospel reductionism,” which is one aspect of an improper distinction between Law and Gospel, has contributed to the practice of women’s ordination. The distinction between Law and Gospel becomes improper when the two are either confounded or separated.

The term “Law/Gospel reductionism” came to the fore as part of the debate that erupted in the mid-twentieth century among theologians in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America over the significance of the Law/Gospel distinction in biblical hermeneutics, in relation to the function of the Law among Christians. Some theologians held the opinion that “Gospel alone” is the overarching biblical hermeneutical principle. Under this principle, everything considered “not Gospel” is jettisoned. John Warwick Montgomery used the term Law/Gospel reductionism, probably for the first time, in criticizing Walter R. Bouman for confusing the relationship between Law and Gospel.² At issue was how to establish the balance between the so-called “material” and “formal” principles of Lutheran theology.³

²Edward Schroeder, “Law/Gospel Reductionism in the History of the LC-MS,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1972): 232.

Montgomery vehemently opposed the reduction of the Word to Gospel, on the ground that this mutilates the Word of God.

Those who have defended reductionism attribute it to the Reformers themselves. Edward Schroeder, for example, contends that Luther and others were reductionists because they regarded the Law/Gospel distinction as the operating [theological] yardstick. To espouse his claim he says:

In the face of this widespread agreement, even on an authoritatively acknowledged Bible by both sides, Melancthon conducted a master-class kind of demonstration, a tour de force, in Apology IV to show how the distinction between Law and Gospel, when practiced as a theological razor, cuts through to expose where the Gospel is and where it really is not in the debate of the day.⁴

What was at stake in the debate over Law/Gospel reductionism was the position of the Law among Christians.⁵ This can be seen in Scott Murray's response to Schroeder:

The Gospel or Scripture choice reflected a false either/or. Therefore, Schroeder's claim that the Gospel reductionistic hermeneutic was the hermeneutic of the Lutheran Reformation was gravely flawed. The use of Gospel reductionism as a hermeneutic tool had significant effect upon the approach to the third use of the Law. . . . Gospel reductionism reduced authentication of the Lutheran doctrine to whether they were Gospel or not-the-Gospel. With such a sharp razor of discernment, the third use of the Law is ripe for excision.⁶

The concern of Montgomery and others who were opposed to Law/Gospel reductionism

³The formal principle refers to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the source and norm of all doctrines (*Sola Scriptura*), while the material principle refers to the article of justification by grace through faith on account of Christ (as the summary of Christian Doctrine).

⁴Schroeder, 237.

⁴Ibid., 237.

⁵Lutheran theologians are divided over the functions of the Law. There are those who assert that the Law has two functions: Law as a curb and Law as an accuser. In its accusative function, the law proves man guilty and thereby throws him at the mercy of God. Others hold that there is a third function of the Law besides the two named. In the third use, the Law is taken as a guide for Christians on ethical issues.

⁶Scott Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God. The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: CPH, 2002), 106.

was the manner in which the Law was treated as excess baggage in the Scripture, as though it was not part of the revelation of God. Through reductionism, Montgomery saw that the coherence of the Christian faith was jeopardized.

The *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* defines "reductionism" as "the practice of oversimplifying a complex idea or issue to the point of minimizing or distorting it." Montgomery reflects this in his definition of Law/Gospel reductionism as "a hermeneutical procedure that calls for interpreting biblical texts with the Gospel, or distinction between Law and Gospel, as the exegetical norm, i.e. bringing the issue back to the Gospel."⁷ The question of Law/Gospel distinction is still an important issue in contemporary Lutheranism. Some theologians hold that the Law has no other use besides condemning and killing. Gerhard Forde, for example, believes that "the nature of the Law is that it terrifies."⁸ Through this negative lens, the Law is seen as an enemy, and hence bad. But it is important to note, as David Yeago says, that "the negativity of the Law is not located in its formal character as a commandment, as proposal of form and order; its ground is, rather, in our disorder, our sin, our non-conformity to Christ."⁹

Law/Gospel reductionism was allegedly put in place to guard the Gospel against philosophical additions. It was the theological razor for excising anything considered "not-the-Gospel."¹⁰ While the distinction between Law and Gospel is undeniably indispensable for a clear understanding and communication of the Word of God, an improper distinction, especially one that sets the Law against the Gospel, creates an

⁷Schroeder, 232.

⁸Murray, 128.

⁹David Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology," *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (1993): 44.

¹⁰Schroeder, 236.

antagonism in which the Gospel is elevated over the Law. Yeago, one of the chief opponents to Law/Gospel reductionism, observes that any account of Luther's contribution to the doctrine of revelation that tends to create an antithesis between Law and Gospel is a perilous misinterpretation of Luther's position on the art of Law/Gospel distinction. Yeago asserts that the essence of the misinterpretation is the "assumption that a radical antagonism of law and gospel is the ultimate structuring horizon of Christian belief."¹¹

Theological Implication

In Yeago's assessment, there are four inherent errors in a hermeneutics of Law/Gospel reduction. First, there is an assumed antagonism between Law and Gospel.¹² The two doctrines are viewed as diametrically opposed to each other, and one has to yield. Second, the distinction of Law and Gospel takes the form of the distinction between letter and spirit.¹³ Here the Law is the letter, which kills and hence is bad. Third, the Law is considered inauthentic and enslaving, while the Gospel is authentic and liberating. Finally, the emancipatory nature of the Gospel is understood in its opposition to the Law.¹⁴ Yeago argues that operating with a radical Law-Gospel antagonism as the structuring horizon of Christian belief leads to the neglect of the Law. This is true because the theory teaches that "what members of the church do or do not do in an ethical

¹¹Yeago, 38.

¹²Ibid., 39.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 41.

respect belongs in the domain of sociology and has nothing to do with the nature of the church.”¹⁵

According to Yeago’s argument, two dangers result from creating an antithesis between Law and Gospel. First, dogma is prone to rejection for “it is a rule, a call for particular ordering of thought and language for determinate reflective response to the love of God. It becomes oppression and bondage from which the Gospel is to liberate us.”¹⁶ Second, the antithesis between Law and Gospel is Gnosticism in disguise: “If the saving gift of God through the Gospel is deliverance from form, liberating from order and call for order, then the God of the Gospel cannot be a God who has taken form concretely in history.”¹⁷ It becomes apparent, as Yeago demonstrates, that by operating with Law/Gospel reductionism, the church plays into the hands of neo-Gnostics on the one hand and antinomianism on the other.

Improper Law/Gospel distinction in general, and Law/Gospel reductionism in particular, has numerous theological dangers. Through Law/Gospel reductionism, the Law is eventually overcome and removed, leaving in the end the Gospel alone. This is what Yeago rightly calls “theoretical antinomianism.”¹⁸ Law/Gospel reductionism, the alleged theological razor, is used to extirpate the Law, leading to an open antinomianism. Theoretical antinomianism begins with a low view of the Law and its relevance in the life of Christians. Such denigration of the Law culminates in outright rejection under the

¹⁵Ibid., 42.

¹⁶Ibid., 43.

¹⁷Ibid., 44.

¹⁸Ibid., 41.

claim of absolute freedom. In such false freedom, activities are carried out in open violation of God's will for His creation.

The original architects of Law/Gospel reductionism may have been genuinely concerned to make distinctions of Law and Gospel, so that the comfort of the free salvation by grace through faith on account of Christ is not obscured. However, the concept has degenerated into the extinction of Law and order, thereby doing more harm than the intended good. In this respect, Law/Gospel reductionism has become a powerful tool in the hands of those who labor to bring down every hurdle that stands in the way of the ordination of women. Those who accept and encourage the practice normally appeal to the freedom of the Gospel, according to which the Law, and anything that stipulates order in life, is deemed obsolete and inapplicable. Philip Johnson, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in his prayer that other church bodies will soften their stand on women and incorporate them into the pastoral office, says, "I believe the church is free under the Gospel to ordain women as well as men."¹⁹ This can be interpreted to mean that these churches are preaching, purportedly under the Gospel, what is forbidden under the Law.

Reinhard Hütter has succinctly spelled out the dangers inherent in the wrong concept of freedom. In considering possible answers to the question of what freedom means, he says:

Is it what is realized when we create the meaning and the values of our own lives? Is it what is brought about when we exercise the right of making our own choices without being answerable to anyone? Is it what is mandated by political liberation and self-determination? Is it what comes about when we receive the gospel of God's

¹⁹Philip Johnson, "With a Yarn or Prayer," *Lutheran Forum* 29 (April 1995): 10.

free grace?²⁰

In his contention, real freedom is not self-determination or the absence of interference, but rather that which “denotes the truthful enactment of created existence.”²¹

Hütter here means that true freedom is that which is enjoyed within the creaturely limits as prescribed by the Creator. It is freedom that puts the creature in submission to the will of the creator, and hence it is the “freedom of living with God.”²² This understanding of freedom is opposed to what he terms “Promethean”²³ freedom, or *autopoiesis* (self-creation), which insists that “everything that might bind me, that might restrict me, that might direct me without myself having chosen the direction, is estranging and oppressive—whether bodies, laws, traditions, conventions, or something as simple as taxes.”²⁴

Drawing from Pope John Paul II’s encyclical²⁵ on freedom, Hütter concludes that genuine freedom is a gift and the very *telos* (end) to which the Law is ordered. He says: “Genuine human freedom is attained on the path of and is formed by God’s Law. It is God’s Law—identical with God’s goodness—that liberates and forms human freedom

²⁰Reinhard Hütter, *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 12.

²¹Ibid., 112.

²²Ibid., 6.

²³In Greek mythology, Prometheus was a demigod who made man out of clay and stole fire from Olympus. After teaching man the use of fire and many other arts, Zeus punished Prometheus by chaining him to a rock. Daily an eagle would peck out Prometheus’ liver, which would regrow each night.

²⁴Hütter, 114.

²⁵The encyclical, entitled *Veritatis Splendor* (Splendor of Truth), was published in 1993, in which Pope John Paul II outlined the true meaning of “freedom.”

and thus prevents it from its Promethean expansion as well as its unending eclipse.”²⁶ In all this, Hütter stands against any claim of freedom in which the Law of God is not taken into consideration.

In this vein, any hermeneutical principle that creates an antithesis between Law and Gospel, obliterating the Law to achieve freedom, is defective. Ordaining women into the ministry under the banner “freedom of the Gospel,” with disregard to the Law is just one way of portraying the wrong concept of freedom. It is noteworthy that even when it is said that salvation is by grace alone apart from works of the Law, this does not mean that the reality of the Law, is evaded. Rather, the Law’s demands are fulfilled by the obedience of Christ. Actively, He satisfied the Law; passively, He suffered the wrath of God on behalf of the human race for their breaking the Law.

Proponents of women’s ordination anchor their arguments in the rejection of the Law, which is an immediate consequence of Law/Gospel reductionism. This is reminiscent of what we may call “Eden Hermeneutics,” in light of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s work. Bonhoeffer points out that Eve, at the instigation of Satan, sat in judgment of the Word of God, discrediting what God had said and thereby going beyond the limit God Himself had drawn for His creatures.²⁷ God had said that they “must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden” and “must not touch it.”²⁸ This limit defined their creatureliness in distinction from the Creator. When we therefore talk of the perfect relationship with God before the fall, we refer to that relationship in which humans, as

²⁶Hütter, 124.

²⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: Temptation* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 73.

²⁸Genesis 3:3.

creatures, lived contentedly within the limits or in obedience to the Law. This perfect communion lasted for the period of time that humans submitted to the Lord's will or command. If the limit was the Law—the command not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden, along with the other directions given to Adam—then it can be argued that the Law itself is essentially good and positive, for it reveals the will of God for His creation.

The question that led to the fall of humans into sin in Eden continues today: “Did God really say you shall not?”²⁹ Women's ordination crusaders, or those who consider walking that path, start by asking a similar question: “Did God really say that women should not preach?” Those who ask such questions usually expect a negative answer, from which they can proceed in any direction without any limits. In this case, forms of exegesis are always put in place that obliterate the limits.

The journey along the highway of antinomianism leading towards the ordination of women begins with the single step of questioning the limit God has put in place, His will for the creation. Normally, the argument goes that we are not under the Law anymore and therefore can do as we please. When the Law is struck down under the “Gospel alone” principle, women's ordination becomes inevitable. Leroy Dobberstein, commenting on the absurdity of denigrating the Law under the guise of the freedom of the Gospel, says:

In the history of the Lutheran church, antinomianism has taken on two forms. In its extreme form, it denies any use of or need of the Law. According to this extreme form of antinomianism, the question is not whether someone violates God's Law but whether he has conducted himself in a wrong manner toward God's Son.³⁰

²⁹Cf. Genesis 3:1f.

³⁰Leroy Dobberstein, *Law and Gospel: Bad News-Good News* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996), 101.

Those who appeal to the freedom of the Gospel as the basis of women's ordination assume that the relationship with the Son, Jesus Christ, overrides or overthrows the call for order demanded in the Law. In other words, it is assumed that the order of redemption under the Son dissolves the order of creation. But it is noteworthy that God's Son is not operating independently of the Father. The Son and the Father are one,³¹ and as such they do not have conflicting wills. In any case, how can one know, without the Law, that he has conducted himself in a wrong manner towards the Son? It is paradoxical that even those who claim freedom in the Gospel still need something to point out their wrong conduct! We can say with Hütter, on the significance of the Law, that "the law remains important and valid both as the other in light of which the gospel's grace is unequivocally forgiving (effected in the fact of its fulfillment) and as that in light of which human freedom comes into view as realized through the gospel but given shape by the law."³² If the will of the Father is that women are not included in the ordained ministry, then it follows that the Son wills the same.

Christians and the Law

Although the confines of this chapter prohibit dealing extensively with the Law as a topic, it is necessary to treat the Law briefly to understand the extent to which it is relevant for Christians. When we refer to Law/Gospel reductionism as a factor giving impetus to the argument for women's ordination, one naturally wonders what the Law is. Lutherans commonly speak of the use or functions of the Law, even if people are not agreed on a precise definition. The word *Law* has been used to denote different things,

³¹John 17:21.

³²Hütter, 137.

such as the entire Old Testament, the Pentateuch, the Decalogue, and sometimes any order and arrangement.³³ But the Law's primary meaning is the "immutable will of God according to which man is to conduct himself in life."³⁴ In other words, the Law is the will of God for His creation; as Gustaf Wingren remarks: "Both the pedagogical work of the Law and the regenerating work of the Gospel aim at realizing God's decree for creation."³⁵ This is rightly put because it ascribes both the Law and the Gospel to God, allowing no room for the elevation of one over the other. Both are from God, and neither is to be overlooked or degraded.

When the Law is minimized, God's revelation in His Word is distorted. If the Law tells us the unchangeable will of God, then it follows that we should not—even if we could—discard the Law. To eliminate the Law is a serious disservice to the very Word of God. But since the fall into sin in Eden, the perennial bent of humanity has been to do things that are openly repugnant to the will of the Creator. Man has become autonomous, a law unto himself, obeying no bounds.

In this spirit women's ordination thrives. A chief argument for such ordination is based on the false assumption that Christians are not under the Law. For example, Daniel Sylvanus Torto, arguing for women's ordination in the Anglican Church of Ghana, reduces the biblical prohibitions against the practice to mere tradition. He says, "So for the church to hold on too long to outmoded forms of tradition and ceremonies, the obvious consequence of that is that the church then fails to be the means through which

³³Dobberstein, 36f.

³⁴Formula of Concord VI: 15 (Tappert).

³⁵Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1961), 128.

God can speak to the world.”³⁶ Referring satirically to the argument against the practice of ordaining women, he says, “The argument is that to ordain women into the priesthood would be a scandalous break with tradition, because the tradition of the Church has been that only men are ‘called’ to the priestly vocation.”³⁷ Whatever the Church has practiced in the past—whether on the basis of God’s Law or not—can rightly be called tradition; but here Torto interprets church tradition to mean human convention. This implies that women have been locked out of the pulpit by *iure humano*, rather than *iure divino*. As such tradition must be broken in the name of the Gospel, as the need arises. In this case, the perceived need is to accommodate the spirit of feminism, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Appealing to article 34 of the 39 articles of the Anglican Church, Torto remarks:

This article, besides giving room for diversity of rituals and ceremonies, is also cautioning the church to be careful in the interpretation of Scripture, so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word. The very nature of the Gospel demands that it is made relevant to people living at any particular time in history and in any particular society.³⁸

Torto quotes the article to argue that nothing should be ordained against the Word of God. But by making the final reference to the Gospel alone, he ignores the part of that very Word which stands against women’s ordination, on the ground that it is irrelevant. According to this interpretation, everything that is not “Gospel” is not included in the Word of God. Any part of the Scripture that gives command or prescribes some form of order, whether for the church or for Christian life in general, is considered oppressive,

³⁶Daniel Torto, *Ordination of Women: A New Agenda* (Accra: Advent Press, 1994), 26.

³⁷Ibid., 22.

³⁸Ibid., 26.

inauthentic, and anti-gospel. Torto is a reductionist operating under the “Gospel alone” principle.

But if what God speaks in the Law is oppressive and negative and stands against what He says in the Gospel, then it follows that He has conflicting wills—which is far from the truth. This opposition between the Law and the Gospel poses a great threat and danger, as Yeago says, to “the coherence of the Christian faith.”³⁹ It is important to note that what we are saying here concerning the relevance of the Law does not concern salvation or how we are put right with God, lest this be misconstrued to mean salvation by works of the Law. What we are saying is that even for the saved, the Law remains an essential part of God’s revelation.

Conclusion

We have seen that Law/Gospel reductionism, an imbalanced distinction between Law and Gospel, leads to serious theological errors. One is antinomianism, an open opposition to the Law of God. The proponents of women’s ordination take this opportunity to advance their cause, arguing that the Law is obsolete and irrelevant to the Christian life. In this respect, the church is pronounced free under the Gospel to ordain women.

But the Law, as the will of God for His creation, is “universally relevant.”⁴⁰ God’s will never changes. At the moment we start judging the Word of God—be it Law or Gospel—rather than being normed by it, we are straying. The practice of ordaining women under the guise of “Gospel alone” is an act of lawlessness, which is sin.⁴¹

³⁹Yeago, 38.

⁴⁰Wingren, 124.

Operating with the “Gospel alone,” according to which church practices are not under any check, amounts to ecclesiastical anarchy.

The claim of absolute freedom under the Gospel, apart from any ordering of life, is based on a false conception of the Gospel and a wrong understanding of freedom, which either sanctions disorder and anarchy or confuses Law and Gospel by assigning a normative function to the Gospel. This includes “attributing to the gospel parenetic purposes so the Law’s work is subsumed under the Gospel.”⁴² Those who claim to be free from the Law still cling to some regulatory principles to account for ethical questions. Once a church body begins to draw a wedge between the two doctrines, Law and Gospel, in a manner that subjects the Law to disdain and denigration, it is courting anarchy and is headed towards the ordination of women, among other things. It follows that Law/Gospel reductionism, however well intentioned, oils the wheels of antinomianism and results in coarse violation of the will of God for His creation and thereby tampers with the original design for the world established by the Creator.

⁴¹1 John 3:4.

⁴²Murray, 114.

CHAPTER 3

FEMINISM

In the previous chapter, we discussed the meaning of Law/Gospel reductionism and its effect in theology. We saw that the “Gospel alone” principle entails obliteration of the Law, leading to practical antinomianism in which the church’s doctrine and practices are essentially determined by human resolutions rather than the Word of God. Women’s ordination, which is our point of debate, becomes one of the fruits of such a disregard for the Law. In this chapter, we will discuss feminism, another facet of the deviation from the Creator’s design for the world that has characterized contemporary society. We will consider how feminism has contributed immensely to the rapid acceptance of women’s ordination.

Definition

Feminism, in all its manifestations, is an aspect of liberation movements in general and women’s liberation in particular, which began to emerge in the nineteenth century and whose main aim is to achieve equality between men and women in every sphere of life. Feminism arose as an expression of resentment over perceived male dominance in human society, which allegedly subjected woman to oppression under male leadership. It follows, therefore, that “the feminist ideology calls for social change of order that would

shift public leadership and occupational dominance from men primarily to women and men equally.”⁴³

Feminism has found expression in many and various forms in society in general. Some have suggested that it is helpful to distinguish between “secular feminism,” which pushes for the recognition and participation of women in the socioeconomic and political world in equal terms with men, and “evangelical feminism,”⁴⁴ which fights for gender parity in the ecclesiastical vocations and leadership. In both categories, the main issue is equality between man and woman, as opposed to a hierarchy that gives man authority over woman. Feminism is, therefore, a force for reordering society so that man and woman have equal roles and rights in the family and in the broader society. Neither is to assume authority over the other.

Influence of Feminism

To be sure, feminism emerged as a sociopolitical issue, but it soon spilled over into the church as well. Wayne House says:

In this day of social upheaval, many traditional views held by the Christian church are being questioned. Not the least important of these is the issue of women in ministry. During the past several decades the feminist movement has had a significant impact on the church; this impact is such that the issues feminist scholarship has raised simply cannot be ignored.⁴⁵

The question of roles in the church—especially for women—has become a major issue.

The office of the ministry has become the chief object of attention, as women demand equal rights of occupation and vocation, a demand to which many churches have

⁴³Gayle Graham Yates, *What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 36.

⁴⁴H. Wayne House, *The Role of Women in the Ministry Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 15.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 9.

capitulated. Ignatius Kattey, a crusader for women's ordination in the Episcopal Church of Nigeria (which has since succumbed to the demand) gives a good representation of the feminist voice in the church:

the general attitude towards women in the past had not been encouraging. They had been assigned an inferior position through the centuries. They were denied political and economic powers, though some cultures allowed them monarchic rule. . . . If women enjoy freedom and recognition today, it is a result of the long years of what may be called agitation for liberation.⁴⁶

To justify his position that women have been unfairly denied the right of equality with men, Kattey mentions a number of women who have served as public figures in different societies. For instance, he alludes to many female figures who gained prominence in both the Old Testament and the New Testament as a result of their outstanding leadership capacity.⁴⁷ He does this with a view to proving that women are equally able to hold those positions that have been reserved for men alone. In the same vein, Torto contends, "the nature of the church and its mission constitutes the reason why barriers should not be created to block women with an inner sense of vocation and calling to ordained ministry."⁴⁸

As a whole, feminism seeks to eliminate any perceived otherness between male and female. In reference to the proponents of women's ordination, Ruth Edwards says, "for these it is vital that women should be recognized as equal to men if the church is to be effective in spreading the Gospel in the contemporary world."⁴⁹ The feminists argue that any hierarchy and order, whether in the church or social life, that puts woman under the

⁴⁶Ignatius Kattey, *Ordination of Women: Give them a Chance* (Nigeria: CSS Press, 1992), 41.

⁴⁷Ibid., 29ff.

⁴⁸Torto, Vii.

⁴⁹Ruth B. Edwards, *The Case for Women's Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1989), 36.

authority of man is not ordained by God but instead is created by man. It is therefore not a surprise that some feminists label churches in which women's ordination remains unacceptable as "institutionalized sexism."⁵⁰ Alan Graebner, a renowned speaker on the feminist movement in American history, writes:

In 19th century immigrant Lutheran congregations the males sat on one side of the church and females on the other (and naturally the men preceded the women to the altar communion). The seating has since changed, but the mentality is still basically the same. Only recently have more conservative Protestant groups allowed women to vote in general church affairs.⁵¹

This reflects the notion that any apparent difference between man and woman that gives man headship is a form of oppression, from which woman must be emancipated. We can see that the ordination of women, which is rampant in many churches today, is a direct consequence of the liberation movement, specifically feminism. House says:

Until recent years, the role of women in the church had generally been considered a settled matter. Except for a few outbreaks of unconventional theology (such as in Montanism, Gnosticism, and movements given to the pursuit of ecstatic experiences), Christian tradition and practice generally has held that women were not to occupy positions of leadership in the church—most notably the more prominent and visible positions, including those of pastor, teacher (especially over men) and elder.⁵²

This tradition, providing for the distinction of roles between man and woman, is challenged by feminists both in the church and in the wider society. Questions are raised about why men alone are fit for certain offices. Feminists wonder why women are not allowed to be pastors when "some women have been found as efficient and sometimes more efficient than some men?"⁵³

⁵⁰Alan Graebner. *After Eve: The New Feminism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 61.

⁵¹Ibid., 65.

⁵²House, 9.

⁵³Kathey, 5.

Arguments for Women's Ordination

That men alone are to be the incumbents of the office of the ministry sounds offensive to feminist ears. Scholars with a feminist bent have advanced various arguments to justify the demand for the inclusion of women in the pastoral office. The first and most important argument is grounded on the idea of egalitarianism. From this perspective, the proponents of women's ordination draw the Apostle Paul to their side. Feminists consider Galatians 3:28 to be one of the most important passages in the New Testament concerning the functional equality of all persons in Christ.⁵⁴ The passage says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ" (NIV). Referring to this verse, Torto avers:

In this passage, Paul is echoing that "in Christ" the walls of partition are broken down. Sexism is abolished, racism is overcome and classism is eliminated. Paul is announcing a new order in Christ. There is equality in the household of Christ. Salvation ministry and grace of God cut across sexism (neither male nor female), racism (neither Jew nor Greek), and classism (neither slave nor free).⁵⁵

The argument here is that in the order of redemption, there is no demarcation of roles according to gender or social differences since all are equal in Christ. It follows, in the egalitarian view, that no office or vocation in the church should be reserved for one gender alone. To justify this argument, Torto goes on to lump together with other forms of social injustice the distinction of roles:

To the extent that the Galatians passage is irrelevant to our context, then we must argue that all effort to break the barriers of enmity that exist between different groups are inappropriate to this age. Such a position should imply that apartheid, racism, sexism and classism are justifiable systemic structures that need to be championed and perpetuated.⁵⁶

⁵⁴House, 113.

⁵⁵Torto, 30.

A hierarchical system, especially one that denies women equal functional rights with men, is seen as oppressive and hence a social injustice. In contrast, Christianity is considered a means to an end, a vehicle for achieving the emancipation of the oppressed and elevating the status of marginalized groups. Kattey therefore hails Christianity for emancipating women in the apostolic writings and practice:

One great benefit of Christianity is the positive change in the status of women. Whereas in the pre-Christian era women were not regarded in any sphere of life, Christianity came along with it the change in lifestyle of individuals, and the status of womanhood was also elevated and has continued till this day. It was not easy for womanhood to climb up to the status they are now occupying.⁵⁷

The implication of such an argument is that any church body that still denies women the opportunity to become ministers is out of fashion. For the feminists, church is the best place to express equality in the new order as a people of God. Additionally, it is argued that even the Old Testament attests to the equality of male and female, as both were created in the same image—the image of God. Feminists easily conclude that any difference—and especially a difference that bears negative attitudes towards women and puts them under the authority of men—is a product of human design and not the will of God. The argument is that such a hierarchical ordering is a product of society, without divine blessing. Another argument is that God has changed the order He established in the creation. According to the former case, feminists suggest that God has intervened to correct human mistakes. In the latter case, the order of redemption has supplanted or superseded the order of creation, such that the old provisions are irrelevant and alien to

⁵⁶Ibid., 31.

⁵⁷Kattey, 16.

the Christian church. For feminists, therefore, the exclusion of women from the ordained ministry is not only a manifestation of social injustice, but also a theological fallacy.

Analysis of the Arguments

We have briefly examined standard arguments advanced by feminists in support of women's ordination. These arguments have proven quite persuasive, confusing many church bodies that have already fallen prey to the movement. In the interest of the true doctrine of the church, and the faith thereof, the danger and influence of feminism must be identified and checked. House writes:

Thus the issue of women ministry, which has been forced upon us by the feminist movement in secular society, cannot be ignored. It must be addressed not only to provide a reasonable answer for those who will inevitably contest God's will as revealed in His Word, but also to provide confidence and reassurance for believers who sincerely seek answers regardless of how they may or may not conform to modern culture.⁵⁸

The chief feminist argument, as we saw, is based on Galatians 3:28, in which the Apostle is understood as pressing for equality between male and female. However, this so-called egalitarian text has been pulled out of context. Even a cursory look at the immediate passage reveals that Paul is addressing how man⁵⁹ is put right with God. It is an issue of justification by faith alone, apart from works of the Law. In this sense there is indeed no distinction, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). In the context of humanity's spiritual standing before God, there is no difference between man and woman, since both sexes are equally infected with sin and are equally justified by faith alone in Christ. It follows, therefore, that the saving grace of God applies to both man and woman indiscriminately. This beautiful text, which brings

⁵⁸House, 12.

⁵⁹Man in generic sense, designating both male and female.

comfort to all, has nothing to do with the interchangeableness of male and female roles in society.

The egalitarian theory of social sameness advanced by feminists has little, if any, support from this Bible passage. The equality that Paul refers to is that of receiving the benefits of the work of Christ. Woman is justified before God by faith in the same manner as man. "All who are in Christ, without distinction, are heirs and sons of God."⁶⁰ In other words, in matters pertaining to our relationship with God, and our salvation, sex does not count at all. But this relationship with God does not do away with the uniqueness of the different sexes and how they relate to each other. Male remains male; female remains female; Jews and Greeks still have distinctive characteristics, and so on. Any exegesis that seeks to establish the equality of roles out of this text ignores the cardinal hermeneutical principles. Commenting on the danger of reading egalitarianism into the text without careful consideration of the context, Wayne Grudem says:

Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28 that 'there is neither. . . male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,' if taken out of its context could mean 1) in Christ there will be genderless people, or 2) there should be no Christian marriage because in Christ there is no male or female, or 3) since there is no male or female in Christ, Christians should utilize single-sex bathrooms. Hopefully, these options strike the reader as less than sensible, but they are possibilities if one extracts Galatians 3:28 out of its context.⁶¹

Grudem's argument here is that since male and female do not lose their identity of manhood and womanhood when they come to Christ, the text must be understood as addressing something other than gender roles or the equality of the sexes. He gives three reasons to support this argument: First, "the flow" of the argument reveals that "Paul's

⁶⁰Wayne Grudem, *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002), 139.

⁶¹Ibid., 108.

concern was not how the many relate to one another or behave in the church or home.”⁶²

Second, “the logic” of the passage is that it expresses the all-inclusiveness and universality of God’s grace in which “all are included.”⁶³ Third, the phrase “you are all one” is not synonymous with “you are equal.” Rather, “The expression ‘you are all one’ is an expression that denotes what *different* people with *different* tasks or gifts, have in common—viz., one body in Christ.”⁶⁴ To point out further the fallacy of confusing oneness in Christ with equality of sexes, he writes:

Egalitarians commonly argue like this: “You are all one” means “you are all equal.” And “you are all equal” means ‘there are no gender-specific role distinctions in the home and church.’ Both of these moves—from oneness to equality and from equality to no gender-specific roles—are illegitimate. . . . And even if there is a notion of equality found in Galatians 3:28, it does not follow from this equality that there are no gender-specific roles.⁶⁵

In Galatians 3:28, therefore, Paul does not seek to preempt the social order. Fritz Zerbst rightly observes that this text in Galatians “does not treat of the positions assigned to man and woman in creation; it treats of the life in Christ.”⁶⁶ That is, it deals with the Christian life *coram deo* (before God) and not *coram mundo* (before the world)

To add to the Galatians 3:28 argument for equality, Kattey says, “The great Apostle Peter did not discriminate between the male and female sexes at any time. He recognized each and accepted the equality of both sexes as could be attested from his actions and

⁶²Ibid., 132f.

⁶³Ibid., 133.

⁶⁴Ibid., 128.

⁶⁵Ibid., 140.

⁶⁶Fritz Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church*. Trans. Albert Merckens (St. Louis: CPH, 1955), 35.

writings.”⁶⁷ It is true that the Apostles, and Jesus too, recognized and even received the services of women. But there is no evidence of the incorporation of women into the ministry of Word and sacraments. And Kattey here fails to notice Peter’s position clearly stated in his letter. For example, on women’s submission under the authority of their husbands, Peter writes, “Wives in the same way be submissive to your husbands. . . . For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful” (1 Pet. 3:1, 5; NIV).

Peter’s theology, clearly stated in 1 Peter 3:1ff, stands against the feminists who try to create an antithesis between the Old Testament and the New Testament or between the order of creation and the order of redemption in an attempt to establish an equality of sexes. New Testament women are advised, against currents of female emancipation prevalent in some parts of the first-century world, to emulate the pious women of the past by submitting to their husbands. Peter even argues that the beauty of women consisted in their submission to their husbands. Things are beautiful when they function according to the Creator’s design. This includes the relationship between man and woman. Any bid to level this God-established man-woman relationship is unbiblical and hence contrary to the Creator’s design. Mary Pride, challenging fellow women to remain content with the position God has assigned them, describes the impact of feminism and its claim of the interchangeability of male/female roles:

The feminist theory of interchangeable parts has been riding high for a decade or more, and its presuppositions have been in vogue for almost half a century (more, if you realize how influential the original feminist/suffragist movement was). One would reasonably expect that if this is the way God really intended people to live, society would have improved under its influence. But look around you, and what do you see? Broken homes. Moral decay. Expanding statism. Compare this to the state of

⁶⁷Kattey, 23.

society three or four generations ago, when women were still mostly homemakers.⁶⁸

Pride argues that the results of the feminist agenda in western society have not been positive. Feminism has proven to be detrimental to the cohesion and health of society. Pride calls her readers back to the reality of a man-woman relationship as God designed it. A woman's beauty, as Peter says, consists in willing submission and in playing her role in accordance with God's design. According to Pride, human society was considerably stronger and more moral before the rise of feminism. This is contrary to the feminist argument that submission of women under the authority of men is a social injustice that must be redressed. We are not denying the fact that some men have abused their God-given authority and have, as such, lorded it over women, which is certainly sin. It is also true that some cultures have denied women certain fundamental rights. For example, until recently in many parts of Africa, many people did not see the importance of educating their daughters. As such, many women have been denied the right of education. Polygamy, which is rampant in many African communities, is another sinful activity by which the dignity of women has been lowered.⁶⁹ These, however, are extremes that emanate from sin, which has not only affected humanity's relationship with God but also corrupted interpersonal relations in human society. With the fall into sin, "rather than man lovingly ruling and woman willingly submitting, the war of the sexes had began. Man would seek dominance, with woman vying for his position."⁷⁰ Although such human abuses are sinful and need to be corrected, they do not warrant rebellion

⁶⁸Mary Pride, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism. Back to the Reality* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1985), 134.

⁶⁹In some African communities, one man can marry as many women as he wants. Some have married up to 40!

⁷⁰House, 23.

against God-ordained male-female differences in society. It is abuses stemming from sin, “not the divinely created order of authority,”⁷¹ that are to be corrected. And even if we have certain extreme cases of social injustice against women, it is not wise to use another extreme as a corrective measure; as the famous adage says, “two wrongs cannot make a right.”

Kathey is in error when he says, “in effect, God is no respecter of sexes. The wall of sex discrimination is finally broken. God could use anyone, Jew or Gentile, slave or slave’s owner, male or female.”⁷² God created humanity as two unique and different sexes and declared that it was very good.⁷³ Therefore, the argument that He is not a respecter of sexes runs against the grain of revealed truth. Of course, in one sense it is true that God can use anybody, or even anything, to achieve His purpose. But we cannot make a situational event into a universal normative paradigm; we will next be ordaining donkeys, since God has used even animals to serve His own purpose.⁷⁴ It is safer and wiser to do what God has said, rather than trying to do what He has done occasionally, according to His perfect freedom. We follow what is prescribed and not what is described.

That the interchangeability of roles between man and woman is not in accordance with the original design of God can be argued from history. Not until the twentieth

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Kathey, 60.

⁷³Genesis 1:31.

⁷⁴He used Balaam’s donkey, Numbers 22:21ff; Elijah was fed by a raven (I Kg. 17: 1ff), a dove was sent from Noah’s Ark to check the condition of the flood (Gen. 8:8) etc.

century did feminism pick up momentum across the globe.⁷⁵ For example, in Africa women have historically submitted to the authority of their husbands, and few women accepted occupying positions of leadership with men under their authority. (For example, women never served as chiefs, village elders, and so on). Feminism commonly claims that women have been assigned an inferior position in the society by men, but who actually assigned women this position, which gained such uniformity in almost all communities? History does not attest to any “Pan-African male conference” or “International male convention,” assigning women to a certain position in society, similar to one held by women in Beijing, China, in 1995.⁷⁶ In any case, there was no “global village” as we have it today, in which an ideology can be easily disseminated from one part of the world to another. One can argue, therefore, that the uniformity of the different gender roles across cultures actually reflected the design of the Creator. We can also argue that functional equality, as demanded by the feminists, is repugnant to the natural Law established by God Himself. A feminist version of radical social interchangeability of roles cannot be traced to the order of creation. Steven E. Rhoads affirms that the differences between male and female in social orientation and roles are not just products of human society, but that such differences are congenital. He observes, “Many of these differences appear ‘from the very beginning of autonomous behavior’—too early to have been affected by much socialization.”⁷⁷ It can be argued, therefore, that the gender-

⁷⁵Edith Hoshino Altbach, *From Feminism to Liberation* (Cambridge, Mass: Schenkman Publishers Co.,1971), 5ff.

⁷⁶The Fourth World Conference on women was held in Beijing, China, September 4–15, 1995.

⁷⁷Steven E. Rhoads, *Taking Sex Differences Seriously* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004), 24.

specific roles are God-ordained and that any bid to do away with them is a rebellion against God Himself, questioning His wisdom in designing the world.

In expressing how feminism influenced some American Lutheran churches in the practice of ordaining women in the middle of the twentieth century, Leonard Klein writes:

In ordaining women I fear that the Lutherans of the late sixties and early seventies bought into a false construal of reality and unwittingly promoted it. Liberal concern for process and a nascent feminism postulated that relations between women and men were a zero-sum power game.⁷⁸

We can see that the error of pushing for the elimination of the distinction between the roles of man and woman is based on one major assumption: that in Christ, God “was reversing the order of creation, establishing a new redemptive order. That in Christ something has happened which transcends the Law itself and thereby even the order of creation.”⁷⁹ Otherwise stated, the feminists assume that the order of redemption has done away with the ordinances established in the order of creation; what was ordained in creation no longer holds in the new order of redemption. But the newness of the order of redemption does not oppose the order of creation. Rather, the new order seeks to restore things to their proper place, as they were created to be. It can be said, therefore, that “In Christ the creation intentions for male and female are restored.”⁸⁰

Zerbst is right in asserting that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament teaches the functional equality between male and female. Rather, functional equality is a sign of moral decline:

⁷⁸Leonard Klein, “Women’s Ordination and Lutheran Nominalist Flaw,” *Lutheran Forum* 38 (Summer 2004): 41.

⁷⁹House, 115.

⁸⁰Ibid., 23.

The demand for equality of sexes with respect to position and rights could not arise in the Old Testament, because there marriage was traced to God the creator and Law giver. . . . It remains for other religions and cultures to express the equality of the sexes, although only in their periods of decline.⁸¹

It can be argued that the sharing of roles, advocated by feminists, is a sign of moral decline in human society, as it stands against the Law of the Creator, one aspect of moral degeneration in which the rule of the Law is not taken into account.

We must remember that the will of God, as revealed in the Scripture, does not change. Since God does not will one thing in the Old Testament and another in the New Testament, “the New Testament is careful neither to pervert the ordinances of creation and of the Law in legalism or in lawlessness, nor to annul them.”⁸² David Scaer’s advice is very important in this regard: “The woman assuming the role of a public preacher knows that in preaching the Word of God, she is challenging, or at least ignoring the same Word.”⁸³ It is the very Word which clearly teaches that “a woman should learn in quietness and full submission,”⁸⁴ occurring “in *all* the congregations of the saints.”⁸⁵ We cannot claim to serve God by going against His ordinances.

House has identified two problems with evangelical feminism. First, there is a low view of biblical inspiration. The feminists have a problem identifying when God speaks and when He does not.⁸⁶ In this regard, certain parts of the Bible that challenge the

⁸¹Zerbst, 67.

⁸²Ibid., 68.

⁸³David Scaer, “Against the Ordination of Women” *Lutheran Forum* 25 (Lent 1991): 14.

⁸⁴1 Timothy 2:11.

⁸⁵1 Corinthians 14:33b.

feminist position are readily dismissed as culture-bound. Such passages are conveniently ignored as irrelevant if they cannot be reconciled to feminist presuppositions. The implication, obviously, is that the Bible is not the Word of God; rather, it merely contains the Word of God, and therefore it becomes the reader's responsibility to sift the text and determine what the Word is and what it is not. Second, there is a flawed hermeneutics that leads to a false tension between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The feminist view regularly assumes that there is no harmony between the testaments. The Old Testament is regarded as irrelevant to the New Testament church. By creating an antithesis between the testaments; between the order of creation and the order of redemption, we become latter-day Gnostics who ascribe evil things to "God of the Old Testament." If the ordinances established in creation are oppressive and bad, then the one who established them is bad—and this is blasphemy.

On a different front, Kattey has argued for the ordination of women based on the success of women's leadership in public society, where, he says, they have been accorded full rights. For example, he alludes to successful queens and other female heads of state. It can be noted from his list, however, that none of these women came from Africa,⁸⁷ save the Queen of Sheba, whose history of governance is obscure. In any case, Kattey wants the church to ordain women because he believes that the world has given them the green light. His argument fails to recognize the difference between the church and general public society. He also fails to acknowledge one very important principle in our relationship with God: a call to live a different life that does not conform to the world.⁸⁸

⁸⁶House, 15.

⁸⁷Africa got its first woman president in Liberia in 2006.

The church ought to be a community that reflects the will of God, rather than an accomplice of the world in its apostasy. In blindly following the world in reversing God's will for His creation, the church undermines its own foundation. We should not, as a people of God, decide our next cause of action on the basis of what the world has accepted, especially on doctrinal issues. Nevertheless, many churches have made the world, rather than the Word, their norm today in their approach to other issues such as homosexuality, abortion, divorce, and pre-marital sex.

The church should not ordain women because the world has occasionally made them presidents or queens. The church must remain the salt of the world. R. T. France has put it well:

The New Testament in many ways indicates that it is the calling of the church as a people of God, not to imitate the norms and values of secular society. Rather its structures should reflect the God-given ideal of human relationships which society as a whole too often ignores. The church should, thus, by its very nature, constitute a challenge to the norms accepted by society at large. Its essence is being different.⁸⁹

The church should influence the general society and not the other way round. For Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men."⁹⁰ It is profoundly unfortunate that the influence of the world has become greater in the church than the influence of the church in the world.

⁸⁸Romans 12:2.

⁸⁹R. T. France, *Women in the Church's Ministry: A Test-case for Biblical Hermeneutics* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1995), 36.

⁹⁰Mathew 5:13 (NIV).

Conclusion

From all that we said above, it is evident that the secular force of feminism has contributed immensely to the acceptance of women's ordination in many church bodies. The main argument is that male and female are equal and therefore have equal and interchangeable functions. As mentioned above, there is certainly equality of worth and dignity between man and woman, as both are human beings created in God's image. There is also an equal share for both in the benefits of Christ, as both are saved without any discrimination. It follows, therefore, that there is an equality of spirituality. But this does not address differences in familial and social roles. The hierarchy that provides for male authority is a design of God built into the creation. Any rebellion against this is a rebellion against God himself, for all authorities are from God.⁹¹ While man is admonished against the abuse of his authority, woman is asked to submit herself under such authority, as this is pleasing to God.

It is also important to note that God has never contradicted Himself. All that He said and designed in the order of creation still holds in the order of redemption. Christ came to fulfill the Law and not to destroy it. Salvation in Christ, therefore, does not dissolve the order that God ordained in creation. House reminds us: "No matter how ardently feminists, both secular and evangelical, deny the existence of essential differences between the sexes, it is nevertheless true that differences between men and women exist and have been acknowledged by every known society in recorded history."⁹²

⁹¹Romans 13:1ff.

⁹²House, 117.

Any church body that is still faithful to the Scripture as the true Word of God in which His will is revealed must beware of feminism and all its manifestations. “The exclusion of woman from the office of Word proclamation remains founded alone through reference to creation and to the Law of God.”⁹³ Our well-trained deaconesses in the ELCK, for example, can serve the Lord in many ways and capacities that are pleasing to God without feeling discriminated against or marginalized. But if we are swayed by the wave of feminism that has swept many churches around us, we shall soon ordain women. Let us remain faithful to the unchanging will of God as we have it in the Scripture and as articulated in our Lutheran confessions, so that we never follow the majority in their wickedness⁹⁴ but hold on to the truth. As David Scaer puts it, “the Gospel should be seen not as a carte blanche to interchange roles of male and female, but as the re-enforcement of Law in its original, positive sense in which male and female relate to each other to form one flesh.”⁹⁵ It is better that “we glorify God through manhood and womanhood lived according to His Word”⁹⁶ than “deny His Word and give in to the pressures of modern culture.”⁹⁷

⁹³Zerbst, 99.

⁹⁴Exodus, 23:2.

⁹⁵Scaer, *Against the Ordination of Women*, 14.

⁹⁶Grudem, 68.

⁹⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

FUNCTIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE MINISTRY

In the last two chapters we discussed the danger of Law/Gospel reductionism, and we saw how it opens a wide door for antinomian practices. We saw that by its undermining of the Law, Law/Gospel reductionism creates room for a false, misguided freedom that is exploited by proponents of women's ordination and becomes foundational to their arguments. We also discussed in chapter 2 the impact of feminism in the church. We saw how the false argument for the ordination of women on the ground of equality (which is understood as sameness) between man and woman, according to which roles are interchangeable, has great influence on many churches. In this chapter, we will examine how a functional understanding of the pastoral ministry has also helped expedite the acceptance of women's ordination in many church bodies.

The Ministry and Its Authority

The term *ministry* in the wider sense refers to all the activities in the church associated with the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments in which Christians in general participate. Ministry in the narrow sense refers to the preaching office (*Predigtamt*, AC V) entrusted to a few individuals who have been duly called (*rite vocatus*, AC XIV).⁹⁸ This is known as the office of the Public Ministry. To avoid confusing the two senses of ministry and succumbing to the dangers lurking in that

⁹⁸F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (St. Louis: CPH, 1953), 439.

confusion, many Lutheran theologians reserve the term *ministry*⁹⁹ for the public preaching office, otherwise called the Pastoral Office.

The institution of the office of the Public Ministry and the authority therein have been understood differently by different people. But one thing is clear: our understanding of the ministry and its authority will have much bearing on our understanding of who should hold the office. The Lutheran understanding of the ministry contends that it is “a divine regulation that Christians who live at one place fellowship with one another, form a congregation, and appoint men equipped with necessary teaching ability to teach God’s Word in the name of the congregation both publicly and privately.”¹⁰⁰ In this view, the ministry is a divine institution with authority from Christ Himself. The authority is not inherent in the office, as understood in Roman clericalism, nor does it derive from the personality of the bearers; but the authority comes from the authority of the Word and the Sacraments. There is, however, a competing view that the ministry is simply a creation of the church and not a divine institution. The implication, often referred to as congregationalism, is that the congregation has complete authority over the Office of the Ministry and can therefore determine its fate and shape. This is the point of concern in this chapter.

If a local congregation has complete authority over the ministry and can determine its nature, it follows that the congregation has the sole right to determine who will occupy the office. The congregation claims the privilege of deciding whether a woman or man is

⁹⁹Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance. Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*, no. 9, ed. Robert D. Preus (Fort Wayne, Ind.: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 105.

¹⁰⁰Pieper, 443.

to be pastor. In this sense, the congregation puts in place a person to discharge the pastoral functions as determined by the congregation itself. It also follows that the pastoral office becomes a job like any other profession, a profession at the mercy of the employer, the congregation, which can unilaterally hire and fire the incumbents.

Supporting this line of reasoning, Kattey says:

Women have moved into professions, occupations and vocations, previously regarded as exclusively masculine, for example law, the military, engineering, politics etc. In these jobs, some women have been found as efficient and sometimes more efficient than some men. Some people are however against the ordination of women as pastors, with the belief that priesthood is exclusively for men. If women are barred from priesthood, it would then mean that some of them who would have performed better than some men would have no opportunity to prove their worth. Various denominational churches would then be left with mediocres who would be ordained by reason of their gender and not their performance.¹⁰¹

In this argument, women are to be ordained because some of them have manifested greater leadership qualities with which to carry out the functions of pastor. On this ground, performance or function is the major consideration in determining who is to become a church minister. The argument holds that since some women are gifted and have the capacity to discharge the functions of the pastoral office, barring them from holding the office amounts to robbing the ministry of potential effective leaders. This reflects a functional understanding of the ministry, because it assumes that pastoral functions can be discharged by any Christian.

Analysis

We have briefly considered the view that the pastoral office and its authority have no divine mandate, with the implication that the office belongs to the church, which can organize it arbitrarily. This understanding of the preaching office does a great disservice

¹⁰¹Kattey, 5.

to the growth and health of the body of Christ, the church, even beyond the question of the ordination of women.

First, any understanding of the ministry that either vests authority entirely in the office and its incumbents, neglecting the congregation, or that attributes authority wholly to the congregation, neglecting the office, is in error. The preaching office is divinely instituted; the authority of the office is that of the Word and Sacraments, derived from Christ Himself. This is exemplified by His words to the disciples: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, his sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”¹⁰² This authority to declare the forgiveness of sins, otherwise called office of the keys, belongs to both the congregation and office of the Public Ministry, without any zero-sum game or power play between the two. This is the error of a functional understanding of the ministry. The church, or a local congregation, has no mandate to determine the fate and shape of the ministry. The office, being divinely instituted, must conform to the Word of God as reflected in the apostolic tradition and the practice of faithful Christians.

Second, those who occupy the office must meet the qualifications outlined in Scripture. For example, one must be able to teach and must be monogamously married. It follows, therefore, that a congregation has no unqualified right to give the office to anybody without abiding by the regulations set in the Scripture. In this regard, appointing a woman to assume the office goes against the will of God, who instituted the office, as articulated in the Scripture and practiced by the earlier faithful saints.

The argument is also advanced that since women have succeeded in leadership in different fields and vocations, they are qualified and able to function as pastors, and

¹⁰²John 20: 21ff.

nobody should be opposed to their assuming the office. There are no doubt some women who are gifted and can do much better in leadership than many men. In Kenya, for example, we have many women who have succeeded as politicians and have done better as government ministers than many of their male counterparts. It is also indubitable that some women have immense oratory ability and can make better preachers than many male pastors. But an argument for women's ordination based on this reality fails to address the main theological question at issue. The question is not whether or not women *can* discharge pastoral functions; the question is whether they *should* discharge those functions. One approach ties candidacy to the office primarily as an issue of one's ability. The second, however, looks first into the propriety of the act before considering the ability. Obviously if we were to do everything we *could*, we would do many weird things indeed! When the young Amalekite found Saul pinned to his own spear and Saul called him, this was his question: "What *can* I do?"¹⁰³ After killing Saul, the Amalekite reported to David, probably expecting praise. But David was furious and had him killed, on the ground that he *should* not have done what he did,¹⁰⁴ though he had the ability. My argument here is that while the ability to teach and preach is one of the necessary qualities in candidates for the ministry, it is not appropriate to consider it the sole criterion for identifying the bearers of the office. Of greater importance is whether an action is theologically appropriate, conforming to the will of the Creator as revealed in nature and the Scripture. What makes something theologically appropriate is not reasonableness or rationality, but the fact that God has given it. Because God has said so,

¹⁰³2 Samuel 1:7.

¹⁰⁴2 Samuel 1: 14.

so it is, even if out of step with human reason. It is a serious blunder to use a product against the manufacturer's instructions provided in the product's manual. This is what many churches have done by ordaining women in defiance of the Creator's own instructions. They are more enthusiastic about exploiting the ability of women than about doing the will of the Creator.

Kathey also compares the ministry to other vocations, thereby insinuating that this is a job for which anybody may be hired, depending on the competence of the candidates and the preference of the employer. This is a wrong notion of the ministry. Pastors are not employees of the congregations they are serving. Rather, they are called by God through the congregations. In this sense, the office of the Public Ministry is not just a matter of functions that may be discharged by anyone, but rather is a divinely instituted office with guidelines regulating the incumbents.

Conclusion

As outlined above, many churches have ushered women into the ministry by citing their ability to carry out the functions of the office. This demonstrates that a functional understanding of the ministry definitely facilitates and validates the acceptance of women's ordination. Whenever a church body begins to see the preaching office as a creation of the congregation rather than a divinely instituted office, that church is ripe for the argument approving the ordination of women. Another aspect of the functional view is that pastors become hirelings whose qualifications for the office are determined solely by the congregations, in which case there is an increased opportunity for hiring a woman.

However, the office of the Public Ministry must be understood as divinely instituted, and its authority must be recognized as that of the Word and Sacraments. With this

correct understanding, the church has no latitude to ignore God's revealed will or to call someone into the office who does not meet the qualifications spelled out in Scripture. In this respect, women are disqualified from the ministry, not because they *cannot* preach, teach, or lead, but because the church, as an assembly of God, must respect and reflect the Lord's design for human relationships. Ordaining women into the pastoral office is an open departure from the design of the Creator and His will for the creation.

CHAPTER 5

THE INFLUENCE OF ECUMENISM

The term *ecumenism* comes from the Greek word *oikoumenikos* and Latin *oecumenicus*. Both primarily refer to the whole inhabited world.¹⁰⁵ The term has been used in the church to denote the church's universal outlook, according to which it transcends geographical and temporal confines. In this respect, the confessions of the church that were formulated and subscribed to by the entire church have been called "ecumenical symbols," and the councils that endorsed them "ecumenical councils." Every church body that holds on to these symbols is ecumenical because it reflects the universal nature of the church and is not isolated from the worldwide church.

The term *ecumenism* has, however, lately been used to signify the inter-faith endeavors within Christianity to realize visible unity among churches. Stephen Candia outlines this development:

In the 19th century especially among the Protestants with the founding of associations, the word received a new connotation. With Evangelical Alliance of 1846 and YMCA (1848), a basic tendency of internationalizing Christianity was created. In these associations the term implied belonging as a Christian to a world wide Christianity. In the 20th century the word signified the struggles or efforts to bring about the unity of Christians, in order to effect or realize the unity already given in Christ. The report of World Conference of Oxford(1937), stated that ecumenism is related to the manner and way in which the reality of unity of the church has been expressed in the course of history.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Stephen Candia, *Eastern Africa Contributions to the Ecumenical Movement* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 25.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 26f.

It is in this sense of the quest for unity among Christian churches that the term will be used in this chapter.

In the 8th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) that met in Harare, Zimbabwe, in December 1998, one of the resolutions was “to continue the unfinished task of working towards the transformation of the social, political and economic systems and institutions with a view to creating a just society in which women and young people have opportunity for full participation.”¹⁰⁷ The assembly also discussed proposals by the “Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women,” a body within WCC that was founded in 1988,¹⁰⁸ and offered, among others, the following recommendation:

That the assembly encourage the use of languages and policies that support the inclusion of persons in leadership positions in all aspects of the life of churches, whereas this is in harmony with the churches’ ecclesiological self-understanding, especially in regard to gender, age, race, cultural background and disability.¹⁰⁹

In this recommendation, we can see a push for nondiscriminatory participation also in the Office of the Ministry. That the ecumenical movement has had women’s ordination at the top on its agenda from its inception can be seen in these words of Elizabeth Bher-Sigel, a Lutheran-turned-Orthodox woman who has participated actively in the ecumenical movement:

The problem of women’s participation in the life and especially in the different ministries of the Church has thus been a part of the ecumenical movement from the beginning. Of the 400 church delegates to the first assembly of Lausanne in 1927, there were only seven women lost in the mass of male theologians and male dignitaries. These women, however, inspired a prophetic motion which was accepted.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 130.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 133.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 134.

It expressed a serious concern of giving to women the place which is theirs in the Church and in the councils of the Churches.¹¹⁰

In Kenya, there were maneuvers for ecumenical unity already in the early twentieth century. In a bid to realize this goal, a conference was held in October 1932 in which Anglican Church agencies, the Church of Scotland Mission, the Africa Inland Mission, and the Methodist church were represented.¹¹¹ The chief aim of the conference was to have one united church under the Lordship of Christ.¹¹² Such negotiations were extended to the neighboring country of Tanzania, which resulted in a series of consultative conferences. Henrik Smedjebacka presents eight theological questions in relation to women's ministry, outlined by an ad hoc committee on the issue in December 1964, to be presented at the conference that was due in February 1965 in Dodoma, Tanzania:¹¹³

1. The status of women in the church
2. The status and functions of full-time women workers in the church
3. The forms of women's organization in the church
4. The place of women in the government of the church
5. The ordination of women and, if so, in what form
6. The place of religious communities in the church and women's place therein
7. The place of voluntary women workers in the church
8. Marriage in relation to the service of women in the church

Sharing her view on these questions, Dr. Madeleine Barot, who was the head of the Department of Cooperation between Men and Women in the Church, Family, and Society

¹¹⁰Elizabeth Bher-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (Redondo Beach, Calif.: Oakwood Publications, 1991), 159.

¹¹¹Henrik Smedjebacka, *The Search for Church Union in East Africa* (Abo, Finland: Abo Akademi University Press, 2002), 17.

¹¹²This is understood as the visible unity of the church.

¹¹³Smedjebacka, 132.

of the World Council of Churches, observed that “ordination of women was the only point in discussing the place and service of women in the church.”¹¹⁴

It seems, then, that the role of women in the life and ministry of the church has long been a very critical issue for the ecumenical movement in its pursuit of the visible unity of the church. This is also reflected in the response of different churches to the report of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM). Part of the report (M. 18) reads: “thus, the existing divisions over this issue are clearly expressed in the responses. A number of churches which ordain women regret that BEM has not come out forward with a more positive stance towards this position.”¹¹⁵

It can be noted that ecumenism has succeeded in promoting women’s ministry in two primary ways. First, umbrella organizations like the World Council of Churches,¹¹⁶ which are used as vehicles for achieving the desired outward unity of the church, have exerted some pressure on those member churches with positions opposed to the ordination of women. As we have seen, the issue of women’s ordination assumed a central place in the push for the desired unity. The ordination of women has become a requirement to be met in achieving unity. Some churches that formerly did not recognize the ministry of women have been, in this manner, prevailed upon to change for the sake of unity.

Second, other churches have feared the stigma of being left behind, as church bodies in these ecumenical organizations positively and enthusiastically adjust to the new

¹¹⁴Ibid., 215.

¹¹⁵World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), 78f.

¹¹⁶Here we can also include the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

development. This we can see in the words of Philip Johnson, urging other church bodies to embrace the ordained ministry of women:

As long as we remain ecumenical Christians and refuse isolation in contented denominationalism, the matter deserves our prayers instead of our yawns, and we owe it to ourselves to articulate more clearly what is and what is not a Gospel-specific rationale for the ordination of women.¹¹⁷

Johnson's concern here is that churches do not get isolated from the rest of the world in the practice of ordaining women, striving neither to be left behind nor to look odd. Such churches do everything necessary, including doctrinal overhaul, to match the system. In such a situation, the issue of right doctrine becomes a matter of secondary importance. In Johnson's argument, standing for the truth and shunning those who are in error is labeled "denominationalism." And when he says that "we owe it to ourselves to articulate what is a gospel-specific rationale for the ordination of women," he not only portrays a false understanding of the Gospel (see chapter 2), but also implies that it is our prerogative as Christians to determine what we are going to teach, believe and practice. In this respect, we become autonomous, a law unto ourselves. A *laissez faire* situation arises in which individuals or groups do as they please. In the spirit of ecumenism, the practice of women's ordination has prevailed in many churches, abandoning their traditional positions in a show of solidarity with the rest of the world. As Johnson says:

I ask myself as a male pastor, what if the tables were turned? I need a wild scenario to keep imagination at work on the question. Let us suppose that next week the Pope in Rome, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC (in consultation with its many member churches) and Billy Graham were all simultaneously to come to conclusion that for the sake of the gospel the ordained ministry was to open to women. How would I react?¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Johnson, 11.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

Although Johnson's question is hypothetical, it reveals a lot about what is going on in the ecumenical movement, where what the majority has said precedes what God has said. One does not need to be a Lutheran to know that the Word of God is to be believed and obeyed above popes, patriarchs, archbishops, and the Grahams of the world—or even all of them put together in a church council. In the opinion of those who follow the majority, opposing women's ordination is viewed as being resistant to change; oppositional groups are considered irrelevant to the changing society. In the bid to keep pace with the changing world, to avoid this perceived irrelevance, many churches have adjusted themselves to accept the ordination of women.

To be truly ecumenical is noble. It means that you are not separated from the worldwide communion of saints, in spite of outward organizational differences. A church body that is not ecumenical in this sense is a cult, or below the level of Christianity. However, the external union of structures, or outward unity, does not constitute the essence of church unity. Although desirable, the visible unity of the church, which has remained the propelling force of the ecumenical movement, is in some ways unworkable and even unnecessary. In Lutheran ecclesiology, "the church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, . . . but is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts."¹¹⁹ The true unity of the church lies in faith and confessions. But since the faith by which membership in the church is acquired is invisible, so the church is invisible. As Kurt Marquart puts it, "The invisible bonds of faith which unite the church to Christ, and so also within herself, cannot of course be

¹¹⁹Tappert, *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* VII/VIII: 5.

traced by us.”¹²⁰ In this regard, “What makes the church church makes the Church one.”¹²¹ But this oneness comes by its marks, the pure preaching of the Word and right administration of the Sacraments. To strive to achieve the outward unity of the church worldwide at the cost of doctrine and confessions is sheer vanity.

Through the spirit of ecumenism, people become the judge of what the churches are to teach and believe. For instance, the issue of women’s ordination has been discussed in many forums, with the final result that most of the opposed churches give in for the sake of unity. Here unity has become more important than the revealed truth, and conference resolutions have replaced the Scripture as the norm of doctrine and practices. Ecumenism fosters fellowship between different church bodies through the lowest common denominator. In this kind of fellowship, often called “unionism,” faith and doctrine become matters of indifference. Patsy A. Leppien and J. Kincaid Smith put it this way:

The modern ecumenical movement is simply the promotion of unionism in a grand scale. It cuts across denominational lines and has as its ultimate objective the reuniting of all churches into one. The proponents of the ecumenical movement do not recognize their error because they fail to understand the proper distinction between the invisible church and the visible church—true unity and unionism.¹²²

In every unionistic maneuver, something is lost. For our purpose, we can say that the ministry has lost meaning in many churches that have been influenced by ecumenism. Usually there is a compromising of faith and doctrine in order to achieve outward unity,

¹²⁰Marquart, 57.

¹²¹A quotation from my friend in Kenya, the late Rev. Thomas Were, during church workers’ seminar at Atemo Mission Station, Kenya, in the year 2001.

¹²²Patsy A. Leppien and J. Kincaid Smith, *What Is Going on Among the Lutherans: A Comparison of Beliefs* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 348.

which Pieper calls “a caricature” and “a mockery of Christian unity.”¹²³ Leppien and Smith quote Dr. J. Michael Reu to point out the marks of unionism:

Here we discover the *first mark* of unionism: A difference in doctrine which hitherto has been regarded as divisive, is suddenly made to lose its divisive significance. The *second mark* of unionism, therefore is this: Differences in doctrine are made to lose their divisive significance with a view to uniting hitherto separate churches. The *third mark* of unionism, therefore is this: A formula of unification is found which each of two hitherto separate churches may accept but which each of them interpret differently.¹²⁴

In Africa, ecumenism has influenced many churches in yet another form. Most African churches rely mainly on their Western counterparts and different international relief agencies for economic support. Sometimes the churches are bound to embrace changes with a view to impressing their partners abroad, demonstrating that they are reading from the same script. Many churches in Africa have ordained women to please and pacify their mission partners in the West, thus ensuring an unbroken stream of financial support. For example, the decision of the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) to ordain women pastors was greatly influenced by its relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the main mission development partner.

As we said above, the spirit of ecumenism creates in churches the desire to fit into the larger outward community of Christians at the expense of God’s will as revealed in Scripture. This desire to fit in forces churches to abandon their confessions to embrace new trends. At the moment when a church body begins to feel the stigma of “going it alone,” that church is moving towards the ordination of women. But as we said in chapter

¹²³Pieper, 426.

¹²⁴Ibid., 359.

2, going it alone is often a mark of faithfulness to the Lord. It is a grave danger to try to follow the way of the majority when the majority is in error, especially in matters pertaining to faith and doctrine. Churches can change their positions in mass apostasy, but the Word of the Lord will never change.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that Law/Gospel reductionism, with its “Gospel alone” principle, leads to the denigration of the Law of God and thereby creates antinomian tendencies in the church. In this atmosphere of disrespect for the Law of God, many churches have resolved to ordain women, against the will of God as revealed in His Word. Since the Gospel does not stand in opposition to the Law, the church cannot claim to be free under the Gospel to ordain women in direct contravention of the order established by God in creation.

Feminism has in its part created a false understanding of the relationship between man and woman by demanding gender equality and the interchangeability of gender roles. This demanded equality is, however, based on a wrong understanding of the relationship between the order of creation and the order of redemption. Feminists hold that the latter has supplanted the former, and therefore any hierarchy and order established in the creation does not count. However, the will of God does not change, and the order of redemption has not dissolved the arrangements of the order of creation as regards gender roles. Woman remains woman and man remains man, even in the order of redemption. Many churches have bought the feminist agenda regarding equality and gender roles, leading to their approval of the ordained ministry of women in the church.

On another front, a functional understanding of the ministry has facilitated the acceptance of women’s ordination. Those churches that see the preaching office as not

divinely instituted have the tendency to see the office in terms of functions, which any Christian can perform whether male or female. Ideas favoring a place for women in the ordained ministry have exerted extensive influence on many churches in Africa and the whole world via the ecumenical movement. A key aspect of modern ecumenism is doctrinal indifference for the sake of visible unity within the church. In this quest for unity, many churches have abandoned their traditional positions as a token of solidarity with others. Churches have feared being left behind. But the true unity of the church does not rest on external structures. Rather, unity consists in true faith in Christ as expressed in the confessions of the church. Clearly the arguments that promote the rapid acceptance of women's ordination, as discussed in this thesis, emanate from a disregard for the Creator's will and design for the world established in creation. To hold the true position on the ministry, therefore, ELCK has to submit to the unchanging will of God as revealed in the Scripture. The will of God is the same in both the orders of creation and redemption.

As a church body surrounded by other churches that have accepted the ordination of women, ELCK has to be firmly rooted in the scriptural truth, as articulated in the Lutheran confessions, to be able to withstand the pressure to compromise its correct practice. Sometimes the church may feel pressure both from within and from without, pushing it away from a confessional position. But if the axiom "heresy is the mother of orthodoxy" holds true, then I am persuaded to think we should be able to stand and define our ground better in juxtaposition with these new, popular, but errant positions. Here we can remember the admonition to the Hebrew Christians: "Do not be carried away by all

kinds of strange teachings.”¹²⁵ As we saw above, the ecumenical movement has played a key role in leading many churches to accept women’s ordination. The point of concern here is how ELCK relates to other churches without contamination. For example, the ELCK is a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), most of whose member churches from Africa have women pastors today. We in the ELCK might be tempted to follow the majority in the federation, either for greater economic gain or for fear of being “lone rangers.” It is my view that sound doctrine is far more important than economic gain or organizational company, neither of which I think is an absolute necessity. What I mean is that ELCK is to remain both ecumenical (not separated from the worldwide communion of saints) and confessional (holding on to the pure doctrine of the church).

Accepting women’s ordination is not the end of the road in the quest for gender equality. On the contrary, this is the key to a “Pandora’s box.” Some church bodies that have accepted women’s ordination have gone farther in the highway of antinomianism. For example, in the Anglican Communion, women’s ordination is by now a settled matter, no longer an issue. The issue now is the service of homosexual ministers and same-sex marriage, which has reportedly been accepted by a section of the Communion! Antinomianism presents such a “slippery slope,” from women’s ordination to other lawless practices such as homosexuality, abortion, and so on. One antinomian practice definitely leads to another.

The ELCK should, therefore, maintain the difference between itself and the surrounding churches and remain faithful as a paragon of authentic confessional Lutheranism on the continent. To achieve this, these words of the Apostle Paul must be taken into account: “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct,

¹²⁵Hebrews 13:9.

rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”¹²⁶ Elsewhere Paul says, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both your self and your hearers.”¹²⁷ We are called on to persevere in the pure doctrine. Paul calls this “perseverance” because it is not an easy enterprise to remain an island of truth, without being submerged in the surrounding sea of doctrinal indifference that characterizes many churches today. Remaining confessional Lutherans might cost us friendships and earn us unpleasant names. Yet we shall say with the Apostle, “I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶2 Timothy 4:2f. (NIV).

¹²⁷1 Timothy 4:16 (NIV).

¹²⁸2 Timothy 1:12 (NIV).

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