

Dissenting Opinion on Women in Congregational Offices

A. Introduction

When the document *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices* was adopted by the CTCR at its November 1994 meeting, the undersigned indicated their intention to submit a minority report. According to the Commission's informal but detailed guidelines for adopting documents, a minority report must be considered by the whole commission and, if adopted, published along with the document itself. Since the majority who voted for the document decided to publish it in the *Reporter* before considering our response, we regretfully conclude that the spirit of the guidelines has already been broken and we release this Minority Report for consideration by the church.

We understand that questions concerning our life together in the church, especially those on "women in the church," are quite sensitive. One reason for this is that the traditional and historic understanding of these issues is not "in tune" with the understandings of broader, popular culture. This places us into an unfamiliar context which demands serious theological reflection. Especially now, patient, earnest thought, rooted in respect for God's own truth, is critical. The alternative is haste. The minority is firmly of the opinion that the Commission has acted in undue haste.

Our concerns are threefold: procedural, historical, and theological.

B. Procedural Concerns

The passage of the CTCR *Service of Women* document occurred only after a remarkable overriding of the Commission's own normal processes. Although the committee under whose auspices the Report was being prepared (Committee 2) had discussed its contents approximately half way (through the section on Elders and beginning the discussion on Chairman and Vice-Chairman), it was determined to hold a consultation on the draft with COP members, at the request of the COP.¹

The consultation with the COP took place in late September, yet a new updated draft of the Report was not available to CTCR members, including Committee 2 members, until several days prior to the November meeting.² At that meeting, in his regular presentation to the CTCR, the President of Synod, A. L. Barry, strongly urged the Commission not to act in haste in adopting the new Report. He noted that the one year Synod deadline preceding the July 1995 convention for the presentation of a Commission Report had already passed and that haste would not serve the church. Far from honoring this reasonable request, however—a request which should have been honored if only to conform to the CTCR's own self-understanding as formally adopted in its Mission Statement (that it "assists the President of Synod at his request")³—the Executive Committee of the CTCR, apart from any discussion with Committee 2 and without any vote by that committee to bring the document to plenary, proceeded to take the document from committee and present it to the plenary. Furthermore, the Executive Committee set aside its Tentative Schedule (agenda) sent to members 7-10 days before the November CTCR meeting, cancelled virtually all normally scheduled individual committee sessions, and scheduled in their place plenary after plenary (including an extra evening session) to work relentlessly on the document as a "committee of the whole." Other than a very brief discussion in its April 1994 meeting, this was the only discussion of the Report by plenary. The Report was adopted by a vote of 7-4, four voting members (25%) not being present. That is, with only seven members voting for the document, the "majority" Report was adopted by less than a majority of the entire sixteen (voting) member Commission.

C. Historical Concerns

1. The Report's Appendix provides a brief overview of the history of "women in the church" discussions, beginning with the Synod's 1969 Resolution 2-17. This summary is important, for here the CTCR offers its interpretation of what the Synod and the CTCR itself have said in the past 25 years. This discussion, furthermore, intends to validate the position of the new Report. But at strategic points, the Appendix is, unfortunately, misleading, if not wrong.

The Appendix says, "Regarding offices and board membership the Synod [said in 1969 Res. 2-17]... that women are prohibited from holding any other kind of office or membership on boards or committees in the institutional structures of a congregation, only if such a way of proceeding involves women in a violation of *this principle*" (emphasis added). "This principle," in the context of the Appendix, is that women ought not be pastors or carry out distinctive functions of the pastoral office. But that is not what the Synod's resolution actually said. In addition to making the point concerning the pastoral office, Res. 2-17 also said that the service of women on boards, etc., should not violate "the order of creation." This is an important inaccuracy in the account, for characteristic of the Report is its refusal to include the order of creation as a guiding concept in its argument. Indeed, Res. 2-17 explicitly operates with *two* guiding principles: that concerning the pastoral office, and that concerning the order of creation. The Appendix's rendering consistently refuses to acknowledge this second principle. Thus, the Appendix says that Res. 2-17 allowed freedom for congregations to alter policies and practices "provided the polity developed conforms to the Scriptural principles informing the Synod's position regarding the pastoral office." However, what the 1969 Resolution actually said was that congregations could make changes "provided the polity developed conforms to the general scriptural principles that women neither hold the pastoral office *nor exercise authority over men*" (emphasis added).

Again, in 1969 Res. 2-17 the Synod acknowledged (as it always had) a principle of the order of creation which defines the relations between men and women in the church, as well as specific application of this principle in allowing only men to serve in the pastoral office. That this is the correct reading of Res. 2-17 is clear from the 1970 ruling of the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) to which the Appendix refers.⁴ In its sample constitutional paragraph, the CCM allows the service of women as officers and members of board and committees "as long as these positions are not directly involved in the specific functions of the pastoral office ... and as long as this service does not violate the order of creation (*usurping authority over men*)" (emphasis added). This position of the Synod was (as the Appendix notes) subsequently reaffirmed by Synod in convention in 1981 and in 1986.⁵ What is not clearly admitted in the Appendix is that the present Report challenges the repeated and historic position of the Synod regarding the service of women in congregational offices such as chairman, vice-chairman and committee chairs. In the Appendix and in open discussion, the members of the majority and the staff made much of the CCM statement that "the Synod may further define its position in the future." To be sure, it may, and in the Report the majority clearly desires a redefinition. But has the groundwork been laid to sustain such a change?

2. The present Report is in response to 1989 Resolution 3-13A, which asked the CTCR to prepare a study concerning the service of women in congregational and synodical offices. The specific question posed by that resolution was whether women may serve "in all offices of the congregation, including that of chairman, vice-chairman and elder, and district and synodical boards and commissions *where their official function would, in effect, involve public accountability for the function(ing) of the pastoral office*" (emphasis added).⁶ In its first resolve, Res. 3-13A assumes that the offices in question "would in effect involve public accountability for the

function[ing] of the pastoral office." The present CTCR Report now claims that women may serve as chairman, vice-chairman, and as members of synodical dispute resolution panels. However, the actual question of Res. 3-13A, whether such service is allowable when it "would, in effect, involve public accountability" for the pastoral office is *nowhere* discussed in this Report! And that after several members of the COP (cf. consultation [B, above]) requested clarification on this matter! In fact, this Report does not adequately respond to the question actually put to it by Synod.⁷

D. Theological Concerns

The final concern which is, of course, the most important but which is impossible to argue in detail in this place and at this short notice, is doctrinal and scriptural. Several items may, however, be brought forth: first the treatment of terms such as "teaching," "exercising authority," etc., and second, the understanding of the doctrine of the order of creation. To take 1 Tim. 2:8-15 as the focus of our comments in this short Minority Report, the following issues/questions can be raised:

1. Regarding the teaching (*didaskain*) mentioned in verse 12: Is it simply coterminous with the activities of the entire pastoral office? Paul certainly does not use the word that way. In describing his own ministry, Paul says that he was called to be a teacher (*didaskalous*) (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). But he never describes himself as a pastor/overseer (*poimeen/episkopos*). Indeed, he specifically denies descriptions of his ministry in terms which fit the specific sacramental functions of the pastor of a local congregation (1 Cor. 1:17).⁸ In addition, he ascribes teaching to others besides pastors (Col. 3:16),⁹ including, it must be noted, women (Titus 2:3).¹⁰ Clearly, more work needs to be done here.

Simple equation of teaching with the pastoral office seems too facile for this text.

2. Regarding the exercising of authority (*authentain*) also mentioned in verse 12: What is the actual meaning of this word? Is it "to exercise authority?" (cf. Report), "to usurp authority" (cf. 1970 CCM ruling)?, or something else? Furthermore, with respect to what is the exercising/usurping done? With respect to spiritual matters? to matters of physical well-being in the congregation?¹¹ More importantly, what is the relationship between exercising/usurping authority and teaching? Is the one equivalent to the other? If not, does one still somehow modify the other? Or, are these two completely different things? On this latter point, we can say that the grammatical construction of the verse¹² and the argument in the context from the order of creation (see next point) seem to suggest that teaching is one thing and with the mention of authority Paul moves on to a new topic.

The issues surrounding the verb *authenteeo* ("to exercise/usurp authority") are very difficult and simply must be handled, as the Report does not.¹³

3. Regarding the order of creation discussed in verses 13-14: Can the argument in these verses concerning this truth of Scripture and of creation really be limited in this passage to the pastoral office? Several points strongly suggest that it cannot. On the one hand, Paul's treatment of the order of creation elsewhere does not suggest such a limitation (Eph. 5:25-33 deals with the relationship between husband and wife, and 1 Cor. 11:2-16 concerns evidence expressing the relationship between husband and wife and/or men and women). On the other hand, the context of the entire passage in 1 Tim. 2:8-15 may not be limited to a worship setting at all, as is often assumed. What Paul says concerning women's dress and deportment in verses 9-10 may well not concern worship practices only, especially when one compares these verses to the highly similar wording in 1 Pet. 3:3-5. This may well indicate that more general (even familial) relationship considerations are in view.

Indeed, the matter of the order of creation raises questions concerning the very nature of manhood and womanhood, as well as

the relationship between creation and the new creation of the Age to Come.¹⁴ These questions are worthy of fundamental (re)consideration.

E. Conclusion

The minority signing this Report, along with the majority, affirms that "in their various callings, Christian men and women alike have received from their Lord the high privilege and responsibility of serving each other and their neighbor." That Christ has blessed and continues richly to bless His church through the faithful service of women is a fact which we joyfully and thankfully acknowledge. We are disturbed, however, with the Report of the majority. Not only did the Commission which produced it transgress agreed upon procedures and its own adopted Mission Statement. More importantly, it acted in great haste and neglected to consider seriously important scriptural and doctrinal issues. It pleases us that the Atlantic District, at its July 1994 convention, asked the Commission to consider in a fundamental way the exegetical and theological questions concerning the service of women which we have described. But—and this is the basic point—this work must be done first, before decisions on application to congregational life can be made. This is especially true in the case at hand, when the current Report puts forth positions which are at odds with the official position adopted by our Synod. Our fundamental concern, however, is that in an important matter such as this we study seriously and reverently the Word of God as his faithful people.

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ENDNOTES

1. It should be made clear that no one on Committee 2 objected to the idea of a consultation. Indeed, that such consultation was to be held was part of the original synodical resolution assigning this study to the CTCR (Res. 3-13A, 1989 *Convention Proceedings*, 118). But members of the committee had doubts whether a consultation would accomplish much in view of the very incomplete status of its own deliberations. In its own consideration of the COP request, the committee adopted a resolution that it "suggest a postponement of that consultation until it had itself been able to discuss the document in all its parts (Minutes of Committee 2, CTCR, Sept. 15-17, 1994). However, upon request by the commission staff, the committee subsequently rescinded this motion in favor of allowing the Executive Committee to bring forth the question of the Sept. 26 consultation with the COP (*ibid.*).

2. One member of Committee 2 did not receive the updated draft until the morning of the first day of the meeting.

3. September meeting, 1994. The statement of purpose does continue "...and provides resources and guidance to the Synod in matters of theology and church relations." This second function is

not to be understood as distinct from the first, however, as was clear from the discussion which preceded the adoption of the Statement at the September meeting.

4. See 1971 *Convention Workbook*, 244.

5. Res. 3-11, 1981 *Convention Proceedings*, 156; Res. 3-09, 1986 *Convention Proceedings*, 144.

6. *Convention Proceedings*, 118.

7. In a previous draft of the present Report it was argued that by "public accountability" the 1985 Women in the Church document had meant merely "the accountability inherent in the pastoral office." But note that all previous discussions (including the 1985 Report) use the language of "public accountability for the functioning of the pastoral office." In the present Report this concept too is collapsed into the pastoral office alone.

8. "For Christ did not send me with a commission to engage in baptizing but to do preaching of the Gospel." It is true, of course, that in Eph. 4:11 the words "pastors" (*poimenas*) and "teachers" (*didaskalous*) are preceded by one article (*tous*) and linked by the word "and (*kai*);" but these terms conclude a listing of gifts/offices in the church and this may well be an example of a common stylistic feature of Paul used to conclude a recitation of individual items

in a list. See, e.g., the conclusion of the list in Gal. 3:28 (*kai theelu*). At any rate, this point must be argued.

9. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching (*didaskontes*) and admonishing yourselves with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs...."

Related is the question what the teaching mentioned in this verse concerns. Does it concern all sorts of topics? religious matters only? Answers to such questions help to determine if the pastoral office is in view at all.

10. "Older women, similarly, ought to be properly reverent in behavior, not devils, not enslaved to much wine, noble teachers (*kalodidaskalous*)."

11. Later, in 1 Tim. 5:9, 16 [cf. Acts 6:1], Paul deals with very earthly matters of care of widows in the congregation.

12. *ouden* "and not" joins the two words. The use of *de* ("and"), as well as its compounds *ouden/meeden* ("and not"), in 1 Timothy always strongly suggests a move to a different topic or to quite a different aspect of a topic. See, e.g., 2:15 and 1:4.

13. The 1985 "Women in the Church" document's treatment of this issue is very brief, encompassing only several sentences.

14. The latter question is explored in some detail in the 1985 document only.