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## A Critique of the 'Novel' Contemporary Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Given in the Book, *Women in the Church*. Part II.

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*This is the second part of the essay which was published in the April issue of the Evangelical Quarterly (EQ 72:2 [2000], 151-167).*

**Key words:** New Testament; 1 Timothy; women; ministry.

In the first part of this essay I argued *inter alia* that what the authors of the book, *Women in the Church*, present as the 'historic' interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:9-15 is just the opposite. It is a novel reading of the text without any long standing historical precedent. To begin this part of the essay I want to explore the three most important, and altogether novel, elements in this postmodern interpretation of 1 Timothy 2. These three matters are the pillars which support the case for the permanent subordination of women presented in this book and similar ones. After this I will outline a better way to read this text.

### 1. The novel creation orders argument

The expression, 'the order of creation', is a confusing one for it can be understood in at least two ways, chronologically or constitutively. In the first case it can be used simply to refer to the sequential order in which man and woman can be thought to have come into existence in the light of Genesis 2, man first, woman second. In the truly historic argument for the permanent subordination of women virtually all commentators, as we have seen, were agreed that being created second implied woman's inferiority. In making this deduction, which had already been made before the time of Christ by the Jewish Rabbis, male theologians were simply reading into the text their own cultural presuppositions. Being created second does not imply inferiority, or subordination. There is no logical force in this argument whatsoever. In Genesis 1 man and woman are created last yet stand supreme. Calvin with his usual clarity of thought says, 'Paul's argument that woman is subject because she was created second does not seem very strong,

for John the Baptist went before Christ in time and yet was far inferior to him.<sup>1</sup> To their credit the authors of *Women in the Church* adamantly reject this line of reasoning. Doriani says, 'for complementarians the phrase, "Adam was formed or created first" refers beyond chronology to God's sovereign decree'<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, Harold Brown dismisses the suggestion that being created second by itself implies woman's subordination. He insists that what Gen. 2 and 1 Tim. 2:13 are indicating is that there is an 'ordered structure of reality' set up by the creator.<sup>3</sup>

In arguing in this way the contributors to this book show that they endorse the second and more common use of the expression, 'the order of creation'.<sup>4</sup> In this usage a creation order is a structure or institution established by God in creation, before sin entered the world. It is a constitutive ordering of human relationships. This meaning is indicated when these orders are designated 'ordinances' or 'mandates'. Harold Brown sums up well what the authors of *Women in the Church* understand when they use this expression. In creation, he says, God has established, 'explicit *mandata Dei* that hold good for all time and in every place'.<sup>5</sup> Doriani develops his own terminology. He calls this usage the 'congruent' understanding of the order of creation and equates this with 'the created order of nature'.<sup>6</sup> It is this constitutive usage of the expression, 'the order of creation', which now dominates in the conservative evangelical literature written in support of the permanent subordination of women, usually spoken of in terms of role differentiation. In an informative footnote, Doriani says that, 'nineteen of the twenty two authors (in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*) argue for their position on the basis of creation or the order of creation on at least eighty one pages', and he adds that Donald Carson and George Knight also base their case for woman's subordination on creation orders, or ordinances.<sup>7</sup> What no one so far has pointed out is that this argument is completely novel. It is not found in any commentary or book prior to the Second World War. The historic ground for defining women's position *vis à vis* men has been that in creating woman chronologically second God made women (ontologically) inferior to men.

1 *Commentary on 1 Tim.*, 217.

2 *Women*, 262.

3 *Ibid.*, 201.

4 This is not to suggest that the chronological order of the creation of the sexes is never mentioned. I find it spoken about in passing by Gordon on p 62 and by Schreiner on pp 135-136, but chronological order is not the foundational premise on which they base their case for the unchanging functional subordination of women.

5 *Women*, 204. See also pp 61-62, 134-40, 192, 200-6.

6 *Ibid.*, 258.

7 *Ibid.*, 258, note 180.

The idea that there are a number of given structures or orders which order all of human life goes back to Luther, although he never actually used the term 'creation orders' or 'ordinances'. He spoke rather of three 'orders' or 'estates' of society which were divinely given bulwarks for warding off disorder in a sinful world. These were marriage, the ministry and the state. He saw them as givens and made no attempt to ground them in the creation narratives, or anything else in the Bible. They were natural law. Calvin speaks incessantly about 'order'. It is possibly his most favoured topic.<sup>8</sup> For him the expressions, 'the order of nature' and 'the order of creation' are usually synonymous. This order is to be seen in the stars, the seasons, good government, family life and so on. Nowhere does he suggest that in creation God laid down a set of creationally given structures or orders which govern all of life.

Orders of creation theology, it is generally held, was first developed by the Lutheran theologian, Adolf von Harless (1806–1879).<sup>9</sup> Orders of creation theology blossomed in Germany in the 1930s, being used to legitimate the Nazi regime and the preserves of the German race. A modified theology of creation orders developed in the Netherlands,<sup>10</sup> and then was adapted to support apartheid in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> In 1957 John Murray introduced the theology of the creation orders or ordinances into the North American Presbyterian Reformed tradition.<sup>12</sup> For Murray, as with the Lutherans, these orders were God-given structures governing the whole of life, not just the church and the home.<sup>13</sup> What is more, for them it was not the autocratic state, or the republican state, or the democratic state which was given by God in creation, but the concept of the state itself. How the state established good government could differ from place to place and from time to time.

In the case of interest to us, it was the family which was the given, not how the family was ordered. Indeed Luther insisted that in creation men and women stood side by side as equals; woman's inferior status being a consequence of sin—part of the fallen order.<sup>14</sup>

8 See for example, W. J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: a Sixteenth-Century Portrait*, Oxford, OUP, 1988; M. E. Osterhaven, *The Faith of the Church: A Reformed Perspective on its Historical Development* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), chapter 14.

9 He actually used the term *Schöpferordnung*—the creator's order' but it is from him the whole orders of creation theology developed. See 'Schöpfungsordnung' in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1961, V, 1492–1494).

10 I allude to Dooyeweerdianism in which the 'spheres' correspond to creation orders.

11 For a brief comment see A. König, *Here I am! A Christian Reflection on God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), vii–ix. See also J. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

12 *Principles of Conduct* (London: Tyndale, 1957).

13 This is expressly stated by Murray, *ibid.*, 44. He says, 'they touch upon every area of life and behaviour'.

14 *Works*, Genesis 1–5, 115. He says this commenting on Gen. 2:18.

Something altogether new emerged when theologians started appealing to the idea of orders of creation to validate the permanent subordination of women, and then only in the church and the home.<sup>15</sup> These two novel ideas, woman's subordination actually being one of the orders of creation, and this subordination being restricted solely to the church and the home, were first developed by Fritz Zerbst, a German Lutheran, who wrote soon after the second World War opposing the ordination of women. His book was translated into English and published in 1955 under the title, *The Office of Woman in the Church*.<sup>16</sup> Mainly from this source, first by Missouri Synod Lutherans,<sup>17</sup> and then by conservative evangelicals, the idea of a creation order which permanently subordinated women to men solely in the church and the home took root and flourished. In the formulating of the ideas for his influential book, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*,<sup>18</sup> George Knight seems to have assumed that what Zerbst outlined was much the same as what his mentor, John Murray, had taught him, but this is not the case.<sup>19</sup> John Murray's creation order is marriage itself, not the subordination of women, and this and all his creation orders cover all of creation, not just the church and the home, which are for him the domain of the 'orders of redemption'. Paradoxically, just as orders of creation theology was being abandoned by most mainline theologians, because of Barth's devastating critique that it was based solely on natural theology not revelation,<sup>20</sup> and because of its common usage to exclude justice issues, it sprang to renewed life among English-speaking conservative evangelicals who were searching for a way to uphold the traditional ordering of the sexes.

Those evangelicals who embraced this novel theological construct with gusto failed to notice that the New Testament is in fact grounded on a theology of the new creation in Christ which, while it in no way annuls creation, does transcend it. 'In Christ there is a new creation, the old has passed away' (2 Cor. 5:17). The Bible does not hold that the ideal lies in the past, in an idyllic Eden, but in the future, in the age to

16 St Louis, Concordia. A similar argument is developed in less detail by another German Lutheran and then translated into English. See P. Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women* (St Louis: Concordia, 1971).

17 On this see R. C. Prohl, *Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957). Prohl wrote to refute Zerbst. His book is still worth reading.

18 Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977. His ideas first appeared in earlier articles as he explains in the beginning of his book.

19 In a personal letter to me Dr Knight says he thought his 'indebtedness' for his understanding of the orders of creation on which he predicated the permanent subordination of women was to John Murray alone. The term yes, but not the content. The content is Zerbst's book which he lists in a footnote.

20 See K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Creation*, 3-4 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 18-46.

come.<sup>21</sup> Eden cannot give the ideal because there the devil was active and sin was possible. The church as the eschatological people of God is always to look forward, and seek to realise in its corporate life the perfection to be known in the new heaven and the new earth, where all inequalities will be abolished.<sup>22</sup> The only places in the New Testament where there is the slightest hint that women are to be subordinated to men on the basis of some aspect of God's creative work are 1 Tim. 2:13 and 1 Cor. 11:3ff.<sup>23</sup> None of the exhortations to wives to be subordinated to their husbands in the so called 'Household Codes' are grounded on an appeal to the creation order. Most of them make their appeal on the basis of expediency.<sup>24</sup> The exhortation in Eph. 5:21ff. is grounded in a parallel between Christ and the church, the only time Genesis is quoted is to affirm that in marriage a man and a woman become 'one'. In 1 Cor. 11:3ff. we do find appeals to the creation stories in more than one way to enforce the wearing of head coverings by women. What is to be noted in this case is that virtually everyone today agrees this dress code is culturally limited. It would seem that in this passage Paul marshals a number of *ad hominem* arguments to enforce a traditional practice. If none of these arguments are weighty theology, why then suggest this of 1 Tim. 2:13? Lastly, and of great significance, we note that in Gal. 3:28 the apostle seems to annul *in some way* the creation givens of sex,<sup>25</sup> suggesting that being 'in Christ' is of more importance than even one's sexual identity.<sup>26</sup> In the light of this evidence we must conclude that the whole idea of permanently

21 New Testament scholars are agreed that the New Testament is profoundly orientated to the future. It is predicated on eschatology. Specifically on the matter asserted see R. Prenter, *Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), especially, pp 196-197. A. König in *The Eclipse of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 59ff argues that the authentic Reformed tradition, building on Calvin's thought, does not look back to Eden as the ideal but forward to the eschaton. See also the important study by J. Moltmann, *The Future of Creation* (London: SCM, 1979).

22 See the good discussion of this in S. J. Grenz and D. M. Kjesbo, *Women in the Church* (Illinois: Downers Grove, 1995), 173-179.

23 The authors of *Women in the Church* also ground the double prohibition addressed to women on the 'whole fallen order' (61-62). In 1 Tim. 2:14 the chronological order in which Adam and Eve sinned is not significant. The point Paul makes is that 'it was the woman who was deceived'. To suggest that women are to be subordinated to men on the basis of a constitutive and permanently binding fallen order seems to me to contradict the primary message of the New Testament that Christ annulled for the believer the consequences of the Fall. I agree with George Knight, *op. cit.*, 44, who denies emphatically that 'the fallen order is normative for the New Testament'.

24 I demonstrate this in my *Created Woman* (Australia: Acorn, 1985), 42-47.

25 Quoting the Greek of Gen 1:27 he literally says, '(In Christ) there is no male and female'.

26 So K. Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 34; R. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 70-93; Giles, *Created Woman*, 28-32.

binding, constitutive creation orders, which not even the coming of Christ can challenge, is alien to biblical revelation. It is a construct drawn from the Greek philosophical tradition which has been read into the Bible.

The biggest problem, however, for the pseudo-historic position is that the basic premise on which orders of creation theology rests is that these orders govern *all of life*. The state and marriage, for example, are givens, part and parcel of creation. They are to be contrasted with 'orders of redemption' which apply only to Christians living in the church and the home. It should follow then that if women are subordinated to men, ontologically or functionally, by one of the created orders, then they are subordinated in the purposes of God in the home, the church *and the state*. On their own interpretative principles 1 Tim. 2:9–15 proves too much for the authors of *Women and the Church* and those who take their position. If this is the case, then honesty only allows them two possibilities. Either they should renounce their novel orders of creation theology on which they ground the permanent subordination of women, or they should return to the 'historic' position and openly state that they believe that women are ontologically inferior to men.

If my reasoning is correct, we must conclude that the recently-developed conservative evangelical orders of creation pillar supporting the case for the permanent (functional) subordination of women, cannot stand the weight placed on it. This argument is invalid at several levels. It contradicts the overall teaching of Scripture which is eschatological; it has no historical tradition to support it and it denies the foundational premise on which orders of creation theology rests, namely that these orders govern all of God's creation, not just the church and the home. If this is conceded, then the whole case that the double prohibition in 1 Tim. 2: 12 is a permanently binding, trans-cultural ruling, collapses.

## 2. The novel usage of the word 'role'

The French word 'role' originated in reference to the part an actor played on stage. In the 1930s it became a key term in 'functionalist sociology'. Prior to 1960 I can find no evidence of Christian usage of this term in theological discourse. This means that role theory, which is now one of the fundamental building blocks of the present day conservative evangelical case for the permanent subordination of women, is also something quite novel. The idea of creation-given *roles* finds no mention in Zerbst's important 1955 study,<sup>27</sup> or in Charles Ryrie's 1958

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27 *op. cit.*

book, *The Place of Women in the Church*,<sup>28</sup> or in Peter Brunner's 1971 monograph, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*.<sup>29</sup> It was only in the 60s with the advent of women's lib that the word 'role' came into common parlance in reference to the appropriate contributions of men and women. The first theological book I can find with the word used in the title is Krister Stendahl's 1966 study, *The Bible and the Role of Women*.<sup>30</sup> I take it this title was devised by the publisher, for the original Swedish title has no corresponding word, and the term 'role' is never used in this book in relation to men and women. It is also interesting to note that Ryrie's 1958 book, *The Place of Women in the Church*, was reissued in 1978 under the title, *The Role of Women in the Church*.<sup>31</sup> In this climate it was not at all surprising that in the early 70s George Knight took up this term and combined it with the also new understanding of creation orders in his book entitled, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*.<sup>32</sup>

From then on women's subordinate status was redefined by hierarchalists in terms of role differentiation. Despite their profession of being those most faithful to Scripture, they embraced this new term, not noticing that they had baptised an idea and a term not found in Scripture and alien to the Bible's own teaching on the sexes. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that men and women are simply *acting out* their maleness or femaleness, or that apart from procreation there are some tasks given only to men and others only to women. The defining statement of Gen. 1:27-28, which undergirds all that the Bible says about the sexes, teaches that God made us men and women. In our very being we *are* differentiated, we are not simply acting out sex roles. I personally would not want to believe that anything in Genesis 2 contradicts these basic affirmations of Genesis 1. To suggest that God has differentiated the sexes simply by allocating differing roles is a novel idea which cannot be supported from the Scriptures. The Bible insists that our maleness and femaleness is grounded in our God-given nature. This recently popularised usage of terminology and ideas drawn from the theatre and humanistic sociology actually contradicts divine revelation. W. Neuer is the only hierarchalist that I know who has seen the 'inappropriateness of role theory' to interpret the Bible's teaching on the differences between men and women. He says, 'In the cause of truth we should give up talking about the roles of the sexes'.<sup>33</sup>

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28 London: Macmillan.

29 *op. cit.*

30 Philadelphia: Fortress.

31 Chicago, Moody.

32 *op. cit.*

33 *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990) 30.

This novel usage of the term role is, however, not only theologically flawed but also logically flawed. In the truly historic position women were to keep silent and not exercise authority because God had made them (ontologically) inferior to men. In contrast contemporary hierarchalists insist that women are not inferior: God has simply given them different roles to men. (This implies functional subordination, but wherever possible the biblical word 'subordination' is avoided in *Women and the Church*).<sup>34</sup> It is true that the allocating of a subordinate role does not necessarily imply inferiority: it is not true that it never implies this. An army officer is superior in function to a private: they have different roles. The officer and the private are nevertheless equal in essential being. Such functional subordination or difference in roles, of which countless examples could be cited, does not imply inferiority. This is because the officer's superior role is based on superior training and/or competence to lead and it is possible for the private to become an officer, or the officer to be demoted. This is not the case with women. Because a woman is a woman, and for no other reason, no matter what her abilities or training might be, she is locked into a *permanent* subordinate role. The private can assume higher responsibilities but a woman can never become a leader in the church and never assume equal responsibility with her husband in the home. Once the question is asked as to why this is so, some inability in women has to be inferred. It has to be admitted she lacks something only given to men; in some way she is inferior. No amount of clever double speak can avoid the force of this logic. If this is the case then we at last see what the authors of *Women in the Church* mean when they claim they are restating the 'historic' position. In their own novel language they are arguing for the superiority of men and the inferiority of women.

The argument that men and women are equal although they have differing roles sounds very plausible and sociologically sound, but when unpacked we discover that what is being talked about is not really sociological roles at all—such as who mows the lawn, pays the bills, washes up—something, by the way, that the Bible says nothing about. There is only one matter in mind all the time, the leadership of the man and the subordination of the woman. The issue is not *gender roles* but *gender relations*. God has set men over women. The introduction of the word role obfuscates this fact.<sup>35</sup>

Again we reach the conclusion that this equally important pillar on which the novel contemporary hierarchical case is built cannot bear any weight. The novel appeal to differing roles for men and women

34 Yarbrough criticises me for stigmatising the 'historic' position by designating it as an argument for 'the subordination of women'! *Women*, 185.

35 See the excellent parallel exposé of role theory in R. M. Groothuis, *Good News for Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 27–29, 49–52, 65–67.

sounds reasonable and equitable, but when examined we find it contradicts biblical teaching, is logically flawed and it implies that in some ways women are inferior to men.

### 3. Novel language

A third very observable difference between the authentic historic position and that given in *Women in the Church* and its parallels is in the way language is used. The historic position is characterised by stark and unambiguous language. Women are 'inferior'; they are to keep 'silent', they 'are born to obey' (Calvin); they are responsible for sin, being 'weak and fickle' (Chrysostom) and they will be saved so long as they concentrate on bearing children. In contrast the contemporary pseudo-historic position is characterised by euphemistic, ambiguous and evasive language. The wording is carefully chosen to make what is culturally unacceptable sound acceptable. In politics making bad news sound good is called putting a 'spin' on things. The writers of *Women in the Church* are 'spin doctors' in this sense. We have already noticed this phenomenon in the use of the word 'role'. There are other words used like this; a classic example which we will consider in a moment is the word 'difference'. The more common manifestation of what we are talking about is, however, seen, in the phraseology. For example, instead of saying women are not to teach because they are more prone to sin, we are told that they are not to teach in church because 'they are less likely to draw the line on doctrinal non-negotiables'<sup>36</sup> Instead of saying men are to lead in the church and the home, Yarbrough says, 'men must bear a few strategic burdens that women normally do not'. We have mentioned many other examples in passing in earlier parts of this essay. This language is used not to elucidate the facts, or to clearly set out arguments which can be proved or disproved, but to further the cause being pursued and to make their arguments sound innocuous and socially acceptable. If this is the case then what we have here is the language of ideology.<sup>37</sup> This suggestion is supported by the fact that nothing said in refutation of those who use this language is ever considered.<sup>38</sup> Counter arguments or rebuttals are ignored, stigmatised, or emotively dismissed. This is done because behind this debate lie two

36 *Women*, 145.

37 On the meaning and use of this term see J. Plamenatz (*Ideology*, London:Macmillan, 1970). The word can be used simply to refer to a set of beliefs or ideas characteristic of a given group. I use it in a more developed sense to refer to socially generated beliefs or ideas which further the goals of an elite, usually at the expense of some other group. Plamenatz says ideology in this sense creates the 'illusion' that the position advocated is rationally and factually based.

38 I speak from twenty years of experience in debating these issues with my fellow graduates of Moore College, Sydney.

underlying and intertwined concerns which are primary. The first and most powerful is a desire to defend the doctrine of an inerrant Bible conveying timeless, transcultural truth which, it is thought, gives special 'role' responsibilities to men, from which women are excluded. If it were allowed that the seemingly explicit comments of 1 Tim. 2:11–12 did not apply today then, it is reasoned, this view of the Bible would be overthrown. The second hidden, and usually vehemently denied, agenda is that of male hegemony—the right of men to run the show. Like the old 'Biblical Theology' endorsing slavery, and the biblical case for apartheid developed by South African Reformed theologians, this theology is self-serving. It is 'theology' written by an elite who want to maintain their privileges. When an argument is controlled by other agendas than the one on the table, it is not surprising that language is distorted, evidence is ignored and logic goes out the door. My claim that ideology rules in the conservative evangelical debate about women is not an unfair one to make. Harold Brown in *Women in the Church*, virtually says this himself. He maintains that hidden 'pre-suppositions', not 'exegetical assertions', determine the conclusions reached on this matter.<sup>39</sup>

When this debate began in earnest in the early 70s the two sides were happy to call themselves 'egalitarians' and 'hierarchalists'. These terms made clear the positions the protagonists were taking. In more recent times hierarchalists have rejected this description of their position, preferring instead terms and phrases which further their cause by sounding positive. They now want to be known as 'complementarians'<sup>40</sup> or holders of the 'historic' position. We have discovered that in fact they are not advocating any historic position and we should see that the term 'complementarian' does not on its own truly describe their position. The word is chosen not to make clear the stance they take, but because it sounds so positive. The truth of the matter is that both sides in this debate are complementarians. I know of no one who is arguing for 'total sexual equivalence', despite Harold O. J. Brown's emotive claim.<sup>41</sup> The debate is between those who want men and women to complement each other by standing side by side in the home, the church and the state and those who want men and women to complement one another with the men standing above the women. The contrast is thus between hierarchical complementarians and egalitarian complementarians. Honesty demands that this be acknowledged.

39 *Women*, 197.

40 This is Doriani's favoured term and the one advocated throughout in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

41 *Women*, 200.

Now we come to the word 'difference'. In the truly historic case for women's subordination much was said about the inferiority of women. Indeed, it would be true to say that the word 'inferior' was the key term for older commentators. In the modern case the key term is 'difference'. Those who call themselves 'complementarians' tell us: 'We are only arguing that the Bible teaches the *difference* between the sexes. Women are not inferior, they are *equal but different*'. The language of difference is used to avoid more problematic terminology and to attack those who reject the hierarchical case. The affirmation that men and women are different cannot be denied. The Bible clearly teaches that God has made us men and women and it is obvious that the differences between men and women are multifaceted, despite the more profound equality we share as joint bearers of the image and likeness of God. I have never heard or read any Christian who denies that God made us men and women. Differences between the sexes are not disputed by egalitarians. Nevertheless, in *Women in the Church* and parallel literature, egalitarians are stridently attacked for denying the differences between the sexes. This suggests that there must be some particular aspect of difference about which the two sides disagree. It is obvious what this is. One side argues that men and women should be granted freedom to exercise God-given gifts, including the gift of leadership, in all areas of life; the other side argues that women must not be allowed to exercise leadership in the church and the home. It is only on this 'difference' that the two sides part company. What is being contested is not that there are wide ranging differences between the sexes, but that because God has made men and women differently women must not lead in the church or the home—and this is an unchanging principle. In other words women are to be subordinated to men. If this is the case, why not say this directly? Clarity of language always makes for clarity of argument. The fact that what is actually meant is deliberately concealed by the choice of the word difference suggests once again that language is being used ideologically for a political end, the rule of men in the church and the home.

Egalitarian evangelicals do not deny God-given differences between the sexes, but they should be cautious about the language of difference because in the history of ideas those who have spoken most about the difference between people of one country and another, or between one class and another, or between one race and another, have used this term to enhance their own privileges and power at the expense of those less privileged and powerful. In other words, the word 'difference' in such debates is invariably used by the party who has most to gain by defining themselves in a way that will further or uphold their position. Thus when a white supremacist says, 'We whites are different to blacks', he is cryptically claiming that whites are in some way

superior to blacks. Those who are working for justice for the oppressed and equality of consideration, in contrast, emphasise likeness or similarity.

Then there is the problem that this theology/theory of profound differences between men and women does not fit the facts. It is true that there are statistically significant differences between the sexes. For example, most men are stronger than most women. What is not true is that all men are stronger than all women.<sup>42</sup> This means that even if it could be shown that *most* men are better suited to be leaders, theologians, teachers or pastors than *most* women, it would not follow that *all* women are not equipped to do these things. There are not only differences between the sexes but also profound differences among each of the sexes. The whole idea that women are not made by God to lead is a culturally conditioned, androcentric premise which has been invalidated by the realities of modern life. If God has actually denied women the ability to be leaders and exercise authority, how is it that women can be so effective as queens, prime ministers, judges, doctors, business executives and even ordained ministers? Paradoxically, modern studies on sexual differences show that most women have better communication skills than most men, and most women are better at relating to other people than most men, the two gifts which more than anything else make for good pastor-teachers. If this is so, then perhaps God's revelation in nature, which never contradicts his revelation in Scripture, is suggesting that the old case for the permanent subordination of women is mistaken.

This deliberate use of ambiguous and misleading language by contemporary hierarchalists is the third pillar which supports their novel case. The problem with this pillar is that when it is examined we find it has no substance. Like the other pillars it cannot bear the weight placed on it. The language used to further the cause of women's permanent subordination only makes sense to those inside this building supported by this illusionary pillar. It is not a language which makes sense to those outside. As a result we have contemporary hierarchalists writing books which they think are conclusive proof of their position, while others, who do not hold their views, think that they are utter nonsense. If hierarchalists are going to make a single convert to their cause, they will have to use language which communicates with those with whom they differ.

What we must conclude therefore is that although *Women in the Church* claims to be basically an exegetical study with supporting arguments, it is in reality a highly developed theological/ideological case

42 For a good, readable introduction to the scholarly study of the statistical differences between men and women see A. Moir and D. Jessel, *Brain-Sex: The Real Difference Between Men and Women* (London: Mandarin, 1989).

for the permanent subordination of women grounded on an insupportable and novel reading of 1 Tim. 2:11-15.

### Evangelical theology: is it based on proof-texts or on Biblical Theology?

One final major criticism of *Women in the Church* must be made. The authors of this book are dismissive of those who make one verse, Gal. 3:28, the key to understanding what Christians should believe about the sexes. Yet they themselves arbitrarily chose just one text, 1 Tim. 2:9-15, to arrive at their dogmatic answer. I would suggest that, whichever text is chosen, both approaches are profoundly flawed. Sound evangelical theology cannot be built by 'proof-texting'. Making 1 Tim. 2:11-15 the key to understanding what the Scriptures teach about women and the narrow lens through which the whole Bible is read on this matter distorts the overall picture. It is not a valid methodological approach. Parallels would be to make James 2:18-26 the focal point to begin working out a doctrine of justification, or Revelation 20:1-10 the commencement point for a study of eschatology, or Acts 8:4-25 the foundation for a theology of Spirit reception. To capture the overall drift of Scripture on any matter we need to listen to the whole, and take into account the passages of Scripture those with whom we differ think are important. The history of the church tells us that when this is not done Christians invariably fall into theological error.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the late Oscar Cullmann argued that 'the fountainhead of all false biblical interpretation and all heresy is invariably the isolation and absolutising of one single passage.'<sup>44</sup>

No contemporary biblical scholar on any other matter would dare to suggest that just one text in one strand of the apostolic tradition, read as a proof-text, could disclose 'what the Bible teaches'. Critical study of the Bible, which evangelicals embrace, has underlined the diversity of Scripture. The Bible is not uniform in its teaching about the status and ministry of women, or on any other important issue.<sup>45</sup> Today we do not even speak of what the Gospels teach. Instead we study the differing

43 I give examples in *Created Woman*, 63-70.

44 *The State in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1963), 46.

45 See the important appendix, 'Unity and Diversity in the New Testament', by David Wenham in G. E. Ladd, *The Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 684-719. See also Giles, *Created Woman*, 63-70. By far the best critical evangelical study, which recognises the diversity within the New Testament in what it says about women, is B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988). This book is cited once in a footnote in *Women in the Church*, and twice in footnotes in the 566 pages of *Recovering Biblical Manhood*. I will be convinced that the authors of such books are serious about their quest to understand what the Bible says about women when they seriously interact with scholarly studies such as this.

insights of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I can think of no important Christian doctrine where there are not texts in tension, and if only part of the evidence is given the overall teaching of the Bible is not heard.

If our aim is to discover what the Bible says about the sexes, a far better point to begin than either Gal. 3:28 or 1 Tim. 2:11–14 is Gen. 1:27–28. This is the canonical introduction to this whole matter. Here we are told that man and woman are equally created in the image and likeness of God and to both God gives authority over the earth. The picturesque and highly symbolic story which follows in Gen. 2 is to be read in the light of the prior defining statement. The alone Adam is helpless, inadequate. Only when God differentiates the sexes is sexual identity realised and a community between equals possible. (It is to be remembered that a New Testament interpretation of an Old Testament text or story does not determine the interpretation of the Old Testament text or story in its original context.)<sup>46</sup> With Luther we would agree that women's subordinate status is introduced as a consequence of the Fall. It is first mentioned in Gen. 3:16. This is not an interpretation to be lightly dismissed. The modern day Roman Catholic Church takes exactly the same position. Women's subordination is part of the fallen order which Christ overcame.<sup>47</sup>

In the New Testament the teaching and example of Jesus is the commencement point. Although we should not set the Gospels over the epistles there is a case for beginning any holistic thematic study of the New Testament with the words and works of Jesus. It is he who is the teacher of teachers and the Lord of the church. Jesus says not one word about the subordination of women<sup>48</sup> and he says and does much to suggest the opposite.

Next we should turn to Paul's theology and practice of ministry so clearly enunciated in his earlier epistles. Paul's *theology* of ministry, as exemplified in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, has God giving gifts of ministry to men and women irrespective of their sexual identity. Paul's *practice* of ministry equates with his theology of ministry. He accepts

46 Thus, for example, Paul's interpretation of the Hagar story in Gal. 4:21–31 does not determine the historical meaning of Gen. 16, and his interpretation of the Exodus crossing of the Red Sea in 1 Cor. 10:1–2 does not determine the meaning of this story in the book of Exodus. In the New Testament sometimes the one Old Testament story, such as that of Abraham, can be interpreted in more than one way (see Rom. 4:1–25 and James 3:18–26).

47 See John Paul II, *On the Dignity of Women*, (Homebush: St Paul, 1988), 32–46. In this exposition of the biblical teaching on women Genesis 1 is assumed to be the starting point and the teaching of Jesus the ultimate test of any thing said on the status and dignity of women. Woman's subordination is explicitly grounded on the Fall.

48 Appeal to the mute historical fact that the twelve apostles were all men proves nothing, as has been pointed out *ad nauseam*.

that the foremost gift of being an apostle,<sup>49</sup> and the second most important and authoritative gift, that of being a prophet, may be given to women, as well as many other ministries.<sup>50</sup> It defies imagination to think that none of these women leaders ever taught when the little house churches of the first century met. After this, passages seeming to be in tension with what is foundational, may be considered. The exhortations to women and slaves which are in parallel raise few problems. Both are to be seen as practical advice to people living in the first century when slavery and patriarchy prevailed, which no longer apply. When Paul speaks of the husband as the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23), he is seeking to transform the patriarchal understanding of what the leadership of the husband entailed. In the development of his argument it is hard to see how self-sacrificing, *agape*-love in the husband differs from subordination in the wife, which suggests that v. 21, where mutual subordination is demanded, is the key to the whole of what Paul says in this passage. The three remaining problematic texts are all specific rulings dealing with specific problems. When women lead in prayer and prophecy in church they are to have their heads covered (1 Cor. 11:2–16);<sup>51</sup> when women disrupt church services by asking questions they are to keep silent (1 Cor. 14: 34–35),<sup>52</sup> and for some reason at Ephesus,<sup>53</sup> women are asked to desist from teaching and to accept the cultural norms of that day which assumed the leadership of men. These regulative instructions, all addressing specific first century problems, are not to be universalised. It is theologically erroneous to allow regulative comments to triumph over normative, theological statements and common practice.

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- 49 I was very interested to note that Douglas Moo in his excellent, commentary, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 921–924, concludes that almost certainly Junia is a woman apostle. To then argue that because Junia is a woman she is a lesser apostle is not very convincing. Is she not to be numbered with those whom Paul says are, 'first in the church'?
- 50 The repeated attempts by hierarchalists to make prophecy a non-authoritative proclamation are not convincing. Setting prophecy and teaching in contrast is very difficult. Luke quite explicitly calls a wide range of authoritative proclamation 'prophecy'. He even calls the leaders of the church at Antioch 'prophets and teachers'—one ministry (Acts 13: 2). See Giles, 'Prophecy'.
- 51 In this text women leading the church in verbal communication is actually commended! What is more in this passage Paul expressly says God has given authority to women to minister in the church (v. 10). In *Biblical Manhood*, 135–136, Schreiner gives seven reasons why what Paul says explicitly about women having authority to minister cannot mean what the words say!
- 52 I assume for the sake of this argument that this text is authentic, but I am convinced that it is not. For the very strong case against authenticity see G. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994), 272–281; P. B. Payne, 'Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor. 14:34–35', *NTS* 41 (1995), 240–62.
- 53 See below for possible reasons why Paul made this unique prohibition.

Reading the biblical teaching on the sexes within the framework just outlined makes much more sense of the data than beginning with 1 Tim. 2:11–14 and trying to force all the other data to fit. When the Bible is read, as I have suggested, a Biblical theology, or theological paradigm, can be constructed which produces a picture that corresponds with the teaching of Jesus on women and with Paul's theology of ministry and practice as set out in his major writings. The alternative paradigm seen in *Women in the Church*, and similar publications, contradicts Paul's own view of ministry and worst of all subordinates women to men in direct contradiction of the teaching and example of Jesus.

### The contextual interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15

In the 60s when the debate about the status and ministry of women began in earnest, evangelicals could see only three options in dealing with texts that spoke of the subordination of women: accept that the Bible permanently subordinates women to men; reject the authority of the Bible and leave the evangelical fold; or seek a new interpretation of the key texts quoted to oppose women's emancipation in the home and the church. Each of these possibilities found a following. Evangelicals were limited to these options because their doctrine of Scripture, inherited from the great theologians of old Princeton, depicted the Scriptures as a collection of permanently-binding, transcultural propositions. In the 90s there is a fourth option. We may now argue with a clear conscience that a text such as 1 Tim. 2:9–15 does not apply in our age. It is context-specific and need not be obeyed by Christians today. This fourth option has arisen because in the same period that evangelicals were rethinking their understanding of women they were rethinking their doctrine of Scripture in the light of the discussion about hermeneutics. What the study of hermeneutics has made plain is that when the historical and cultural context changes what was once said will not be heard in the same way at another time, and in some cases what was said in one context will not apply in another.<sup>54</sup> This means that in seeking to hear what Scripture says on any matter two questions have to be asked of every text: what do these words mean in their historical context, and how does what is said apply in our very different historical context?

The authors of *Women in the Church* are aware that these two questions now have to be asked of any text, but, when it comes to the debate about women, it seems that they find it almost impossible to conceive

<sup>54</sup> Moises Silva of Westminster Seminary says in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, ed., M. Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 75, that nowadays 'even the most conservative Christians recognise that at least some commands of scripture cannot or need not be applied in our day'.

that the apostolic exhortations to wives to be subordinate, or women in general to be silent in church, may not apply one for one in our age. The two least convincing chapters in this book are the ones by Gordon and Yarbrough which are supposed to give reasons why what 1 Tim. 2:9-14 says should still govern church life today. They fail to engage in any meaningful way with the modern debate about hermeneutics. Instead they base their whole case on the claim that what 1 Tim. 2:11-12 demands is grounded on 'the entire created and fallen order' which they maintain is permanently binding and transcultural. On this premise the historical and cultural context in which these words were spoken is not seen as the key to the interpretation of the passage. The paragraph is interpreted as if it stood in a historical and cultural vacuum. What they want their readers to believe is that there are only two choices open to evangelicals: obey what we tell you this text means, or cease claiming to be evangelical. We have shown that this argument is profoundly flawed. Their whole case rests on the premise that the prohibition on women teaching and holding authority is based on an unchanging constitutive order of creation and sin. No one until recent times has ever claimed this and such a claim contradicts the overall drift of Scripture. Once this is noted, the possibility of reading this text in other ways becomes an option. I give two examples which may be taken as complementary. In contrast to the authentic historical and the pseudo-historical interpretative traditions which tend to ignore the historical and cultural contexts of 1 Timothy chapter 2 these readings make these the key to the interpretation of this passage.

1. Paul commands women not to teach in church or exercise authority because certain women were teaching heresy. This double prohibition speaks explicitly to this problem. The evidence for this is as follows. The main reason why Paul wrote to Timothy was to strengthen him in his resolve to eradicate the heresy undermining the church at Ephesus. Whatever the exact nature of this heresy one thing is clear. It involved women. The heretics had 'gained control over weak-willed women' (2 Tim. 3:6), leading them to 'follow Satan' (1 Tim. 5:15), and to forsake marriage (1 Tim. 4:3). As a result they 'were saying things they ought not to' (1 Tim. 5:13). It is in the light of this that both 1 Tim. 2:9-16 and 5:3-16 must be understood. In countering this heresy Paul insists that widows under sixty should marry, have children and concentrate on managing their homes (5:14). In another context, when writing to the Corinthians, he advises widows to do exactly the opposite (1 Cor. 7:40). In 1 Timothy 2, again addressing the particular problems in Ephesus, Paul tells women to dress modestly, to concentrate on good deeds, to desist from teaching or exercise authority in the church and to give themselves to bearing children. This advice also contradicts his normal practice. For at least ten years women had been free to

teach in the Ephesian church. In the more than two years Paul spent in Ephesus (Acts 19:8,10), he obviously had not indicated that women should not teach or exercise authority in the church. As was his custom elsewhere (Rom. 16:1, 3–5,6,7; 1 Cor. 11:5; Phil. 4:2–3 etc), we may presume that Paul encouraged the ministry of women in the life of the church at Ephesus. It was only when the behaviour of some women threatened the wellbeing of the church that Paul gave these exceptional rulings. Against this backdrop the force of the unusual verb *αὐθεντέω* in v. 12, found nowhere else in the New Testament, is to be understood. It seems plausible to argue that the use of this exceptional word suggests an exceptional problem. Whether or not this verb implies an improper use of authority scholars are divided. The jury is still out. Köstenberger argues that, as *οὐδέ* usually links two positive or two negative ideas, this verb has to be understood positively, as the teaching prohibited must be ordinary teaching which was acceptable when given by men. This argument can, however, be reversed. If the Pastorals' concern about what some women were saying may imply that they were giving false teaching, then this negative view of their teaching suggests a negative meaning for the verb *αὐθεντέω*.

Within this framework of interpretation the following two reasons as to why women should not teach or exercise authority raise few problems. If anything, they support a contextually limited understanding of Paul's double command. Paul first of all reminds the women that, 'Adam was created first then Eve'. He draws no deductions whatsoever from this point. To argue that this therefore means women are inferior, or have been given distinctive roles, is to read our presuppositions into the text. At the most these words suggests nothing but a gentle reminder to the women not to overstep their freedoms so as to cause offence. Next he says, 'And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor'. This comment rather than suggesting a permanently-binding, transcultural rule points rather to a particular problem, namely that some women had been deceived like Eve. It supports very strongly the view that v. 12 is addressed specifically to women who are teaching error. If this is the reason why Paul commands women not to teach or exercise authority in the church then what he says is not a permanently-binding, transcultural prohibition on the public ministry of women. In another context at another time it does not apply.

2. There are also indicators that the Greco-Roman cultural setting in which the Pastorals are to be placed is determinative for the interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:9–15. I am in perfect agreement with S. M. Baugh's description of life in Ephesus.<sup>55</sup> Patriarchy was unquestioned.

55 *Women*, 49.

Men were the leaders in the government, in religion and in the home. Public life was the domain of men and the home was the domain of women. What is so disappointing is that his co-contributors in *Women in the Church* virtually ignore his findings and interpret 1 Tim. 2:9-15 as if it were set in an historical and cultural vacuum. Against the backdrop Baugh draws, the early Paul appears somewhat of a radical in his attitudes to women. In his earliest epistles Paul majors on the equality of the sexes and encourages their ministry in the life of the church. Like Jesus he was, as far as was possible at that time, counter-cultural in his affirmation of women. Nevertheless the apostle had to ensure that the Gospel was not brought into disrepute by the freedoms Christian women enjoyed. In writing to the Corinthians he asked the women leading in church to follow cultural norms and cover their heads so as not to cause offence (1 Cor. 11:2-16). Later in his ministry he introduced rules for the good ordering of the extended patriarchal household in which he asked wives to be subordinate to their husbands, slaves to obey their masters and children to obey their parents (Col. 3:18-4:1, Eph. 5:21-6:9). Finally, in the Pastorals he virtually abandons his egalitarian ideals because of the criticism of outsiders. His main agenda at this late point in his ministry was the good standing of the church within the conservative, Greco-Roman society. He does not want hostile unbelievers to view the church as a radical egalitarian movement undermining the good order of the extended patriarchal household. Thus he says, 'I am writing these instructions that you may know how to behave in the household of God' (1 Tim. 3:14-15). Bishops, 'must be well thought of by outsiders' (1 Tim. 3:7 and similarly Tit. 1:6-8). Young widows are to marry so as 'not to give the enemy an occasion to revile us' (1 Tim. 5:14). Slaves are to honour their masters so that 'the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed' (1 Tim. 6:1; Tit. 2:10). Wives are to subordinate themselves to their husbands, 'that the word of God not be discredited' (Tit. 2:5). This same agenda seems to govern all of 1 Timothy chapter 2. Before asking women to desist from teaching in church, as had been their custom for many years, Paul prefaces this command by asking the Ephesian Christians to 'lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our saviour who desires all persons to be saved' (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Then he asks men to be prayerful and not quarrelsome and the women to be prayerful, modestly dressed, to cease teaching or exercising authority in church. They should rather concentrate on bearing children.

If this is the background to 1 Tim. 2:11-12, then what it says is not to be understood as a permanently-binding, transcultural prohibition on women in public ministry. Paul asks the Ephesian women not to teach or exercise authority over men in church because he fears that the

Gospel will be brought into disrepute if they continue to exercise the freedoms they had enjoyed. He wants them to conform to the cultural norms of that age so as not to cause offence to outsiders. In our age subordinating women to men in the church brings the Gospel into disrepute in the world at large. Our changed culture demands the exact opposite application of what was originally prescribed, if we are to be faithful to Scripture!

These two context-specific interpretations can be taken as alternatives or combined. I suspect both concerns lie behind the prohibitions. The problems raised by women giving erroneous teaching and the growing criticism of the freedom of Christian women led Paul to forbid altogether the public ministry of women at Ephesus, which he had encouraged earlier and allowed elsewhere.

This contextual interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:9–16 is to be preferred simply because it makes most sense of the double prohibition in its historical setting. It is also to be preferred for at least two other reasons. Firstly, because on this interpretation what it says can be integrated into the larger, more positive attitude to women's ministry seen in the New Testament taken as a whole, and secondly because it is not demeaning of women in general.<sup>56</sup> No amount of clever 'spin' can overcome the fact that *Women in the Church* is a case for the permanent subordination of women and this implies their inferiority. On this premise women are unjustly discriminated against. In judging any interpretation of 1 Timothy chapter 2 the ethical outcomes must not be ignored. Reformed theologians in the Old South and in South Africa were guilty of this oversight and we now condemn them.<sup>57</sup>

### Conclusion

What we have then, if we combine our two contextual readings of the 1 Timothy passage, is three interpretative traditions. We have first of all the historic view that women are to keep silent and not to exercise

56 R. Lundin, A. Thiselton and C. Walhout, in *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 9, argue that in hermeneutics 'no less fundamental than the question of truth is the question of ethics'. What is a stake in interpretation, they argue, is not only the truth of one's conclusions but how these conclusions impact on our behaviour and that of others. If this were not the case, they say, we would care little about how anyone interpreted the Bible. Interpretations of Biblical texts are given to further the ethical ends of the theologian and to reinforce or question the behaviour of the community to which he/she belongs.

57 I adamantly disagree with the authors of *Women in the Church* when they depict women's liberation as a terrible evil. I think that women are ennobled by giving them the same opportunities in education as men, the same opportunities to enter the work force and to gain promotion as men, the same opportunities to end a destructive marriage as men, the same opportunities to give leadership and preach in church as men and the ability to control their own fertility.

authority because God has made them inferior to men. This view reigned for 1900 years and perfectly reflected the patriarchal cultural and androcentric world view of its proponents. Then we have the two post-60s altogether new interpretations. One argues that men and women are equal although God has given them different roles. On this basis women are excluded from teaching in church and from exercising authority in the church and the home. This is a role preserved for men. It is a permanent and transcultural ruling based on the constitutive order of creation. The other interpretative tradition argues that the Biblical ideal is equality of consideration and equality of opportunity to use God-given gifts which may include teaching and exercising authority by women. The double prohibition on women teaching or exercising authority in church and the exhortations that wives be subordinate to their husbands are historically and culturally limited to the context in which they were addressed. They are not binding on Christians today. These *two* contrasting positions reflect the changed cultural context of our age where it is no longer believed that women are inferior to men.

We can agree that the authentic historic position missed much of what was said in the Bible about the equality of the sexes and it allowed cultural presuppositions to determine the meaning of certain texts. For these reasons we may reject it. This means we must chose between the two contemporary interpretative traditions which have both evolved and been refined in the last thirty years. In making our choice we should ask which one most faithfully grasps the overall drift of Scripture, making sense of all the parts, which one is logically most consistent and which one is most ethically sound. In this lengthy two-part essay I have given some new information to help us arrive at the answer. You will be in no doubt as to which position I think wins on all the above criteria.

### Abstract

In this second part of a two-part article the author offers a critique of the influential book *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* and proposes that the arguments from the creation orders and the 'role' of women and the use of language are different from those of the historic position and are unsound. He maintains that evangelical theology must be based on biblical teaching and theology as a whole rather than on proof-texts interpreted without proper reference to their context in a specific cultural situation. On this basis he outlines an alternative interpretation of the key passage.