

Women in Church Office

By Rev. R. Cammenga

“Whatever hypocrites or wise men of the world may think, God is better pleased with a woman who considers the condition God has assigned to her as a calling and submits to it, not refusing to bear the distaste of (cooking) food, the illness, the difficulty, or rather the fearful anguish associated with childbirth or anything else that is her duty - God is better pleased with her than if she were to make some great display of heroic virtues and refuse to accept the vocation given her by God.” John Calvin on I Timothy 2:15

“A woman undertakes no small share of the whole administration, being the keeper of the house. And without her not even political affairs could be properly conducted. For if their domestic concerns were in a state of confusion and disorder, those who are engaged in public affairs would be kept at home, and political business would be ill managed. So that neither in those matters, as neither in spiritual, is she inferior.” John Chrysostom

“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” I Timothy 2:11, 12, 15

Introduction

A Live Issue:

To say that the subject of this pamphlet is a live issue in the church world of our day is to state the obvious. Certainly the role of the woman is a much discussed issue in the world at large, and especially in modern Western society. We live in the day of women's liberation, women's rights, and the feminist movement. Women are clamoring for equality with men and are seeking fulfillment not in the home and not in raising a family, but in the professions and careers traditionally occupied by men. The women's movement has become highly organized, a political force to be reckoned with. An organization such as NOW (national Organization for Women) is devoted to political action and the spreading of propaganda on behalf of the women's rights movement. All across our country organizations traditionally open only to men, from high school soccer teams to the Jaycees, are being pressured to admit women.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there is also a parallel movement in the churches pushing for the admittance of women into the special offices, the offices, of minister, elder, and deacon. The general assemblies and synods of the churches have been very busy with this question in the last few years, and from the look of things will continue to be occupied with the issue for some time to come. The theological journals and church magazines carry many articles, both pro and con, on the question. Many books have been written on the subject. Women are enrolling in increasing numbers in the seminaries. And many churches, some with and some without the approval of the broader assemblies, are actively ordaining women into the offices.

A Misconception and Misrepresentation:

In this pamphlet we want to consider the question of women in church office. At the outset, we want to clear up a common misconception and misrepresentation. Often the two sides of this issue are divided into those who are “for” women and those who are “against” women. The position “for” women means that women can do anything men can do, may hold any office that men may hold. All possible distinctions are to be erased. The position “against” women means that women are not allowed to do all that men do, are not allowed to hold every office that men hold, and are called to be in submission to the man in the home and in the church.

At best this is a serious misconception; at worst it is a deliberate and malicious misrepresentation. It is our conviction that the Bible does not allow the woman to hold every office that the man holds and that the woman is called to be in submission to the man in the home and in the church. But this is not a position “against” women, but

a position “for” women, really the only position “for” the women. The Bible is “for” women, that is, the Bible has the woman’s own best interests in view and prescribes what is best for the woman herself. Exactly because the church is motivated by the good of the women themselves, the church must be committed to adhere to the Bible’s teaching on the question of women in office.

The Important Place Women Have in God’s Church

Women in the First Century Church:

The bible prescribes a large and important place for women in God’s church.

This is plain, first of all, from Jesus’ relationship with several women. Jesus was interested in and took the time to minister to the needs of women. Not once did Jesus treat women in a demeaning way or regard them as inferior. He cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene. He preached the gospel to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. He defended and forgave the woman taken in adultery. He raised the son of the widow of Nain, and freed the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman from a devil. Several women were especially close to Jesus and enjoyed a warm, personal relationship with the Savior. The most prominent of these were Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, and Mary Magdalene. The women were, strikingly, the last to leave the scene of Jesus’ crucifixion and were the first ones to whom the gospel of the resurrection was preached. The Savior, however, called none of these women to be part of His twelve disciples, nor did He later send any of them out as apostles.

This same large place was given to women in the early church. There were several women among the 120 disciples in the upper room when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. We read often of the women in the church in the book of Acts. Several women served both the apostles and the people of God. There was Dorcas, or Tabitha, who was raised from the dead by Peter, concerning whom we read that she was “full of good works and almsdeeds” (Acts 9:36). The first convert of the apostle Paul at Philippi was Lydia, the seller of purple. Paul remembered young Timothy’s unfeigned faith, which dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and in his mother Eunice. From these Godly women, Timothy had first learned the Scriptures (II Tim. 1:1-5). Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, was a great help to the apostle Paul in his missionary labors.

One certainly cannot accuse the apostles of mistreating women, or of ignoring women, or of allowing women no place in the life of the church. They honored the women and spoke highly of them. They valued their services and encouraged and commended them highly. But the apostles did not ordain women into the offices of minister, elder, or deacon. These women assisted the apostles, cared for the poor, instructed the younger women, kept their homes, and reared their children in the fear of God, but they did not preach, they did not sit in the elders’ bench, and they did not serve in the office of deacon.

Equal in Essence, Different in Roles

This important and large place which the Scriptures give to women is in keeping with the Scripture’s teaching on the equality of the woman with the man. The Scripture’s teaching that the woman is to be in submission to the man and that the woman is “the weaker vessel” does not take away from a certain equality of man and woman.

This indicates that the whole question of women in office is not a question of the woman’s equality with man. Equality and difference of role are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are two aspects of Scripture’s teaching on this issue.

There is a certain biblical equality of the woman with the man. The creation account of Adam and Eve already brings this out: both man and woman are created in God’s image (Gen 1:27). God’s command to exercise dominion over the creation comes to both the man and the woman according to Genesis 1:28. The fact is that in the very passages in the New Testament which teach the headship of the man over the woman there always appears a statement about their equality and mutual dependence. The Scriptures are very emphatic that the headship of man does not justify a harsh, tyrannical, domineering rule over the woman. So we read in I Corinthians 11:11, 12

“Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.” The man is out of the woman, depends upon the woman, is called to live all his life through the woman. In I Peter 3:7 the apostle exhorts, “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers are not hindered.” Men and women are “fellow heirs” of God’s grace and of eternal life.

The Scriptures teach that men and women are equally involved in ruin. Men and women stand equally in need of salvation. Jesus Christ is the Savior alike of women and men. Both men and women possess the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, and therefore equally share in the office of all-believer, the office of prophet, priest and king. As Joel had prophesied, the Spirit was poured out not only upon Israel’s sons, but also upon her daughters (Joel 2:28, 29).

The Biblical Prohibition of Women in Office

Although all of this is true, the Bible forbids women to occupy the special offices in the church. Any fair and honest treatment of the biblical material can yield no other conclusions, as the church up until recent times has maintained. What is the biblical material?

In the Old Testament:

First of all, the history of the Old Testament reveals very clearly God’s will that the leadership and offices in His church be taken up by men. The leadership roles in the Old Testament were consistently assigned by God to men. Noah was called by God to build the ark and lead the church out of the old world and into the new world after the Flood. It was the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s twelve sons who led the church in the period after the Flood. It was Moses who was called by God to deliver Israel out of Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land. And it was Joshua who was appointed by God to bring the children of Israel into the land of Canaan.

In the Old Testament God assigned the office of the priesthood to Aaron and the male members of his family. Not one woman was ever called to the priesthood. There were also elders throughout the Old Testament and right into the New Testament, but there is no mention ever made of a woman being among the elders of any city in Old Testament Israel. Neither did a woman ever occupy the throne in Israel, except the godless usurper Athaliah, who was eventually killed by order of the God-fearing priest Jehoiada.

In the New Testament: This male leadership of the church continued into the early New Testament. The Lord Jesus called twelve men, not six men and six women, to be His disciples. Peter, led by the Spirit, called the 120 believers in Acts 1:21 to choose “one of these men which have companied us” to take the place of Judas Iscariot. The Spirit led the church, according to the first part of Acts 6, to appoint seven men of good report to be the first to occupy the office of deacon. The Jerusalem council, recorded in Acts 15, was an all male church council, and the decision of the council was to appoint “leading men” to go with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to inform the church there of the council’s decisions.

The New Testament Scripture teaches that men occupy the special offices. This is plain from the passages which speak of the qualifications of officebearers (I Tim. 3; Tit. 1). These passages speak very clearly of men, not women, as elders and deacons in the church. Among the qualifications listed is that the officebearers must be the husband of one wife. These passages expressly do not say the wife of one husband. There simply was no question in the mind of the apostle or in the mind of the early church concerning God’s will. Men should be the ministers, elders, and deacons of the church.

Besides this, there are especially two passages of the New Testament that expressly forbid women to occupy the offices. I Corinthians 14:34, 35 is the first of these passage: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”

This passage is so utterly plain that its explanation should be obvious to anyone who is able to read the English language. The apostle calls the women to keep silence in the church. That does not mean that women may not talk inside a church building. That women are not allowed to speak means that they are not allowed to speak in the sense of preaching or teaching in God's church. The official ministering of the Word of God, which is not simply the work of the minister but of the elders and deacons too, is forbidden to women.

The second passage is I Timothy 2:11, 12: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, not to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." The apostle is speaking in this passage of the public worship services of the church. According to I Timothy 3:15, the first epistle to Timothy concerns proper behavior in the house of God, the church of God. Do not teach. For a woman to teach in church is improper behavior in God's house. The women are not absolutely forbidden to teach. They may, and they must, teach their children at home. They may stand in the place of the parent in the Christian school and teach the covenant children. They must teach in the sense of speaking and witnessing to all those with whom they come in to contact day by day. They may teach Sunday School and teach one another in the Bible study societies of the church. In Titus 2:4, 5 Paul calls the older women to teach the younger women to be good wives and mothers. But they may not teach in the church. The woman is forbidden to occupy the pulpit and to preach.

More than this, Paul forbids them "to usurp authority over the man." The woman does not occupy the office of ruling elder. A woman who does this is a "usurper," that is, she acts on her own authority, not the authority of God.

Rather, the woman is to learn in silence. She is to learn. She is to grow in the knowledge and understanding of God's Word. But she is to do this in silence. That does not mean without talking. Literally, the apostle says "in quietness," that is, tending to her own affairs and in her own God-given place, not intruding into affairs which God has assigned to the men of the church.

She is to do this "with all subjection." Subjection is obedience. "All" subjection is total obedience.

The ground or reason for the apostle's teaching here is twofold. First of all, as in I Timothy 2:13, the apostle appeals to creation: "For Adam was first formed, and then Eve." God created Adam first, and then He made Eve. And not only was Adam made by God before the woman, but the woman was made out of and for the man. In I Corinthians 11:8, 9 the apostle says, "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man."

And secondly, Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was found in the transgression (I Tim. 2:14). Now that does not mean that Adam did not sin and did not fall. We know better. Adam, however, was not deceived in the way in which the woman was deceived. The woman was deceived first, and the woman was utterly and thoroughly deceived. She took the lead in the fall. She was the one who talked to the serpent, was deceived by the serpent's temptation. She became the occasion for Adam to fall. She usurped to herself authority that had not been given to her. This played a crucial role in the original fall of the race. As a consequence, she shall not teach, nor usurp authority over the man, but be in silence.

An Examination of Arguments for Ordination of Women

In spite of this clear teaching of Scripture which forbids women to occupy the church office, the proponents of women in office put forward several arguments to overthrow this teaching of Scripture and to support their position that the church must open up the offices to women. We ought to examine the outstanding arguments of those who are seeking the ordination of women.

The First Argument:

There is, first of all, the argument that appeals to certain women in the Old Testament who occupied the office of prophet. The Old Testament does speak of three prophetesses: Miriam, Moses' sister, Deborah, who was both a prophet and a judge; and Hulda.

Three things are worthy of note, however. First, these are the only recorded exceptions in the whole of the Old Testament to the obvious general rule that men were to occupy the offices. Secondly, in two of the three cases, those of Deborah and Hulda, the spiritual condition in Israel was very low. They were raised up by God in times of great apostasy. The reason God raised them up and set them in the office of the prophet was simply this: there were no men in Israel fit to hold the office. And thirdly, it was by direct, special revelation that God called these women to office. They were prophets, that is, those to whom God gave direct, immediate revelation. We could accept women in office if this were still so today. But God no longer gives special revelations. The conclusion is obvious: there can be no women officebearers.

The Second Argument:

Secondly, the argument is advanced that the woman's general submission to the man, and specifically her submission in the church which takes the form of her not serving in the offices, is an aspect of the curse. Her submission, then, is based solely on the consequences of sin and the fall. Appeal is made to Genesis 3:16. "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee." These were the words of curse that God pronounced against the woman on account of her role in the Fall. The next verses record God's curse over the man, that the ground would be cursed for his sake and that from now on he would have to work in the sweat of his face.

The argument runs something like this. As originally created by God, Adam and Eve stood in perfect equality. The fall into sin destroyed that equality, with the result that the woman was placed in subjection to the man. This was part of God's judgment over her. Part of the work of Christ was to redeem the woman from this aspect of sin and the curse. In keeping with this work of Christ, the church ought to exert herself to elevate the position of the woman, to restore her to her original equality, and make it possible for her to serve more completely and fully in the church. Just as we try to alleviate the effects of sin by anesthesia and pain-relievers for childbirth, and air-conditioned tractors for work, so we should attempt to alleviate the headship of man based solely on the fall and sin.

This argument rests on two basic presuppositions. First, there was no headship of man over woman before the fall, in the perfect creation order. And second, the rule of the man over the woman is part of the curse, something therefore inherently evil, a consequence of sin.

Two points must be made in response to this argument. First, we agree that man is permitted to attempt to relieve the effects of the fall into sin. Nothing is wrong with that in itself. But we do that, not by removing the realities themselves that are mentioned in Genesis 3: childbirth, work, and the submission of the woman to the man. Those realities themselves were not the curse pronounced over the man and the woman by God. But we do that by alleviating that which corrupts those realities. In the case of the man's rule over the woman, the apostles in the New Testament exhort husbands to love and honor, nourish and cherish their wives, and not be bitter against them.

Secondly, our response to this argument is that Scripture itself never calls women to be subject to men in marriage or in the church because of the effects of sin and the Fall. Consistently, the New Testament Scriptures appeal to the creation order, the pre-Fall arrangement of things as establishing the principle of the woman's submission. The fact is that it is God's creation order, as evidenced in Genesis 1 and 2, that is the solid basis for the New Testament prohibition of women exercising authority in the offices of the church or in marriage and the home. That is the teaching of I Corinthians 11:8, 9; I Timothy 2:13; Ephesians 5.

The Third Argument:

Those who promote women's ordination make frequent appeal to Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Let it be said that this text has absolutely nothing to do with the question of women in church office. This is not the subject of the passage or of the context. An appeal to this passage is entirely beside the point. The subject of Galatian 3:28 is salvation, and the enjoyment of salvation through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. The point of the apostle Paul is that salvation and faith are not confined to one limited sector of the human race. The New Testament church of Jesus Christ is a catholic, or universal church. Salvation is enjoyed not only by the Jews, but also Greeks; not only

by free men, but also slaves; not only by white men, but also black, red, and yellow men; not only be men (males), but also by women (females). As far as the gift of salvation is concerned, it is the same as with the need for salvation: there is no difference between men and women.

The Fourth Argument:

Another argument for women in office, one of the most commonly heard arguments, is that not to ordain women into the offices wastes the gifts of women. If the church does not accede to the ordination of women, the church is guilty of squandering its resources and neglecting women's gifts.

This argument is ridiculous. It is only an emotional appeal for women in office. The issue is not whether or not women have gifts, or whether they ought to use their gifts, or whether the church ought to be diligent to employ the gifts of women. But the issue is where those gifts are to be employed. The same Holy Spirit who bestows gifts upon the members of the church is also the Author of Scripture, who forbids women to occupy office. Are we to suppose that the Holy Spirit would contradict himself?

“What About the Office of Deacon?”

Although some agree that women may not be ordained to the office of minister or elder, they are willing to concede that there may be women deacons in the church. They argue, first, that a deacon would not have to teach or rule. And second, they appeal in support of their contention to two passages of Scripture which, to their mind, speak of women in the office of deacon: Romans 16:1 and I Timothy 5:9 and following.

The view that women may be ordained as deacons because they would not have to teach or rule is a mistaken view. For the deacons do teach and do exercise authority over the members of the church. Sharing in the office of Christ, they too, along with ministers and elders, share in Christ's authority. To occupy an office is, in the nature of the case, to occupy a position of authority. That is why a requirement of the deacons in I Timothy 3, as well as for the elders, is that they be “ruling their children and their houses well” (v 4). That requirement arises out of the fact that they must share in the rule of the church. And the fact of the matter is that in the course of their work of the deacons must give some instruction and teaching officially and on behalf of the church of Jesus Christ. They do not simply write out the checks and pay the bills.

The appeal to I Timothy 5:9 and the verse following fails to prove the permissibility of women deacons. For, first, the apostle deliberately does not refer to the women mentioned here as “deacons” or “deaconesses,” but simply as “women.” Secondly, one cannot appeal to this passage in support of the ordination of women into the office of deacon because the apostle requires that these women be “widows” and that they be widows of at least sixty years of age. Those who appeal to this passage want the offices opened to all women, not just those women who are widows.

Nor does the appeal to Romans 16:1, the example of Phebe, prove the permissibility of women deacons. The passage reads in the King James Version as follows: “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.” The argument from this passage rests on the fact that the word translated “servant” may also be translated “deacon” or “deaconess.” This is the translation offered by both the Revised Standard Version and the Phillips.

There is no question about it, “deaconess” is a proper translation of the word “servant” used here. The question hinges on whether it is a proper translation in this particular passage. Or are the translators of the King James Version correct when they translate “servant”?

It should be noted that this word “servant” occurs in the New Testament in many different connections. It refers to servants, both male and female, in households; to servants of kings; to servants who are called to be obedient to their masters; to servants of God who occupy positions of government in the state. Besides, the word occurs in a host of passages where it must be translated “servant,” and where it makes no sense to translate it “deacon” or “deaconess”.

You can check this yourself by referring to a good concordance. One cannot conclude simply on the basis of the term itself, that Phebe was a deacon in the church. In the light of the rest of the New Testament, she could not have been. She was a godly woman who served her fellow believers in the church at Cenchrea, and who was highly commended by the apostle, but she was not an officebearer.

The Underlying Issue

That brings us to the final argument of those who are advocating women in church office. At the same time, with this argument the underlying issue in connection with the debate over women in office is brought clearly to the foreground.

What is the underlying issue? The Bible in plain language forbids women to teach or rule in the church. One simply cannot find support for women officebearers in Scripture. What do they do then who advocate women in office? They deny that these Scriptures apply to our time and to our culture. True, they concede, Paul in I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 was forbidding women to hold office. But the apostle's teaching there is to be understood in the light of his Jewish training, and in the light of early New Testament culture. We must understand they further contend, that Scripture is time bound and culturally conditioned. What the apostle wrote applied to his time and his culture, but it does not apply anymore to our time and our culture. The underlying issue, therefore, is Scripture and the church's confession of the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Holy Scripture.

Others see this as the underlying issue, too. In a fine article in Christianity Today (April 9, 1976) concerning the question of women in office, George W. Knight III states:

But I am distressed that some who have written on the subject (women in office, RC) seem to be abandoning the inerrancy of Scripture and the authority of its teachings. Even some who claim to be evangelical Christians, to submit to the authority of God and his Word, seem willing to appeal to the passages in Scripture that support their position and to minimize other passages or declare them to be wrong or only culturally relative and not normative, even when these passages themselves claim to be normative and not culturally relative.

This is exactly what Paul K Jewett does in his book, *The Ordination of Women* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980). Jewett is professor of systematic theology at Fuller Seminary in California. In his book, Jewett is bold to assert that Paul's teaching is simply a reflection of an erroneous rabbinical view. He is bold to assert that Paul's understanding of Genesis 1 and 2 is wrong. He is bold to assert that Paul's teaching is simply conditioned by the culture in which he lived, and need not be followed anymore today.

In an editorial in the Banner, then editor Andrew Kuyenhoven defended basically this same position.

There is no doubt in my mind that Paul was prescribing a restricted role to women in service of worship when he wrote I Cor. 14:34 and I Tim. 2:12. However, the reasons for the restrictions were local, cultural, and therefore temporal. Paul could appeal to what was in his day a common moral judgment: a woman speaking in the church looked "bad," "shameful" (I Cor. 14:35). But when such an appeal can no longer be made, the special apostolic prescription is also removed (Banner, January 23, 1984).

Our response to this argument is simply: we deny it! It is false and wrong. It is a fatal denial of the doctrine of Holy Scripture. If this argument is allowed to stand in the church, the church has lost everything. The issue is not women in office. That is just an aside, a little aside. The issue is the infallibility and consequent authority of Holy Scripture. The position for women in office is only one more attack, among so many others today, against the Holy Scripture itself. In the end, if the position that Scripture is culturally conditioned and time bound is allowed to stand, it will be possible to set aside every doctrine and every commandment of the Scriptures.

The assertion that the apostle's teaching is conditioned by the culture and times in which he lived stand directly opposed to the apostle's own assertion that what he taught is the will of God, an assertion which the apostle makes in the very passages in which he prohibits women to occupy the offices of the church. In I Timothy 2 the apostle

asserts that the prohibition of women in office is based on God's will expressed already in the creation order. Already in verse 7 of the chapter he has expressly said, concerning the instruction that he is about to give, "I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not." In I Corinthians 14:34 the apostle states that his instruction has its foundation in the Law, in the will of God revealed already in the Old Testament Law: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law". The apostle insists on exactly the opposite of what men are saying today, that his teaching was grounded in the abiding will of God revealed in the Law.

I ask you, do you suppose for one minute that the Lord Jesus would allow Himself to be influenced by the cultural situation of His day? Did He ever cave in to the prejudices and wrongs of the culture of His day? Are we really to suppose that the One who forgave adulterers, ate with publicans and sinners, who was not afraid to point out the errors and hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His day, was actually afraid of offending the culture of His day? Was this the reason why He did not appoint any women disciples? To ask these questions is to answer them.

One really wonders about this cultural question! Who really are the products of their culture: Jesus? The apostles? Or those today who are pushing for the ordination of women? Is it not the modern advocates of women in office who have caved in to a godless, anti-Christian culture out of which the whole modern women's movement has arisen? One wonders!

In any case, let us be clear, if the modern view wins the day, first the entire doctrine of Scripture's infallibility and authority goes out the window. And secondly, the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture is overthrown and no ordinary Christian will be able to read and understand the Bible anymore. He will have to trust the experts who know all the cultural, linguistic, philosophical, and historical considerations which influenced the writers of the Bible. As happened in the Romish church prior to the Reformation, the Bible will be taken out of the hands of the ordinary people and once again confined to a hierarchy of "experts." May God spare us such a calamity!

Our Calling to Stand Against This Movement

The church today and the individual believer must stand against the movement to ordain women into church office. Whatever the cost, whatever sacrifice is required, whatever personal injury is suffered, we must stand! We must maintain the scriptural position without compromise. Martin Luther once said to those who were hedging in his day:

If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle front besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

This stand of the church and of the believer must be a complete and consistent stand. It must be a position that forbids the women to occupy the offices of minister, elder, and deacon. Besides that, the women are forbidden to teach catechism classes. The Reformed position is that catechism instruction is as much official teaching in the church as is the preaching of the Word on the Lord's day. Nor may women be given the right to vote at the congregational meetings of the church. The congregational is an official gathering of the church. For a woman to vote at a congregational meeting is for a woman to exercise some authority and to enter into the government of the church. That is prohibited. There is an old proverb out of the Far East that the time to keep the camel out of your tent is when the camel sticks his nose into your tent. You let his nose in and you may be sure that his large body will soon be following along. Reformed churches do well to keep the nose of the camel out of their tent.

The Positive Calling of Women

This stand of the church prohibiting women to occupy the offices must also be a stand that carefully lays before the women their positive calling in the church. That positive calling is summarized in I Timothy 2:15: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety". The hue and cry

of the modern woman's movement has its source in the neglect and despising by the women of the positive calling which God gives them.

Scripture calls women to their proper task of childbearing. That is the unique and glorious calling that God has given to women in the church. Carrying out this calling they find their fulfillment. God gives women all kinds of opportunity to teach and to rule their children in the fear of His name. With a view to His calling God has blessed the women with many gifts, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, gifts which God has not given to the men. In the way of their carrying out this calling, God's church is born into the world and gathered. In this way Christ came into the world, born of a woman, the bible says. God did not need and God did not use a man.

How this calling of the women needs to be emphasized today! Now women refuse to carry out their God-given calling! Many resort instead to birth control for wrong and selfish reasons, or, still worse, the cold blooded murder of abortion. What a terrible judgment of God rests upon them and upon those who justify and encourage such sinful behavior!

The apostle goes so far as to say in I Timothy 2:15, "she shall be saved in childbearing." Oh, to be sure, the women, just like the men, are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. But they are to be saved in the way of childbearing. They are not saved in the way of preaching, not in the way of ruling, and not in the way of administering the mercies of Christ in the church. They are saved in the way of childbearing.

What about those women who are past the age of childbearing, or to whom the Lord does not grant the privilege of bearing children? Have they no place in the church? They certainly do! Let them be known as was Dorcas for her good works and for her almsdeeds. Let them visit the fatherless, the widows, the sick, and the aged in their affliction. Let them stand in the place of the parents in the Christian school. Let them assist the poor and be involved in all of the ways they can be involved in helping God's church. But let them not be ministers or elders or deacons.

This is the teaching of the Word of God. What do you say? Say with me, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15).