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Thank you,  
Russell L. Gasero  
Archivist, Reformed Church in America  
21 Seminary Place  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

E-mail: [rgasero@rca.org](mailto:rgasero@rca.org)

### **REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN to the General Synods of 1957 and 1958**

Note: The General Synod of 1965 voted to authorize the reprinting of the earlier study made on the ordination of women to be included in a packet mailing to the churches with the study material from the Christian Action Commission. 1965, p. 123)

## 1957 REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

Fathers and Brethren:

Your committee hereby makes its second report and presents for your consideration a number of studies bearing upon the question whether women should be eligible to the offices recognized in our Constitution. You will notice that we have studied Scripture with respect to woman's place in the life of the New Covenant both in the Old and New Testaments. That, we believe, is basic. Your committee, however, was of the opinion that other studies should be made regarding the question. Accordingly, you will find an essay regarding previous deliberations of your body, one regarding the practice of women officers in other denominations, one regarding the nature and function of the office, and one regarding practices in the early and post-apostolic church.

There is a further question on which your committee is making a study. We recognize that practical considerations as well as sociological differences within the R. C. A. must be honestly faced and given full weight in arriving at a decision regarding changes in our Constitution as to who should and who should not be eligible to office. This study we may have to publish and distribute separately. Time failed us in doing it in time for inclusion in the "Reports for General Synod."

There is another matter to which we call your attention. All the studies are signed by individual members of the committee. This means that the original work of each study was done by the person who signed it. Every study, however, has had the scrutiny, criticism, and evaluation of the committee as a whole. The members of the committee are agreed in viewpoint and occupy the same position regarding the question of women's ordination. It may appear, however, that here and there the vocabulary differs from essay to essay. We regret that laboring under the pressures of time, we could not do otherwise than accept the vocabulary of each writer, even though it may mean an added difficulty in reading.

Your committee is not ready to bring a recommendation to this session of General Synod. It is our hope that you will adopt our recommendation that these studies be separately published and distributed to the several consistories for study. Out of such a study the committee hopes that it will glean new evidence that should be taken into consideration before a recommendation can or should be made.

It is not needless to ask that the consistories and the church be admonished to take the study of the question seriously. The right answer to the question the Holy Spirit can not indicate to a church that refuses to listen what the "Spirit saith to the churches." This study and any reflections should be made and sent to the committee prior to the spring meeting of classes, otherwise there will not be time for the committee to digest the material sent to it. We hope that the Stated Clerk, in sending the committee's work to the consistories for study and comment, will be asked to stress the importance of prompt action.

In order that the church may give serious thought to the question regarding opening the offices to women, which is discussed in the six studies here presented, and in order that the decision of the Reformed Church in America may be based not on emotion but on knowledge, we make the following recommendations:

- (1) that the studies here presented regarding the question of women's ordination be separately published in sufficient quantity for every member of all the consistories for study, criticism, and evaluation.
- (2) that the remaining sum of the money allocated to the committee for this year be used to publish these studies supplemented by money from the General Synod budget.
- (3) that the Stated Clerk be instructed to mail copies to every member of each consistory with a letter urging prompt action and replies to the chairman of the committee before February 1st, 1958.
- (4) that the committee be continued for another year, and that the Board of Direction be directed to include \$750.00 in its budget for the work of the committee.

Respectfully submitted,  
Vernon Kooy  
A. W. Meyer  
Richard Oudersluys  
Lambert J. Ponstein  
G. T. Vander Lugt, Chairman

# I

## ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE REFORMED CHURCH

By GERRIT T. VANDER LUGT

The General Synod of 1955 appointed a committee to study the question of whether in the Reformed Church in America women should be ordained as deacons, elders and ministers. Dr. Daniel Y. Brink, at that time president of the General Synod, appointed the following committee, Dr. G. T. Vander Lugt, chairman, the Rev. Lambert Ponstein, Dr. Vernon Kooy, Dr. Richard Oudersluys, Elder Andrew Meyer.

During the year 1955-56, the committee met to consider the question and a progress report was given to the General Synod of 1956 as follows:

Your committee is making a progress report. We have worked under handicap of Synod not providing an appropriation for the work of the committee. We were, however, able to meet as a committee to survey the question and to plan for its study, with a view to making a full and detailed report later. Your committee feels that Synod should be prepared with an adequate document indicating a full study of the historical and Biblical problems involved. Accordingly, the subject under study has been divided and aspects of the problem have been assigned to individual members of the committee.

Your committee is prepared to proceed and ask Synod to continue the committee, and to allow an appropriation of \$1,000 to carry on the study which will be used in part for travel and in part for bibliography.

Your committee, however, asks that Synod seriously face what is involved should these two requests be granted. We are not unmindful that the question of the ordination of women was proposed very hastily at the conclusion of last year's meeting of the General Synod. Your committee is not certain that this question is one that the General Synod is convinced needs serious consideration. We, as a committee, are ready to devote time and energy to the problem to the end that the membership of the Reformed Church in America might be enlightened and take action accordingly, if it is assured by General Synod that the committee is authorized to proceed in faith that its study of the question needs to be done for the best interests of the Reformed Church in America and for the cause of Christ.

Apparently, the General Synod of 1956 desired that the question of the ordination of women be considered seriously and, accordingly, voted the allowance and continued the committee.

As the report to General Synod indicates, the question of the ordination of women has several aspects, and one each was assigned to the individual members of the committee. The first aspect that needs study is the historical, to see what light is thrown on the problem by past deliberations of the General Synod. The study of this aspect was assigned to the chairman of the committee.

Accordingly, the deliberations and actions of the General Synod were studied to see what former Synods, reflecting the mind of the Reformed Church in America, had said

about the ordination of women. Of course, in reviewing the past, we should remember that previous deliberations and decisions do not necessarily answer the question. The past is an invaluable but not infallible teacher. The Word of God comes to every generation, and every generation must interpret and respond. In doing so, however, it is always well to listen to what those who have preceded us have said.

When we turn to the sources, we find, as is to be expected, that prior to the close of the first World War, the question simply was not raised. Since then, several overtures have appeared before the General Synod, the first one in 1918 from the Particular Synod of Albany and the Classis of Montgomery, asking that the constitution be amended by omitting the word “male” from Article IV, Section 42, of the constitution. Similar overtures have appeared from the Classis of Philadelphia, the Particular Synod of New Brunswick, and the Particular Synod of Albany. Philadelphia repeated its request in 1922. In 1932, the Classis of Westchester made an overture; in 1936, the Classis of Bergen; in 1941, the Classis of Long Island; in 1945, the Classis of Newark; and in 1951, once again, the Classis of Westchester—all asking that something be done regarding the ordination of women as elders and deacons. It was not, however, until 1952 that several voices at once began to assert themselves both for and against the question of ordination. There were in that year 13 overtures, seven of which opposed any change in the constitution, and six once again asking for a deletion of the word “male” from Article IV, Section 42.

The reason or reasons, if any, that have been given for ordination of women can easily be summarized as follows:

- (1) “To grant women the same rights and privileges as are now enjoyed by male members.”
- !2) “In recognition of the full share of the work of our Reformed Church in America which has been done by women, and in accord with the action of our country in civil matters, and with the teachings of democracy, justice and equal opportunity by our Lord when on earth.”
- (3) “The retention of this wording (that of the constitution as it is at present, that ‘elders and deacons shall be chosen from the male members of the church...’) was an anachronism which discriminates against the most interested and helpful members of our churches and is outmoded in an age when women are accorded equal rights and privileges by the civil law of the land.”

Further, the several Synods have given the following reasons for not giving the classes an opportunity to vote on the proposed amendment. The dates and pages given after each reason refer to the minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (I am deferring consideration for the present of the action of the 1952 Synod.)

- (1) “The submission of the proposed amendment to the Classes will work injury through friction and division out of all proportion to any possible good that might accrue to any portion of our church.” (1918, p. 479 ff.)
- (2) “The time for such changes as these overtures call for has not yet come, and therefore recommends no action in the-matter.” (1921, p. 500).

- (3) "The time does not seem ripe for the action suggested." (1922, p. 833).
- (4) "Your committee finds no indications of a general desire at the present time for such a change in the Constitution and is informed that strong objections to such a change may arise in certain quarters. It recommends, therefore, that the request be not granted." (1932, p. 121)
- (5) "Where God created male and female, each have their distinctive functions. They are our equals-what is more, our superiors-in many of their qualifications, not to mention consecration. We, however feel that should they be given the office of Elders and Deacons in our churches, such would rather hinder than progress the work of the kingdom. The men would become content to let the women assume responsibilities which properly are theirs." (1936, p. 393)
- (6) "Your committee desires to pay its most sincere tribute to the invaluable services rendered by the noblest women of our Church, in very many departments of our work, yet sees no immediate advantage in any particular study of the matter." (1941, p. 147).
- (7) "The necessity for this provision is not generally apparent in the Reformed Church in America. Also, opening the offices of elder and deacon to women might tend to diminish men's sense of responsibility in the life and work of the Church. Moreover, it is the opinion of the committee that the Church is not ready for this change." (1951, p. 124).

The most serious thought was given to the matter at the 1952 meeting of the General Synod. At that time, I repeat, there were thirteen overtures, some for and some against the ordination of women. In its deliberations, Synod's committee could not come to a unanimous recommendation, and so, there was a majority report from twelve members and a minority report from four. The minority report recommended that no action be taken for the following reasons:

- (I) "As to principle, the weight of Biblical evidence is against the practice of women serving as elders and deacons in the church.
  - (a) Jesus appointed men only to be His disciples, even though capable and devoted women were available.
  - (b) When the place of Judas among the Twelve was to be filled, the approximately 120 disciples selected men and not women as candidates for the office (Acts 1:15-26). Women were free to pray with the disciples (Acts 1:14) but they were not chosen to office.
  - (c) When deacons were chosen in Acts 6, even though the occasion for the office involved women, only men were chosen.
  - (d) I Cor. 11:1-12 teaches that in the ordinances of Creation, God gave man a position superior to that of women,, not that he is superior to women intellectually or spiritually, but that God has nonetheless given man a preferential status. The tenor of Scripture supports the contention that one way in which this leadership ought to be manifested and employed is in spiritual office in the Church.
  - (e) 'In Christ there is neither male nor female.' (Gal. 3:28) This is the only alleged Scriptural ground presented by the Westchester Classis and it is wholly irrelevant. Paul refers to the equal and full participation of male and

female in the Covenant of Grace and salvation in Christ. This has no bearing on the question of women serving as elders and deacons. The custom of women holding office was not practiced in the apostolic Church.

(2) “As to expediency:

- (a) We reaffirm the position adopted by General Synod, 1951, that ‘opening the offices of elder and deacon to women might tend to diminish men’s sense of responsibility in the life and work of the church.’
- (b) It is most unlikely that the change proposed by the Westchester Classis would receive the approval of 2/3 of the classes required by the Constitution, RCA (Sec. 181) and the discussion and dissension on the subject would inevitably place a strain upon the peace of our Reformed Church.” (1952, p. 110 ff.)

The majority report recommended that General Synod give the classes opportunity to vote on the proposed amendment to the constitution of the Reformed Church in America which would delete the word “male” from Article IV, Section 42. This majority report was adopted, and the classes were given an opportunity to vote.

At the 1953 meeting of the General Synod, its Stated Clerk reported that the motion to delete the word “male” from Article IV, Section 42, had been lost.

There the matter rested until the appointment of the present committee at the 1954 Synod.

*(Dr. G. T. Vander Lugt is the president of Central College in Pella, Iowa.)*

## II. THE PRACTICE OF OTHER CHURCHES IN THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

By ANDREW W. MEYER and LAMBERT J. PONSTEIN

Now that we as a church are studying the Scriptural basis for the ordination of women, we are interested in what other churches have done. Are we studying a question with which many of the churches are concerned? Is this of interest to churches beyond our own borders? Have other Reformed Churches asked this same question? In this paper we want to make a survey of what others have done or are doing. We shall deal first with those which are in the Reformed tradition, and then with those churches outside that group.

First we go to the Netherlands Reformed Church (De Hervormde Kerk). This church had appointed a study committee to ascertain whether or not there was a Scriptural basis for the ordination of women. The committee suggested several different ways in which women could be given a greater degree of responsibility in the church. All of these were considered by the committee to have a Scriptural warrant. The Synod, after a thorough discussion of the problem, decided to admit women to all offices of the church. Throughout the discussion, which was thorough, there was an insistence that the Bible should be the basis on which the decision should be made.

In the Gereformeerde Kerken of the Netherlands, the question of women's place in the church has not gone beyond a study of her right to vote at congregational meetings. This was granted. However, this discussion has prompted Dr. N. J. Hommes, a minister in that denomination, to make a thorough study of the place of women in the church. In this study he comes very close to the position taken by the Netherlands Reformed Church.

In the British churches we find various solutions to the problem. The Church of Scotland, in both 1934 and 1946, voted overwhelmingly against admission of women to the eldership. In 1947 the General Assembly voted against granting women an official standing in the Councils of the Church. The Presbyterian Church of Wales allows women to hold the office of elder, and has a number of women in this office at the present time. However, the men do greatly outnumber the women as elders. The Presbyterian Church of England has granted women the right to hold office of elder for the past 30 years. In May of 1956 the first woman was admitted to the ministry by the General Assembly.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland recognizes the right of women to hold the office of elder as well as to be members of church committees. However, women are not eligible to the office of the ministry.

The Presbyterian Church of Korea ordains women to the office of deacon. This church makes excellent use of these women in its calling ministry.

The Church of Christ in China, with which our church has worked in the past years, has for years ordained women to the office of elder. Missionaries tell of the very excellent work these women have performed. The Church of Christ in Japan and the Church of Christ in the Philippines make little distinction between the sexes in the work of the church. It is interesting to note that we have been doing in conjunction with the younger churches that which we are now contemplating in our own church.

On our own continent, the Canadian Presbyterian Church recently voted on a plan to grant ordination to women for the office of elder and. deacon. This plan was defeated.

In our own country the Presbyterian Church in the United States, at its last General Assembly, heard a report on the subject of the ordination of women. At present the church is in the process of voting whether or not to admit women to the office of elder. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., at its last meeting received a report on the ordination of women. The Assembly voted to grant women full right to all offices. Recently the first woman was ordained to the ministry. The Evangelical and Reformed Church has ordained women to office since 1949.

When we move outside the churches of Reformed background, we find that in England the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland make sex no bar to any kind of Christian service. The position of the Church of England is that the only official status for women is that of deaconess. The Congregational Union of England and Wales has no separate legislation concerning women ministers.

In the United States the major denominations ordaining women are the American Baptist Convention, the Congregational-Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ and the Methodists. Ordination in the Methodist Church is not complete as women are not admitted to full membership in the annual conference. Some of the younger churches, as for example the Church of God, make no distinction between men and women as qualifications for Christian service.

The list of churches and their stand on this question is not complete. It simply points out that we are not alone in facing this problem.

It might be interesting to note the number of women in the Christian ministry. In 1951 there were 2,896 women clergy in the United States, a tiny fraction of the total number of ordained clergy. A large number of these -,were members of the fringe sects. Out of a total of 45,701 Methodist ministers, no more than 60 were women. In the Congregational-Christian Church, less than one fourth of the 239 ordained women are active as ministers. In England the Congregational Union of England and Wales lists 43 women ministers, 29 of whom are in full pastoral charge. If our experience would follow that of the above churches, we could expect no more than ten or fifteen women ministers by 1971. Granting the right of ordination seems no guarantee that women will crowd the offices of the church.

*This article was prepared by Elder Andrew W. Meyer and the Rev. Lambert Ponstein for the committee of General Synod to study the ordination of women. Mr. Meyer is an elder in the North Park Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan, and the Rev. Lambert J. Ponstein is a professor of Bible at Hope College, Holland, Michigan.*

**III.**  
**ORDINATION OF WOMEN AND THE OLD TESTAMENT**  
By VERNON H. KOOY

While the question of the ordination of women properly belongs in the New Testament sphere, the Church, in regarding the entire Bible as “the rule of faith and practice,” commits herself to study all problems from the whole of Biblical revelation. Thus a Biblical approach to this subject must take into account the Old Testament. This literature presents the following pertinent data:

I. The apex of God’s creative activity was the human race, male and female (Gen. 1:26ff.), with the sexes complementary (Gen. 2:20ff.) and forming a unity (Gen. 2:23f., cp. Mt. 19:4ff., Mk. 10:6ff., I Cor. 6:16), each having its distinct place and function without priority and without independence. To the race as a whole God gave the command, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion...” (Gen. 1:28, cp. Ps. 8:4ff.). The subjugation of women is viewed as the result of sin (Gen 3:16). Nowhere in the Old Testament does it appear as part of the created order. One would expect this curse to be removed by redemption.

II. God’s revelation came in a historical and cultural milieu in which male dominance was a part of the social structure. One cannot insist upon the absoluteness of any Biblical social norm. When cultural and social patterns change the Biblical forms must be reinterpreted.

III. God speaks and acts through special individuals upon whom He places His Spirit. In the Old Testament there were:

A. Revealers of the divine will—through divination, sacrifice, ecstasy, spoken word, etc. (cp. Jer. 18:18, Ezek. 7:26). In this class we find:

1. The priest, whose function was to divine by sacred lot to determine God’s will and give instruction (torah). He was the holy person through whom the Israelite approached God in worship. He thus performed a dual function.

2. The prophet, whose concern was the “word of the Lord.” He was the divine spokesman, revealer of the divine counsel and activity (Amos 3:7). He also served as intercessor for the people before God (cp. Gen. 20:7, Jer. 7:16, 51:1).

3. The sage (and elder), endowed with wisdom and able to counsel in accordance with the divine will and plan (cp. Jer. 18:18, Ezek. 7:26).

B. Those acting for God in a special capacity as: leaders of the people (e.g. Moses and Joshua), judges (judicators of lesser disputes), charismatics (as Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Saul, etc.), and the king (as divine regent).

In both areas we find women serving. In the prophetic office we note such illustrious women as Miriam (Ex. 15:20f.), Deborah (Judges 4:4f.) and Huldah, consulted by king Josiah (II Kings 22:12ff., II Chron. 34:20ff.). Deborah held a three-fold office—prophetess, judge (dispensing justice in the hill country of Ephraim, Judges 4:4f.), and charismatic (inciting Barak to battle the Canaanites, she herself directing the battle, Judge 4:6ff.). Moreover, mediums (as the woman of Endor, I Sam. 28.7ff.) and false prophetesses (as Noadiah, Neh. 6:14) were consulted by the people and believed capable of disclosing the divine will. In one instance a woman sat on the throne of Israel and ruled for six years (II Kings 11:3).

While the occasions were few, God did not disdain to speak and act through women, and the people apparently recognized them as divine servants. It is not surprising that the numbers were few. It is rather remarkable, and therefore more significant, that there should have been any.

IV. The sacred offices of prophet, priest and king (those usually identified with the ministry) were neither indispensable nor permanent. When the prophetic office was degraded by those speaking “pleasing words” the true spokesman for God disclaimed any relationship to it (Amos 7:14, cp. Zech. 13:3ff.). The prophets described the sacrificial system as foreign to true worship (Jer. 7:22f., Amos 5:21ff., Mic. 6:6 ff.), predicting the destruction of the temple (Jer. 7:1-15) that a proper worship might be established. With temple and sacrifice go the priesthood. Again, the royal office, promised as everlasting by covenant (Ps. 89:3f., I Chron. 17:12ff., II Chron. 6:16) is denied by some of the prophets as in keeping with the divine plan (I Sam. 8, 10:18f., Hos. 8-4, 12:9, 13, 13:9ff.). Moreover, these offices were not envisioned as directly passing over into the New Order. They were to be consummated in the coming of the ideal (cp. Deut. 18:15ff., Hos. 12:10ff., Zech. 6:12ff., I Sam. 2:35, Ps. 110:4, Isa. 9:1ff., 11:1ff., Mic. 5:2ff., Ezek. 34:23f. cp. also Isa. 42:6, 52:13ff.), which the New Testament rightly interprets as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Whatever continuity these offices may have in the New Testament, their nature and qualifications would seem to be dictated by their fulfillment in Christ and not by the offices as constituted in the Old Testament.

V. While in the Old Testament specially called persons were endowed with the divine Spirit to act on behalf of the deity, there was envisioned a time when such would no longer be the case, but the divine Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, sons and daughters, manservants and maidservants alike, and all would prophesy (Joel 2:28f., cp. Jer. 31:31-34). This time the New Testament sees fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:17ff.). One notes the absence of any distinction in the sexes.

VI. Whereas under the Old Covenant the male was the dominant figure and alone received the mark of membership (circumcision) in the covenant community, in the New Covenant the mark of membership (baptism) is enjoyed by both male and female, both equally a part of the community, there being no longer any distinction but “all are one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28).

VII. The ordained offices of prophet, priest and king (usually associated with the ministry) had a dual function-to act on behalf of both God and people. If there is any symbolism to be found in that a man can best represent the deity (masculine in Israel without any female counterpart) before the people, by a similar argument the representation of the people before God would seem most appropriately symbolized by a woman. One notes that Israel is known as the wife of God (e.g. Hos. 2:16, Jer. 3:8, 20, Ezek. 16:8), as a mother (e.g. Hos. 2:2, 5, Ezek. 16), and as a daughter (e.g. Isa. 1:8, Jer. 4:31, Ezek. 16:44, Mic. 4:8). Moreover this is fully in harmony with the symbolism of the Church as the “Bride of Christ.”

Thus it appears to the committee that from the standpoint of the Old Testament there is nothing against the ordination of women. Although the occasions are not numerous, God did at times reveal His will through their ministry. Moreover, from the standpoint of symbolism there would seem to be a certain appropriateness in having women minister in a special office. This does not imply that the ministry of women would be identical with that of men. But, inasmuch as man and woman make a unit and God and people a unit,

there would seem to be some point in having both the male and female elements represented in the ministry. It may be somewhat appropriate, thus, to permit the ordination of women, for “by nature the priestess is fitted to express the motherhood of the Church, to interpret the feminine aspect of the Word, the sacraments and pastoral care. As a priest is a father to the faithful, the priestess should be a mother to them.” (C. C. Richardson, “Women in the Ministry,” *Christianity and Crisis*, Dec. 10, 1951, p. 167).

*The Rev. Vernon H. Kooy, Th.D., is the professor in the Department of New Testament at New Brunswick Seminary, New Brunswick, New Jersey. He has written the article for the Committee on the Ordination of Women.*

**IV.**  
**THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AND THE TEACHING**  
**OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**  
By RICHARD C. OUDERSLUYS

The question of ordaining women in the Reformed Church requires that due consideration be given the place which the New Testament assigns them in the church of Christ. And what is that place? Apparently it is one marked both by equality and inequality, by high honor and subordination. The puzzling fact is that whereas some Scripture passages declare that women took generous part in worship meetings, praying and prophesying, other passages command them to be silent.

Perhaps this should warn in advance the unwary that the question before us will not be solved by quoting a few texts, but rather by carefully examining and summarizing the total teaching of the New Testament. Now nothing approaching such an exhaustive study can be submitted in the columns of our church paper, but a few expository insights and results of such a study being made by Synod's committee can be presented. An attempt will be made in this first article to present briefly some comments on passages usually quoted as unfavorable to ordaining women. In a subsequent article, passages on the other side of the question will be dealt with.

**The subordination of women.** Our attention is rightly called to several passages of Scripture which make it clear that the wife is to be subject, subordinate to her husband (I Cor. 11:3; 14:34; Eph. 5:22, 24; Col. 3:18; I Tim. 2:11, 12; Titus 2:5; I Peter 3; 1, 5). The apostle Paul finds the basis of this subordination in the ordinance of creation (I Cor. 11:7-9; I Tim. 2:13f), an order established for the duration of this age. In addition to this language about subjection, submission, subordination, Paul also speaks of the headship of man over woman (I Cor. 11:2-16). He declares "the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (v. 3). Now since this subordinate status of woman in the order of creation is relevant to the place of women in the church, let us examine the conception more closely. What is involved in this subordination? Does it connote ideas of restriction, suppression, in public meetings, in church worship? If so, why?

Paul presented his doctrine of "headship" (I Cor. 11:2-16) as part of his corrective counsel for certain worship disorders in the Corinthian church. Women were praying and prophesying in church meetings (vv. 5, 13) without their headcloth (veil). From the repeated references to "her head" and "her husband" (vv. 3, 5), it is apparent that married women are in view here. The only limiting and restrictive deduction which Paul makes from the "headship" doctrine is that women should wear their hair long and cover their heads with a headcloth when praying and prophesying. By doing this, in accordance with good social and church custom, they would show subordination to their husbands (heads). Paul even warns against drawing wrong conclusions from this headship doctrine, lest male pride try to enforce upon women some status of inferiority (vv. 11, 12). The entire passage, then, has to do with proper decorum for wives in church meetings and its impact upon the structure of marriage. Using their new freedom in Christ (Gal. 3:28) Christian wives were laying aside the headcloth in their praying and prophesying, and this might be understood directly or indirectly as a weakening of the structure of Christian marriage, and this Paul combats.

Now let us turn again to Paul's language about woman's subjection, submission, subordination. These terms in their original sense mean "to be placed in an order, to be under a definite (Greek word: tagmata) arrangement of things in order." Paul teaches that not women only, but all persons and things, the whole created order, stand under this divine subordination. All things have been put into subjection unto Christ (I Cor. 15:27, 28; Phil. 3:21), angels and authorities (I Peter 3:22), the church (Eph. 5:24). Children should be subject to parents (Eph. 6:1), slaves to masters (Titus 2:9; I Peter 2:13); believers to one another (Eph. 5:21), and the younger to the older (I Peter 5:5). In all of these relationships the principal requirement is a freely rendered subordination of one to the other in the spirit of Christian love and for Christ's sake. In some instances, the master-slave relationship, the state-citizen relationship, the New Testament also mentions the possession of power (exousia: authority) by the head over the subordinate. But significantly enough, nowhere does Scripture declare that husbands and fathers have power-authority over their children and wives. Nowhere does our Scripture declare that it is a woman's duty to obey her husband, unless one is ready to cite the indirect reference in I Peter 3:6 (Incidentally, this has bearing on the use of the word obey in the marriage form.) Nowhere does the New Testament tell man to subject woman to himself. In these matters, women are always exhorted to voluntarily acknowledge their husbands as their heads, to be subordinate to them, in order that "marriage might become something more than a battle between the sexes for power" (Zerbst-Merkens, *The Office of Woman in the Church*). Concern for the marriage relationship, then, is Paul's chief aim in stressing woman's subordination.

**The silence of women.** The demand for woman's subordination is also related to the command to keep silence in the church in I Cor. 14:34, 35 and I Tim. 2:11, 12, and this produces an expository problem that has exercised the commentators and scholars through the years. If taken literally, absolutely, this prohibition of speaking and teaching in church is the solitary exception to the rest of Paul's teaching with respect to the subordination of women. While various attempts have been made to reconcile Paul's teaching at these points, no single solution has gained general approval.

Paul's commands read as follows: "the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as even the law says" (I Cor. 14:34); "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent" (I Tim. 2:12). Concerning these commands, the following points deserve notice. For one thing, both passages refer to silence in church assemblies; clearly so in I Cor. 14 and probably so in I Tim. 2. For another thing, both passages refer to married women and objection is raised against their decorum in church on the ground of its disturbing effect on the husband-wife relationship. This latter, consideration again seems to be the prompting concern in Paul's demand for silence. Such a view gains support from Paul's statement that he does not permit women "to have authority over men." The verb "to have authority" means to act independently, to act on one's own authority. Now how did women's activity in church meetings by speaking ever give the impression of teaching and of lording it over their husbands? To understand this, we must keep in mind the informal nature of early church worship. What the New Testament terms "preaching" and "teaching" was largely argumentation and discussion, more dialogue than monologue. It was not like the formal, uninterrupted sermonizing and lecturing of our day. It has been convincingly shown (N.

J. Hommes, *De Vrouw in de Kerk*) that the Greek words used to describe early preaching and teaching mean “to converse, argue, discuss.” Paul’s work in the synagogues was that of conducting discussions with question and answer periods (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19), and the same method was followed in his churches. This may explain the tragic episode at Troas where the young man Eutychus fell asleep at a third story window and tumbled to the ground (Acts 20:7, 8, 11). In this instance Paul should not be credited with an unforgiveably long sermon, but the Christian meeting with a discussion hour so interesting and provocative that it became unduly protracted in length. If the married women became over eager in asking questions and participating in the public discussions, this enables us to see why such activity would embarrass their husbands and even give the impression of lording it over their husbands. It explains Paul’s command “to keep silent,” and at the same time his command that married women reserve their questions and “ask their husbands at home” (I Cor. 14:34), and that they be content “to learn in silence” (I Tim. 2:11). Following his advice, Christian wives could still increase their knowledge, and yet avoid publicly embarrassing their husbands and prejudicing Christian marriage in the eyes of a public unsympathetic with these new expressions of Christian freedom.

It appears then, that the above passages ought not to be cited carelessly as though they settled this whole matter of admitting women to church offices. When the historical situation is rightly understood, these passages have nothing to do with church offices or women in general. Paul is concerned about the Christian decorum of married women in the public meetings of the church, in a time when social conditions were adverse to such startling expressions of freedom. A pair of texts, however, cannot settle a problem as fundamental as this one. What is needed is to set the problem in the total vision of the New Testament. The texts, then, of Corinthians and Timothy do not deal with women in general or with church offices. “Een veto voor de vrouw ten aanzien van het ambt is hier niet” (N. J. Hommes, *De Vrouw in de Kerk*).

*The Rev. Richard C. Oudersluys, Ph.D., is professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan.*

#### IV. THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN ON THE TEACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

By RICHARD C. OUDERSLUYS

A new era for women dawned with the advent of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Christ is also a gospel, news, good tidings for women. Their new status of dignity and importance is one of the conspicuous features of the early Christian movement.

**Their inclusion in the early Christian movement.** When Jesus Christ came into the world “born of the Virgin Mary” a new sanctity was at once imparted to motherhood, and with it came a new and higher conception of women’s character and person (Luke 1:48). From the first, women were numbered among the followers of Jesus (Matt. 9:22; 15:28; 15:38; 26:7f). Those who accompanied Him on His mission tours are occasionally mentioned by name (Luke 8:2, 3), and still others unnamed are praised for their ministry to Him (Luke 8:3). Women figure in the scenes of the crucifixion of Jesus (Matt. 27:55, 56; Luke 23:49), and His resurrection (Matt. 27:61; 28:1; Luke 23:55, 56; 24:1, 9, 10, 22).

The Book of Acts makes mention of Sapphira, the wife of Ananias; Priscilla, the wife of Aquila; Tabitha; Mary, the mother of John Mark; the maid Rhoda; Lydia of Thyatira; the slave girl whom Paul freed from a spirit of devination; Damaris of Athens, and the four daughters of the evangelist Philip. In Romans 16 Paul mentions in rapid succession the following as prominent Christian workers: Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, and the sister of Nereus. This Christian prominence of women stood in strong contrast to the depreciatory attitude of the Jewish and Gentile cultures and religions.

**Their prominence in Christian activity.** Not only were women recognized members of the Christian community, but active workers in it. This is the special point of Acts 21-8, 9 where it is said that Philip “had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.” This is the point of Paul’s reference to Priscilla and Aquila as “my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life” (Rom. 16:3, 4). Other descriptions are noteworthy:

“Mary, who worked hard among you” (Rom. 16:33); “those workers in the Lord, Tryphena and Tryphosa” (v. 12); “the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord” (v. 12); “Euodia and Syntyche . . . who have labored side by side with me in the gospel” (Phil. 4:2).

What work they did, we cannot determine precisely, to be sure, but it does scant justice to Paul’s language to assume that they busied themselves chiefly in washing and ironing his shirts and preparing his tea.

It is a matter of record that in Corinth women were praying and prophesying (I Cor. 11:5, 13)), and their eager participation in the discussion meetings was probably the prompting reason for Paul’s command to “be silent” (I Cor. 14; I Tim. 2). The term Paul uses to describe Phoebe in Rom. 16:1 is not too clear. The Greek word *diakonon* may mean “deaconess” or “servant, helper.” In his commentary on Romans, Origen said that the passage showed “that women also were set in the ministry of the church.” Some early church fathers also understood I Tim. 3:11 to be a reference to women deacons, although the reference again is not indisputably clear. The “widows” mentioned in I Tim. 5:3-10

appear to be an official class. The term “enrolling” gives a strong impression of church office or order. That women did some teaching in the Christian groups seems fairly evident from Acts 18:26 and Titus 2:3.

**Their equal status in the church.** Woman’s equal status with man in the kingdom of Christ is stated forthrightly by Paul in Gal. 3:28, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Wives are described as being joint heirs with their husbands of the covenant of grace and all its benefits (I Peter 3:7). Men and women alike are said to share in the service of praise and worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), all are expected to teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16), and all are said to share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14; 2:17).

But does this equal spiritual status cancel out the difference established between the sexes in creation? An answer to this question was attempted in our previous article. According to Paul’s doctrine of subordination, creational differences continue valid, but they are set in the framework of Christian freedom, and woman’s subordination is one of voluntary acknowledgment and practice out of Christian love and in the spirit of Christ. Moreover, as was noted before, Paul never adduces this doctrine of subordination except to conserve the institution of Christian marriage and to keep it from degenerating into a battle between the sexes for power. The New Testament does not adduce these creational differences as evidence or reason for denying women admission to church offices. The I Cor. 14 and I Tim. 2 passages are concerned with the proper decorum of married women in the public meetings of the church, and the creational differences between the sexes come into the discussion only because Paul does not want married women taking part in public discussions and thus jeopardizing Christian marriage.

But finally, does this equal status of women extend to office bearing? Previously it has been pointed out that women did prophesy (I Cor. 11:5, 13; Acts 28:8, 9). But was the prophet a regular minister of the church? Some would deny it, reminding us that God called and inspired the prophets, and that the church did not elect them. Others affirm it, reminding us that many of the ministries of the early church were the result of grace-gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:8-11; 14:5, 29:33; Eph. 4:11). It seems quite clear from the texts just cited that prophets along with apostles and teachers held a spiritual office in the early church. What about teaching? Is there any evidence for women teachers? Reference has been made before to Priscilla’s instruction of Apollos (Acts 18:26) and to the teaching of older women (Titus 2:3). The precise nature of their teaching cannot be determined. The speaking and teaching in church assemblies (I Cor. 14, and I Tim. 2) have previously been explained as asking questions and taking part in the informal church discussions.

All of this data is most startling, especially when we recall that the apostolic age was one in which male dominance was general in political, religious and social life. The gospel came into the world as good news, not as a new movement in sociology, and so we do not expect to read in the New Testament about a revolutionary attack on the existing social structure. A woman’s emancipation movement in that time was not only impossible, but, if attempted, would have encountered disaster and would have been contrary to inherent character of the gospel. And so it is natural to find in the New Testament a situation of male dominance. Jesus called to discipleship and apostleship, twelve men. The church nominated two men to succeed Judas (Acts 1:23), appointed as

deacons seven men (Acts 6:5). The sex of “bishops” and elders, as far as we can determine was male. This data, however, proves nothing concerning the divine will on the matter of admitting women to church offices, unless one is ready to recognize the social situation of the New Testament as binding in all particulars and for all time. The Scripture nowhere expressly forbids a woman to be an Office-bearer, but on the contrary, actually emphasizes her inclusion, prominence and equal status with man in the church of Christ. Since the New Testament neither expressly commands nor forbids their admission to church offices, it would seem that this question before our church is largely one of practical theology, psychology and sociology.

*The Rev. Richard C. Oudersluys is the professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan. This article concludes the discussion of this theme begun in last week's issue.*

**V.**  
**THE OFFICES AND THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN**  
By G. T. VANDER LUGT

**INTRODUCTION**

The objections raised against the admission of women to the offices in the Church are: (1) Citation of texts from Scripture, especially in Paul's letters, (2) the nature and function of women as unsuitable to the offices, (3) the nature and function of the offices themselves. The first has been studied in separate essays. The second can hardly be conclusive evidence against admission and is at best of secondary value. The third, however, is of primary importance. It is possible that the nature of the office is such that it implies conclusively that it can be held only by men. Hence, an exposition of its nature is given in this essay.

It does not lie in the scope of this essay to give a comprehensive analysis and exposition of its nature and function. Its scope is circumscribed by the question of women's eligibility. The question here discussed is whether the nature and function of the office as discerned in Scripture is such that by the' nature of the case women should be excluded from serving in it, as our Constitution now excludes them.

Furthermore, the relative merits and demerits of the PresbyterianSynodical as over against the Episcopal and Congregational systems will not be discussed, as lying beyond the purview of this study. Nor are we raising the question of the Scriptural correctness and inclusiveness of the four offices now recognized in our Constitution. (1).

- (1) The Constitution says: "The Offices in the Church are four: 1. The Office of Ministers of the Word. 2. The Office of Professors of Theology. 3. The Office of Elders. 4. The Office of Deacons." Article I, Sec. 5.

It is the considered judgment of your committee, however, that while there are definite distinctions of function, the offices have essentially an identity of nature which makes it impossible to draw a line that is clear and decisive in determining the question of eligibility. In other words, if any office should be opened to women, all of them should be. Accordingly, we sometimes speak of the office and at other times of offices. In the one case we think more of their oneness, in the other of their pluriformity.

**I THE CONTEXT OF THE OFFICE**

The nature of the office must be seen in the context of the Church and the kingdom of God. The office is not something foisted upon the Church from the outside but something that stems out of the essential nature of the Church.

**A. Jesus Christ and the Office**

The essential nature of the Church is Jesus Christ, who is the unique office bearer. He is the servant of God, the mediator, sent into the world for its reconciliation (John 6:44, I John 4:14). Through His work and person He gathers into Himself a people and creates a

fellowship of those who share in His mission through the Holy Spirit (I John 1:3). He is the “minister” of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6) from whom every office in the Church is derived. “It is not possible to speak of the office (Amt) in the Christian Church without proceeding from Jesus Christ as the perfect office bearer. From Him alone is every office derived and to Him alone is clear what the character and significance of the office is. The office is the task God assigns to a person.”<sup>1</sup>

What needs emphasis here, first of all, is that Jesus Christ as God’s servant by His person and mission creates the Church as His servant. She is the organ or means He uses to continue and complete His own service, “the fulfillment of Him who fills all things with Himself” (Eph. 1:23). Every office in and of the Church is essentially a service of God and of His reconciling work in the world through Jesus Christ.

The service of Jesus Christ is primarily not a service for man (although that is included) but for God and for His kingdom; and every office derived from Him should be essentially a serving of God and of His concern with the world. Jesus Christ, His Church, the offices therein must be seen as means to God’s end, the establishing of His Kingdom where He is recognized as king. A too soteriological emphasis does not do full justice to the Biblical meaning of the significance of Christ, His Church, and the offices. The full context is always eschatological -God’s kingdom already present and coming. Only in this context will the significance and nature of the offices become clear.<sup>2</sup>

## **B. The Apostolic Office**

As part of His work on earth Jesus Christ appointed Apostles, who represented Him. He chose them, delegated them, empowered them (Acts 10:41, John 6:70, 17:6). They stand between Christ and His Church in a unique way. They are the foundation upon which the Church is built, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). They are the witnesses to God’s gracious act in Jesus Christ (I John 1:1-4). As such they occupy a singular, unique and unrepeatable place in the history of God’s work of redemption. From Christ they receive a direct assignment, a specific authority to be His representatives, and a unique share in the once-for-all character of God’s revelation (Acts 1:8, Matt. 28:18-20).

As we study the nature of the Apostolic office, we discern something of its structure. An Apostle is a person delegated to represent his sender (Jesus Christ) in the doing of a specific task to which he is called, to which he is bound (woe is me if I preach not the Gospel), from which he may not detract and to which he may not add, which he may not transfer to another but must carry out in person, and which he discharges in the name of, i.e., with the power of, his sender, to whom he is responsible and to whom he must give an account. The One sent is as if he were the sender. There is in the Apostolic office a functional identity with the office of Christ as if the Lord were doing the work Himself. “He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth Him that sent me,” (Matt. 10:40, see also 16:19, and John 20:21).

The fact that all the Apostles were men does not, in our judgment, constitute a valid argument against women’s eligibility to an office in the Church. In the first place, there is a once -for-allness, an unrepeatableness in the Apostolic office. There simply are no successors of the Apostles. They occupy a unique place in the history of God’s redeeming purpose (See following Section C). Secondly, in the Apostolic Church, after

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, women as well as men take an active part in the various services, formal as well as informal, in the Church. They act as prophetesses, lead in congregational prayers, do works of charity, teach, do missionary work, and even later, may have administered sacraments (Acts 21:9, 18:26, Rom. 16:1-3, I Cor. 9:5, 11:5, 16:19, Phil. 4:2f).

Moreover, to hold that the Apostles were appointed to their office because they were men and on that basis exclude women from office is to assume what needs to be proved. The sex of the Apostles is incidental, at least subordinate, (i.e., historically conditioned), to their election to their office. If the fact that they were men determines the nature of the office, then why not the fact that they were Jews or born in Palestine.” What is essential is that Jesus Christ appointed them to be His representatives in laying the foundation of the Church.

### **C. Continuation of the Office in the Church**

The Apostolic office lives on (1) in the Apostolic Word canonized as Scripture, and (2) in the Church, as a whole, where the work and mission of the Apostles spread out, diffused like light through a prism, in the services and ministries of the members and in the work of the office bearers. The Apostolic office was transferred to the Church in its total, corporate, institutional character as members and offices, and to the Canon as the authoritative Word.

It must, therefore, be maintained that the offices spring forth out of the midst of the fellowship of believers and functions in it, but it is not identical with it. The notion of an office has in it always the character of the specific, as something not shared by all. Out of the many, some are chosen or elected as representatives of Christ and His Word “over against” the others in the fellowship. A representative shares in the fellowship of believers in Christ but has in addition an election to a special task not identical with but for the sake of the ministries performed by the members of Christ’s body.

There are those in the Church of Christ who maintain that the office has no status in Scripture over and above, (beyond, in addition to) the several ministries or services (diakonai) of the members of Christ’s Church. At best, they maintain, the office is but a specialization of services rendered by believers in the body of Christ. For them there is no office over and above the services of the members of Christ’s Church. There is only this priesthood of believers.

Our Constitution, however, recognizes the office as legitimate and valid, as something other than and different from the various ministries which the Holy Spirit freely gives and inspires in members of Christ’s Church. We believe that the offices were instituted by Jesus Christ for the ordering and direction of the ministries, for the upbuilding of His body. He is not only the head of His Church; He is also the subject of every office in His Church. The offices are the organs or means by which He is still active in His Church, in addition to His activity by the Spirit in the members of His Body (Eph. 4). The offices represent Christ in His threefold ministry, which He continues also now in His exalted state.

It is necessary to emphasize this twofold relation of Christ to His Church, (1) in the several ministries, and (2) in the formal offices. In the offices Christ is not so much in and with His people, as over against them.

Your committee maintains, therefore, that the question of women's eligibility can not be settled by virtually abolishing the offices in the Church of Christ, as some now (to, and then hold that women are eligible because they already have ministries within the scope of the priesthood of all believers. Not only is the tradition of two millennia as also our Constitution against it, but especially, in our judgment, the weight of Biblical evidence. The Church has, through the years on the basis of Scripture, set aside some people of its membership to perform special functions to which they are called, for which they are ordained and legitimized by the laying on of hands, and in which they are installed-and all this not simply as a concession to an outmoded and invalid tradition but as an acknowledgment by the Church that in its calling, ordaining, and installing it recognizes that God calls some of His people to a very special task for accomplishing His purpose in and through them. No one can take "this honor unto himself, but that he is called of God" (Heb. 5:4).

Your committee, therefore, has proceeded upon the premise that there is Scriptural evidence for the source and legitimacy of the fourfold office as distinct from and other than the ministries within the body of Christ performed by believers. The offices arise out of and within the scope of the various ministries but are not identical with nor a specialization of them. The question of women's eligibility is, therefore, here considered with reference to the formal offices specified and ordered in our Constitution.

## **II THE NATURE OF THE OFFICE**

### **A. The Office as Instituted by God**

When we consider the nature of the office in the New Testament, we must first of all emphasize that it is divinely instituted. The offices are not, ultimately, a creation of the Church. It is God who in Christ creates or institutes the offices and sovereignly chooses those whom He calls to serve in them as His representative. The offices are not of man's but God's making. See, for instance, what is said of Jeremiah's call (1:5) or of Paul's (first verse of all his Epistles). The calling is based upon the institution of the office, upon special grace for the person called, and upon a divine "setting apart" for an assigned task by the Lord of the Church. From Him also the one called receives authority and power, (and not from the Church) for and even over and over against the Church.

The words used in Scripture clearly indicate this character of the office. God—  
gives-didomi-(I Cor. 3:5, 12:7, Rom. 12:6, Eph. 4:7, 8, 11)  
appoints and places-tithemi (I Cor. 12:18, 28, Acts 20:28)  
grants grace-ineridzo-(Rom. 12:3, Eph. 4:7)  
distributes-diaireo-(I Cor. 12:4, Heb. 2:4)  
entrusts-pisteuomai-(Gal. 2:7)

All of these point in the direction of divine appointment and institution with the purpose of keeping the Church within the dimension of her divine calling and her Apostolic character. And the offices so instituted are for the equipping (katartismos) of the saints to the end that they may minister to the upbuilding of the Church and to the extension of the kingdom (Eph. 4:12). The saints, in turn, are admonished to receive the offices and officers gratefully, to recognize and respect those placed over them, and to submit

themselves voluntarily to their rule or government (I Thes. 5:12-13, I Cor. 14:33, 15:23, and 16:15-16, Heb. 3:13, 10:25, 13:17, Col. 2:5, Rom. 13:1-7).

This divine institution does not mean that officers are to “lord” it over the Church (I Peter 5:3). The New Testament divests the offices of all earthly associations. Jesus Christ said clearly how those who represent Him to and before His Church are to conduct themselves (Luke 22:26, John 13:1-13). Even as He came not to be ministered unto but to minister, so they must serve. They are to be servants in behalf of the Church, always looking to “the pioneer and perfecter of their faith” (Heb. 12:2), humbly conscious of their divine calling. God is to remain sovereign and is to be glorified through them and their office.

If now the offices are instituted of God, can it be maintained that for this reason women can not serve? Does the fact that God instituted the offices for His own sovereign purpose, ipso facto mean that God does not equip and call women to the offices He instituted? It would seem that here, too, the Church of Jesus Christ must always remain humbly receptive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who gives to every one (women as well as men) “grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Eph. 4:7). The conclusion, therefore, seems warranted that the institutional aspect of the offices is not such as to exclude women from eligibility.

### **B. The Office as Representation**

In the second place, Scripture clearly indicates that the offices as instituted have the character of representation and delegation. In the Old Testament prophet, priest, and king represented God to His people. They spoke and acted for Him and in His name, or better, He spoke and acted through them in their official capacity to which He called them.

Likewise, in the New Testament, an office means representation. This is supremely and uniquely true of Jesus Christ. He is God’s new and unique instance of representation, the office bearer par excellence, who has a ministry “as far superior as the Covenant He mediates is better” (Heb. 8:6). He appointed and delegated the Apostles to represent Him as His special, unrepeatably servants in the ministry of reconciliation. Growing out of and continuous with their ministry there develops not only the ministry of believers in the body of Christ but also the ministry of the offices, both having the character of representation. Both are to reflect, mirror, illustrate, express Christ in His ministry but in different ways. The first represents Christ in the Church, the second Christ in, to, and for the Church.

All through Scripture there is in the idea of representation a strong emphasis upon the quality of subordination. We find it in the relationship of Christ to the purpose of God, of the Church to Christ, and of the official ministry to the Holy Spirit. This stress upon subordination is always set in the context of love and trust and mutual fellowship, wherein it exists and functions. The quality of subordination keeps representation within its proper limits. The members of Christ’s Church and the office bearers must so live and conduct themselves that Christ may truly be the Head of His body, the All in All, even as God was in Him All in All. Every member and officer is to represent His Lord humbly in glad recognition of subordination.

## **An Analogy**

Furthermore, the Bible uses an analogy to make clear the idea of representation. God's relationship to His people is symbolized by the relationship of a man to his wife. There is in Scripture a clear analogy between the relationship of God-humanity, Christ-Church on the one hand, and the relationship of husband-wife on the other. God has willed that His Covenant with man should be reflected and mirrored in the Covenant between husband and wife. See, e.g., Paul's discussion in Eph. 5:22-28.

The question, however, must be raised, what does this analogy signify? How must it be interpreted and what implications does it have relative to the question of women's eligibility to the formal offices?

### **1. The Divine Side of the Relation**

The analogy expresses vividly, concretely, understandably that the relationship of God to His people, including officers in His Church, is not a symmetrical relationship, but an unsymmetrical one, involving a definite aspect of subordination. The one term in the relationship, God, is the originating personal ground of the relation as well as of the other term, man, who receives and can only return what he receives in humble service.

The word used in Scripture for subordination (hypotasso) is one open to a variety of interpretations ranging all the way from slavish, abject subjection that leaves no room for personal choice, to voluntary service of neighbor. And in between all sorts of nuances of meaning can be discovered.

To give some content to its meaning, we quote several passages where the word hypotasso is used in several forms. The Son "subjects Himself" to God (I. Cor. 15:28). All things are "subjected" to the "One who does the subjecting," (verse 27). "Angels and authorities and powers are 'made subject' to Him," (I Peter 3:22). The Church is "subjected" to Christ (Eph. 5:24). Every person is to be "subject" to the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1, Tit. 3:1, 1 Peter 2:13). Children are to be "subject" to their parents (Luke 2:51, I Tim. 3:4, Eph. 6:1). The younger are to "subordinate themselves" to the elder (I Peter 5:5).

In regard to its use to express the relationship of man and wife, the Bible employs the word hypotasso six times, in I Cor. 14:34, Eph. 5:22, 24, Col. 3:18, I Tim. 2:11, Tit. 2:5, and I Peter 3:1, 5. In each instance it has the meaning of the wife's acknowledging and respecting her husband in his place, which she is not to usurp. She is to live in it, answering love with love. She can not usurp her husband's place without doing violence to the order of creation and of salvation.

In this specific relationship of husband to wife, the aspect of voluntary subordination is clearly a relationship between sexes. But the idea of sex is not a necessary aspect of the Scriptural teaching regarding subordination. Certainly in the relationship of Christ to God, of all things to God, of angels and powers to Christ, no biological structure and function is involved. And in the other instances mentioned above, the idea of biological differences is incidental, as males or females or both may be at either end of the relationship.

The symbolism of the husband-wife relationship as applied to the relationship of God in Christ to His Church must not be interpreted to mean that biological differences are of

its essence. What is essential is the aspect of subordination that is to be evidenced in the relationship. God remains sovereign even though He enters graciously, of His own free will, into a covenant with man, elects him to a cooperating service in His Church and kingdom, and uses him in the fulfillment of His purpose. A person, even when elected, called, ordained, and installed in an office wherein he is to represent God, must not presume that he is God. He must never proudly usurp the place of the One who chooses him to be a representative. He may, because elected and chosen, speak in the name of his Sender, by His authority and power, act for Him and with Him and be His co-laborer, but he must always do so, knowing his place, which is one of subordination.

It would, therefore, seem that the symbolism used can not be employed as an argument for excluding women from office. Its use in Scripture is not in that direction. All it means to say is that whoever holds office (be he man or woman) must discharge his function in voluntary, glad, joyful subordination to His calling Lord.

## **2. The Human Side of the Relation**

What has been said so far does not, however, exhaust the meaning of the analogy. The symbolism used in Scripture is applied to the Church, too. The Church, as well as the office in representing God, is to be subordinate to Christ. In it there are men and women. Men as well as women and women as well as men are to be subordinate to Christ, and as subordinate may represent Him. Hence, in the relationship of subordination, members of Christ's Church, both male and female, represent their Lord. If, then, the argument from the symbolism of subordination is to be used to exclude women from office, why not from membership in the Church? That conclusion, however, no one would draw from the given premises. It might even be argued that women would exemplify the relationship more acceptably than men, having learned something of its nature in the marriage relationship.

The office, it must be remembered, represents not only Christ in relation to His Church but also the Church in relation to Christ and God. This is also an aspect of representation, an aspect that needs emphasis when we use the symbolism of husband-wife as an analogy of the relation of Christ to His Church. There is not only the service of the Word in the broadest sense as representing God's ministry to His people but also man's needs, his prayers, his praise, his intercessions, his distress of body and mind. Christ, whom the office represents, is both God and man. And the offices in the Church must represent him in both of His natures, otherwise there is a kind of docetism in Church order.

This side of representation is a symbol of Christ's subordination to God. Here is an aspect of representation that is easily overlooked. There is a dissymmetry in the relationship. St. Paul in Eph. 5 in the same context in which he writes of a wife's voluntary subordination to her husband also writes of Christ's subordination to God, in representing His people. Even now He remains the Intercessor before God (Heb. 7:25, 9:24, Rom. 8:34, I Tim. 2:5, 1 John 2:1).

The offices in the Church, therefore, must also be a representation of this side of the relationship. God speaks to man and man must listen but man may also speak to God. The relationship, while unsymmetrical, has a polarity, a two-sidedness that we do not

recognize sufficiently when we insist that Biblical symbolism always represents God as masculine. The Bible speaks of the Church as the Bride of Christ.

Again, it seems to your committee that seen from this side of the relationship the analogy used in Scripture to symbolize the relation between God and His people which the offices represent can not be used to exclude women from eligibility. “We must always remind ourselves that in the order of salvation, i.e., in Christ, there is no male or female (Gal. 3:26) because both are there, both are baptized, both are members of His body, both serve their Lord. The old order is passed away, all things are become new in Jesus Christ, also man’s approach to God. The order of creation is superseded by the order of recreation. The second is not a copy of the first but something new and should be represented by the offices.

In this representation the offices should manifest the quality of openness, receptivity, the freedom of the Spirit, who gives gifts (Charismata) to whom He will, and that may mean both men and women. Women have more regard for and sympathy with the personal, whereas man represents the more official, which may easily become, without the counterbalance of the personal, officiousness. The personal and the official are both aspects of representation. In fact, it may be argued that women, by their very nature and endowment, would express the personal side of the relationship more easily and adequately than men.

### **III THE FUNCTION OF THE OFFICES**

The offices are clearly, all through Scripture, functional in nature. Their purpose lies not within themselves but beyond in the Will of God for His Church and kingdom. Christ chose to establish in His Church a special ministry to represent Him in the ordering, guidance, and direction of His body, of which He remains the head. This special ministry is clearly functional in character, for the order and government of the Church, its growth and edification. As Calvin says, Christ employs the office “just as an artificer makes use of an instrument in the performance of his work” (Institutes IV, III, I).

The form or structure this office developed in the course of history is not germane to this study. Scripture does not give us a fully developed Church-order. The Bible remains the good news of God in Christ. In it we find only seed thoughts regarding the office, which may be studied and systematized but always with care and tentatively. The form of the office is not biblically or theologically fixed, and determined.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis falls upon its representational and institutional nature, not upon its structure. Always there is an emphasis upon the continuous influence and action of the Triune God. God did not establish the Church and then let it develop or unfold from within.

He is still active in it, directing and ruling, a blessed truth the fourfold office symbolizes.

This means that as the Holy Spirit leads the Church into the fullness of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ, the Church must ever remain amenable to the necessity of changing and developing its customs ceremonies, and the structures of its life, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this respect the Christian faith has been dynamic and must remain so. Calvin says in his commentary on First Corinthians that “a necessity may occur of such a nature as to require that women should speak in public.”

The thrust of Reformation theology is in the same direction. It insisted as over against Rome that the office (as e.g., in the administration of the sacraments) is effective not because of the character of the office holder but because of the Holy Spirit who is operative in it. Here, too, the validity and efficacy of the office does not depend upon the person or the sex of the person. These remain incidental, part of its changing and developing form.

What, finally, is the content of this functional office? What does it involve, what duties and responsibilities are specified in our Constitution for and exercised in practice by those who are members of consistory and of the higher judicatories? Is there anything in what the offices cover that would exclude women from serving as office bearers? The question here raised is not whether the offices as described in our Constitution include what they should include, nor whether there should be four or more or fewer offices. Rather, the question is whether, accepting the status quo of the offices as now ordered and practiced, there is in them anything that would make it impossible or inadvisable to open the offices to women if qualified by the Holy Spirit.

At the outset; it should be emphasized that the fourfold office is a “service of the Word.” The office of a minister is that but also that of an elder or of a deacon. Scripture is the source and norm of all knowledge of and communion in the new life in Christ. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Scripture alone is authoritative for faith and life. The Church must live by the Word and, let us not forget, be judged by it. This living and being judged by the Word becomes visible and acquires form in the offices in the Church.

The content of these offices may be enumerated as follows:

1. The proclamation of the Gospel, the Word.
2. The Administration of the Sacraments.
3. Teaching-instruction in the Word.
4. Care of the sick, shut-ins, the sorrowing=“Pastoral” care.
5. Confirmation of marriage.
6. Conducting of funeral services.
7. The exercise of discipline=“Ruling.”
8. Work with young people.
9. Care of the material and financial side of congregational life.
10. The organization and administration of the services to and of the congregation.
11. Choosing and appointing those who serve in various capacities in the Church.
12. Participation in the higher judicatories.
13. Representing the congregation in its relation to the government.

This enumeration lays no claim to exhaustiveness nor to a binding of the freedom of the Holy Spirit in the Church. These thirteen, or whatever the number, are not all equally primary. Some are clearly aspects of others. We believe the many responsibilities of the offices can be understood as essentially three main aspects of the service of the Word, comparable to Christ’s threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.

The Word has a threefold mission to perform in the life of humanity and the world. (1) The Word must be spoken, interpreted, and sent forth as the Word of God that shall not return void (Is. 55). (2) Through the mission of the Word, creation and creatures must become recreated, to bear the image and stamp of the Holy, to become an offering unto God, and to manifest a fuller coming of His kingdom. (3) That Word proclaimed and exemplified must become authoritative and rule in the lives of men and in the world.

If this is the threefold ministry of the Word, is there anything in its function that would by the nature of the case exclude women from serving as “ministers” of the Word? Assuming, of course, the presence of the gifts of the Spirit, the necessary growth and maturity in the new life in Christ, and the required formal and informal training in certain women, can the Reformed Church in America maintain in the light of Scripture that God never calls upon them to serve Him in the offices? Does the function of the offices as described preclude the eligibility of women? This would be difficult to maintain in face of the fact that in the New Testament the Holy Spirit did qualify and use women in various formal capacities in the life of the Church.

## **CONCLUSION**

Your committee is convinced that there is no sufficient Scriptural reason for insisting that the nature and function of the office is such that women should be excluded from eligibility. The fact that the Church may have been slow to recognize that the Holy Spirit does give women as well as men the necessary gifts for eligibility to office is no doubt historically and sociologically conditioned. Tradition, however, which is important in the life of the Church, must not be the determining factor in deciding the issue. The question really is, what does the Holy Spirit say now regarding this question to the Reformed Church in America?

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Koole, *Liturgie en Ambt*, p. 72 Committee’s translation.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dr. A. A. Van Ruler’s *Byzonder en Algemeen Ambt*.

<sup>3</sup> See the study “Practices in the Early and Post-Apostolic Church.”

**VI**  
**THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN**  
**PRACTICES IN THE EARLY AND POST-APOSTOLIC CHURCH**  
By VERNON H. KOOY

Any discussion of the polity of the Apostolic Church must keep in mind that polity is, in a measure, conditioned by contemporary conditions and consequently the practice of the First Century A.D. is not, in itself, to be considered normative for the Church for all time.

With respect to the administrative and ministerial offices in the Apostolic Church one finds no uniform polity. The Church was early divided into two sections-Hebraist and Greek (often termed Pauline). Even as the requirements for membership, the ordering of worship and the conduct of life were somewhat different for each section so also quite possibly the polity of the Church. While the Twelve Apostles, along with James the Brother of the Lord, seemingly exercised a supervisory authority over the Church at its inception it is difficult to know how long such supervision pertained. Quite early they shared some of their authority with the Seven who, although appointed to “wait on tables,” also exercised the functions of evangelists (Acts 6-8). Moreover, their specific task of overseeing the daily ministration appears to have been a local arrangement and did not establish an order of deacons for the whole Church (Cp. Acts 14:23 where elders alone are appointed in the Pauline Churches). Again the Twelve seem to have shared some of their supervisory authority with the elders (Cp. Acts 15:2, 6).

The lists of church officers in I Cor. (apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in tongues; 12:27) and Eph. (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers; 4:11) reveal both variety and lack of uniformity. There does not appear to have been any common practice with respect to these positions. Nor do we find anywhere in the New Testament a provision to perpetuate these specific offices.

The offices in the Early Church can be divided somewhat into administrative and ministerial offices. In the Administrative Offices we find the apostles Who ruled With the elders (Acts 15:2, 6). The apostles no doubt played a dual role. One notes a certain ambiguity in the word ‘apostle’ as it refers to a traveling evangelist (e.g., Acts 14:14, Eph. 4:11, Did. xi) and a witness to the resurrection (e.g., the Twelve together with James the brother of the Lord and Paul). Later the administrative offices seem to have been summed up in that of bishop, elder and deacon (cp. I Tim. 3, 5, Titus 1). The existence of a special order of Minister of the Word and Administrator of the Sacraments (as defined in our Constitution) does not seem to have been known. Quite possibly the administration of the sacraments was in the hands of many individuals. One is hard pressed to find an official “priesthood” in the Apostolic Church.

Ministerial offices, as determined by the varieties of spiritual gifts, did not seem to divide the people into clergy and laity, or men and women. Varieties of gifts tended to emphasize that all were essential to the Church and by their distribution God provided for the spiritual nurture of all the members. Paul, in persecuting the Church, was concerned to bring both men and women bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). This implies women were as active as men in propagating the new faith, else why the concern. The charismatic gift of prophecy was likewise exercised by women (cp. I Cor. 14:4, 11:5, Acts 21:9). We

have mention of Phoebe the Deaconess (Rom. 16:1) and a number of women co-laborers with Paul, who “worked hard for the Lord,” as Priscilla who may have been a teacher (Acts 18:26, Rom. 16:3), Mary (Rom. 16:6) and Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom. 16-12). Again there appears to have been an order of widows (I Tim. 5:3ff. cp. Acts 6:1, 9:39) which was no doubt set apart as an object of the Church’s beneficence and to perform certain acts of service to the Church in return.

Nowhere do we find any attempt in the New Testament to sum up all these offices under one head. The offices of bishop and deacon existed alongside of the charismatic offices and may have been held in lesser honor. We note the exhortation in the Didache ‘not to despise the bishops and deacons for they also render you the service of prophets and teachers’ (Did. xv.), and in I Tim. (“If anyone aspires to the office of bishop he desires a noble task” 3:1). These offices may not have been as highly esteemed as those of apostle, prophet, teacher, worker of miracle, and healer and consequently often neglected.

As far as ordination by the “laying on of hands” and prayer is concerned one can make little case for this rite being reserved for special offices. Some Christians received the gift of the Spirit by this rite and thus full membership in the church with equipment for charismatic service (cp. Acts 8:17, 9:17, 19:6). Others were set apart for a special task by this ceremony (as deacons Acts 6:6, missionaries Acts 13:26). In the first instance women as well as men received this rite.

While nowhere does one find a woman appointed to the office of bishop, elder or deacon in the early Church (as would be expected) and consequently her sex played no prominent role in the leadership and government of the Church, women did possess and exercise spiritual gifts in common with the other members of the Christian community and were instrumental in propagating the faith, including preaching the word.

The transition from the variety of offices in the Apostolic Church to the three chief clerical offices in the Post-Apostolic Church-bishop, elder and deacon-is lost in obscurity. Whereas the regulations for bishop and deacon are marked in I Tim. (3) and there is a note that “the elders who rule %vill be considered worthy of double honor, especially- those who labor in preaching and teaching” (5:17) the distinction between these administrative offices and the charismatic is not clear. By what process these were elevated to the chief offices of the Church is not mentioned. It is quite probable that it was a part of the movement to, vard catholicity in the Second Century.

One notes in the Post-Apostolic Church a movement toward hierarchy- among the clergy with three chief offices: the bishop who presides in the place of God; the presbyters who preside in the place of the assembly of apostles; and the deacons who are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ (Ign. to Magn. vi). In the Epistle of Clement to James (@ 300 A.D.) we have their separate functions listed as: the bishop is to preside over the people; the presbyters are to perform marriages, provide for widows and orphans, remove doubts and love all the brethren; the deacons are to be the eyes of the bishop inquiring into the conduct of members and checking the disorderly. A separate order of Catechists are to’ teach the word.

Besides these leading offices there appears to have been lesser orders of the clergy. The ordained orders are Deaconess (?), sub-deacon (in charge of the sacred vessels), reader (who read from the Holy Scriptures), and Singer (?). The unordained orders of

church servants are: confessors, virgins, widows and exorcists (who possessed the gift of healing). (Cp. Apost. Const. VIII. sec. iii).

Among these offices we find three orders of women-deaconesses who were ordained, and virgins and widows who were unordained. The specific task of the deaconess seems to have been to keep the doors (possibly disciplinary guardian for women at services), to assist in the baptizing of women to maintain decency and propriety, to provide access for the women of the congregation to the deacons and bishop, and to administer charity to the women. They are not to do anything, however, which pertains to the offices of presbyter and deacon. (Cp. Apost. Const. II, xv. xvi. III xxviii).

The Virgins are called “the flower of the ecclesiastical order, the more illustrious portion of Christ’s flock” (Cyprian Tr. II. 3). They are to be honored as the priestesses of Christ (Ign. to Tars. ix), being betrothed to Christ and are to take the vow to provide leisure for piety (Apost. Const. IV. xiv).

The order of Widows seems to have been established only as a group for church beneficence (even as the orphans). These are asked to give themselves to prayer on behalf of those who give alms and for the whole church (Apost. Const. III. v). They are to be honored as the altar of God (Ign. Tars. ix) and quite possibly had some service, on occasion, to render to the Church. Both widows and virgins are given a position ahead of other women at church worship and are under the supervision of the deaconesses. They are not to answer questions of faith except for the subversion of polytheism, not to teach or baptize or perform any of the functions of a priest. The ordaining of women priests was looked on as “one of the ignorant practices of Gentile atheism” (Apost. Const. III. viii).

In all this we note that none of the higher ecclesiastical or priestly offices were open to women. Orders for charity and piety were maintained but for the rest only one ordained functional office was open to women to maintain decency and propriety within the Church. Whether they were, in view of their ordination, considered an order of the clergy cannot be verified. It is possible ordination was to enable them to assist at baptism, in the distribution of alms, and in the exercise of discipline.

While one cannot on the basis of the practice of the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Church make a strong case for the ordination of women, one does note that the social structure of Apostolic days required one ordained order of women for the well-being of the Church. This might seem to indicate that ordination was somewhat determined by social conditions, and while, for the most part, the ministry of the Church was in the hands of men there was a place for women to serve in an official capacity. This would seem to suggest that there is a place for the ministry of women in the Church of Christ.

Moreover, if the Proclamation of the Word, the Administration of the Sacraments and the Exercise of Discipline is a mark of the Church and the function of the clergy, then one notes from Apostolic and PostApostolic practice that women, in an ordained and unordained status performed these functions. In this regard they have unofficially been a part of the clergy.

**1958**  
**REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON ORDAINING OF WOMEN**

Fathers and Brethren:

The Committee on the Ordination of Women has the privilege of submitting to you the following report. We are making hereby our third and last report, including one more study, which could not be included last year but which we believe should receive careful consideration and be given full weight in arriving at a decision regarding the question of the ordination of women in the Reformed Church in America. In addition to this report, your committee presents certain recommendations for action. First of all we present the report.

I  
THE SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECT OF ORDAINING WOMEN

One may be convinced that there is no theological argument against the ordination of women, and that the offices should be opened to all who are called, both male and female. Yet the entire program might be defeated by the cultural pattern under which we live.

Women have had to struggle to gain recognition in all fields. One need simply to note the few women in the various professions. The same arguments were used against women entering medicine, law, or government service as are used today against women entering the service of the church. "These," says the International Federation of University Women News Letter are, "that women can not think logically, can not be objective, and seem ineradicable." However, these barriers are being broken. It is rather interesting that in communist countries this program is moving much faster than in our own country. Women doctors are as common as men in Russia. This can be explained by the necessity of using women to bring about a mechanized society. In our own country, World War II brought women into the factories in great numbers. The result has been that we now tolerate them in positions that once were reserved for men only. This same pattern seems to be followed in the church. We will accept women into the offices of the church when the cultural pattern of the day has removed the bias which is present. I think this is quite well understood by women. The Anglican Group for the Ordination of Women declared: "In our view the strength of the opposition to women lies less in theology than in psychological prejudice inherited from primitive times." In this paper I will approach the problem from this point of view.

First I would like to point out that this psychological prejudice does exist, and that it has been a stumbling block to full use of women in the church.

"Time" for October 21, 1957 reported some of the arguments used against women ministers at the meeting of the State Lutheran Church of Sweden. "A pregnant woman minister would not bring a proper austere authority to the pulpit." "The women replied that fat male ministers are hardly more inspiring." One diehard stormed that he would never confess to a female because women were notoriously unable to hold their tongues. Dr. Maude Royden of London, in a letter to Christianity and Crisis (December 10, 1951) wrote: "It seems almost comic that the 'orthodox' should pour scorn on the erotic attraction that a handsome parson has for women, and at the same time speak of the sex

atmosphere ‘radiated’ by women ‘in a way which men do not,’ and dilate upon the sexless impartial character which at present marks public worship.” She continues. “An Anglican Bishop married and with children, argued that it would be intolerable to have a woman standing at the altar ‘where all the congregation could see her ankles’! And another Bishop pitied the priest who might have to walk into church behind ‘a pretty red-haired girl acolyte.’ A Congregational lady minister told me her marriage caused some concern among her congregation, but it was negligible compared with the outburst of filth which came when it was known that she was going to have a child. Oddly enough, these people did not realize that the experience of motherhood must enrich a woman’s spiritual life.”

I bring these statements to your attention because they are so typical of the type of argument used against women in the offices of the church. We have no statistics with which to make a comparison between male and female ministers relative to dismissal because of moral causes. However, I am quite sure that the percentage figure in the Protestant Church would be such that women would not easily overtake their male co-workers.

“The equality of the sexes is still to a great extent a mere legal formality. The deeper significance of the term is still not known in the church. We may speak of being one in Christ, and that in Christ there is neither male nor female, but the actual practice of this is not yet a part of our Christian life. We do not yet ‘in lowliness of mind let each esteem the other better than themselves.’ The single, independent, working woman is not given the opportunity to do what she could do in the Christian Church. We still see her as a person of another sex, whose gifts may be great, but she must not reach a full status.” (From “Partnership Between Men & Women”-W.C.C.)

Since this is the cultural situation in which we find ourselves, what may we expect in the way of making a greater use of women in the church. I want to give you the experiences of a number of churches. The experiences will show you two things. One is that the cultural lag relating to women is still present in other churches, and the second is what we may expect in our own church.

A member of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches writes: “In our own Congregational Christian Churches, I think that our experience with ordained women could be summarized not too unfairly as follows: Not more than one-third of the women ordained in our churches serve as the regular pastors of churches. Most of these pastorates are in relatively rural areas. The rest of our ordained women serve either as directors of Christian education, or as assistant pastors, or as the secretaries of various educational or women’s boards in the denomination. It would seem to me that these figures indicate something of the reluctance of many churches to accept the ecclesiastical leadership of an ordained woman. At the same time, my own observation would compel me to note that many of the women who do serve as the regular pastors of churches perform their ministry with at least as high and perhaps a higher degree of effectiveness than would be achieved by many men in those specific circumstances.”

A correspondent from the United Christian Missionary Society writes: “The Disciples of Christ have generally allowed their theology to follow in the wake of their sociological development. We have never had more than a handful of women ministers although we have long had many ordained women. Again, sociological reasons have been foremost.

At present, we have approximately a dozen women as full practicing ministers. They are competent but have had a very difficult time, being limited to small rural congregations and with little possibility of improving their financial lot. We have noted much more resistance to women ministers among the women of the congregations than among the men. Traditionally we have recruited more girls for church vocations than boys. However, the fall-out has been tremendous for reasons of marriage, changing to teaching careers, etc. We are not now placing any great emphasis on the recruitment of girls to other than the ministry of Christian Education. These will be ordained if they complete their seminary education. As a matter of strategy we are moving our emphasis heavily to the men. Obviously, we are not making much noise about this because of very vocal opposition among the women's groups of our Communion. However, we feel that in the face of the sociological situation we can be responsible stewards in no other way. In sharing the experience of a group who has had long experience with the ordination of both sexes, I would say that we strongly believe in the right for women to be ordained, but feel it irresponsible to recruit girls to a profession that offers them only a second-rate opportunity."

The following is from the Congregational Board of Pastoral Supply: "The churches usually do not desire the services of a woman minister. The chances are that 950 of the churches would prefer, offhand, that their minister be a man. This offers an initial handicap to any woman in the ministry. Some of our women ministers are married and some are single. They work out this problem with the particular church and with their husbands, in terms of the total family situation. I have observed a good many such situations and feel that it has been very harmoniously dealt with. Concerning the problems growing out of confinements due to pregnancy, children and the adverse attitude of a certain segment of the community, we discover that these problems, in certain instances, have resulted in marked changes of plans for the person involved. There are problems involved, but comparable problems due to temporary illness of a male minister also occurs, and the disruption is, perhaps, no greater in one case than in another. There have been quite a number of women ministers seeking ordination and receiving it, who have later ceased to serve as parish ministers; due to the special problems involved. The percentage has perhaps been a bit higher than in the case of men, but there is no small percentage of men who also go into business and other phases of activity in connection with our Christian work and institutions. This office, and I believe our denominational leadership as a whole, would not keep any young woman in the dark regarding the difficulties and problems, provided she should seek counsel before entering upon this work. At the same time, we feel the door should be kept wide open lest we interfere with the operation of the Holy spirit and the work of the Church. But I would repeat that we never paint a rosy picture to a young woman who contemplates entering the Christian ministry as a profession."

Mr. Riley B. Montgomery of the Disciples of Christ writes: "In our churches most of the ordained women are doing general or specialized types of work rather than the pastoral ministry"

The Salvation Army has perhaps answered the problem in the best way. Both the husband and wife must be officers in the Army. If the man marries a wife who is not an officer, his status goes to that of a layman. The same, of course, is true of women who are officers. Though this rule may seem to be very stringent, it has been the experience of the

Army that they have lost very few men by this rule. In the corps itself, the woman is held to be subordinate to the husband, though both have had the same training. It has been the experience of the Army that the presence of a wife with equal training has been most helpful, especially in the field of counseling. The Army feels that there are many situations in which the wife could be far more valuable than the husband.

I think all this information, coming from churches which have had long experience with the ordination of women, seems to indicate that our problem is not with the ability of women to carry on the work, but rather with a culture which is not ready to receive women on an equal basis. Even in the cases of the churches—small rural—who have called women, we might well ask whether they would have done so, if they could have secured the services of a man. Their situation forced them to accept a woman as minister. This situation may also have forced a change of viewpoint relative to the woman as a minister, just as the situation in World War II rapidly changed our attitude toward women doing certain jobs, heretofore carried on by men only. Judging from the experiences of other churches, we can be quite sure that our own communion would have real difficulty in accepting women in the Christian ministry. I would judge that in our case the cultural lag-toward women in the ministry-would be greater.

It has been very difficult to find published material on the experiences of women who have been in the ministry. I received, however, a very interesting letter from a woman, who was ordained by the United Church of Canada. She will be working with her husband, who is a missionary in India. I must say that there was some real opposition to her ordination since the United Church requires that the ordinant shall give herself wholly to the work of the church. She is the mother of three children.

She writes that in her case there would be a real advantage in sending a married woman to work among the women and children in India, particularly because Indian culture suspects the single woman. Incidentally this matter 'of foreign culture also makes it necessary in some cases that members of the consistory shall be women. All cultures do not allow males to make pastoral calls on the ferrule members of the congregation.

She writes further that there is a feeling in the United Church of Canada that some women have been ineffective, and that perhaps women should have only a limited sphere in the ministry- There is also the feeling that there have been a few notably successful women ministers. I quote the following sentence: " I think the general feeling among women is that it is too early to judge the effectiveness of women ministers on the small sample we have had, if we are comparing them with the best of men ministers, which seems to be the normal tendency." On this last statement I would quite agree with her. We always compare women with the successful minister, or elder, or deacon. We fail to take into account the number of men who are also mediocre.

She has the following to say about her own experience: "I myself have only experience as an unordained supply, and that before my training was complete. I was assigned to an Extension Council to help start two churches, one in a veterans' settlement and one in a city extension area. I received the fullest cooperation of the people and we did open a church in 1946 which is still functioning. My only other pastoral experience was a five months' mission field in 1941 from which families still keep in touch with me. I would say then, that a woman minister can come very close to her people and be of real help, but I think she must recognize that men still like to be led by men-and lots of women too!-and so plan to increase the lay leadership in her church as to provide for that.

Of course, my husband and I feel that the ideal is a situation where a man-woman team works closely together, whether they be man and wife or whether they be in the same congregation with different functions, or whether they be neighboring pastors who organize their work so as to utilize the special gifts of each." I think a woman minister has to recognize certain limitations in breadth of service, which she may well make up to the church in depth, in special gifts, and in tackling social problems among women. It is still evidence of our male-dominated thinking that we consider some of the masculine gifts and abilities more desirable than the feminine ones in the ministry. I wonder when the final score is added up, if God will think so.

"Probably the greatest problems of a woman entering the ministry are with herself. Can she emotionally accept the prior call of her work, even above that of her children on occasion? For instance, my duties in India on one occasion required me to leave my 1% year-old with bronchial pneumonia in charge of a servant during the day, and on another occasion both of my young children with whooping cough, for a period of three weeks, during the day, with servants. Secondly, can she accomplish her work and still provide proper care for her children and sufficient time with them to give them a secure and happy childhood? Here the type of work to which she is assigned is of great importance, as is her husband's readiness to assume home responsibilities. I think the normal American pastorate could be managed with adequate household help, for the woman minister must realize she cannot run her home as well as care for a pastorate. That brings up the third major personal decision to be faced. Is she willing to work without financial gain? If she receives a salary, it will normally be spent in replacing her labors in the home. We simply must recognize that a woman minister is still a social pioneer, but that the need of the countless women who are seeking guidance from psychiatrists, from newspaper or magazine columnists and such like, instead of their pastors, makes the pioneering worthwhile. Before my marriage, I felt that when my training was complete, I would be able to handle a pastorate as effectively, and in the same way as a man. I now know that a woman has limitations-first, inexperience if she is single, and loneliness if she lives alone, which can make her lose objectivity, and secondly, energy and sometimes gifts of administration, and thirdly, the set 'tags' or mores which society places upon her, making it more difficult for her to be the impersonal counsellor men and women need. Yet I also know now that a man has limitations -a lesser degree of sensitivity, oftentimes a lesser interest in the nurture of the young of the church, and practically no entree into the deepest problems of women in his congregation. He also is handicapped by his sex. I have come to the conclusion that a full partnership of men and women in the ministry is a constructive thing, and even an urgent need in modern society."

From what I have been able to gain through reading, and there is very little from the practical side, I believe my correspondent has the best grasp of the problems involved. I would like to put down some statements:

1. A woman of equal ability will do as good a work as her male counterpart.
2. In some areas of work she will excel her opposite, in others he will excel her.
3. Problems raised by the presence of children will be greater for the woman minister than for the man.
4. The present attitude toward women in the ministry is of such a nature that it may well be said that it is the strongest deterrent toward her doing an effective job.

So far we have discussed only the ordination of women to the office of minister. However, the arguments against women in the other offices are substantially the same. The sociological barrier is the one that must be moved. If we could remove this barrier, the church could begin to make use of gifts which are unique with the women of the church. Many a minister has asked his wife for advice on specific problems. The Salvation Army has recognized the value of women officers to deal specifically with the problems of women. The male pastor simply is not taken into confidence by the women of his congregation. If we had women in the office of the elder we could make use of her special gifts. Much of the work of the deacons is of such a nature that women would far excel them in the execution of the office. I am thinking of the needs in the home in case of sickness or need.

In 1950, Canon Raven speaking at a Cambridge University Convocation made the statement that the church was fifty years behind the times in the relationship of men and women. When I think of the numerous times the New Testament refers to women in the church and their work, I am inclined to think that we are far behind the church of the first century.

I suppose we ought to ask ourselves a few questions. Ought we to wait until the social lag catches up to us before we ordain women to the offices? Or ought we to be in the forefront seeking to overcome this social lag? If the Church is convinced that women of equal ability can do equal work in the Church, and in some instances, work that a man can not do, we ought to make use of these women. A cultural lag ought not to stand in the way of allowing spiritual gifts to remain dormant.

## II

Your committee was heartened by the serious consideration that was given in many parts of the Reformed Church in America to the studies submitted to the General Synod last year and distributed to the several consistories. Many of the responses received by the committee emphasized that while there might be serious practical blocks to the ordination of women, there was no Scriptural basis for excluding them from office. We believe that a forthright declarative statement to that effect by General Synod would indicate the real nature of the question that faces us in the ordination of women. The question is not theological but sociological and practical.

Accordingly, we **recommend** that General Synod make the following declarative statement: "Scripture nowhere excludes women from eligibility to the offices but always emphasizes their inclusion, prominence, and equal status with men in the Church of Jesus Christ."

Scripture everywhere emphasizes the oneness of man and wife. The two are one flesh. God made man male and female. These are two forms of being human. Each is specifically endowed by the Creator for the other's enrichment and wellbeing. They truly complement one another. The created differences mutually fulfill and enrich human life. God created man in His image, in the duality of male and female as the one human being, a partnership for the well-being of man's life. Man and woman need one another for their own fulfillment.

This oneness in duality or polarity of the created human world is not set aside in God's plan of redemption. Here, too, there is no evidence in Scripture that woman occupies an inferior position.

Your committee recognizes and acknowledges that even in the Church of Jesus Christ, sociological and practical difficulties make themselves felt and may for a time restrain Christians from translating what is considered right on the basis of Scripture into new forms of communal action, fearful of accepting the clearly-indicated responsibility of moving forward in response to the Spirit's leading.

Making women eligible to all the offices, even though scripturally sound, may arouse fears that the Church is not equal to her responsibility. We would not minimize the fears nor the practical difficulties and tensions the Reformed Church in America would face. We would like to point out, however, that in case the offices are opened to women as a policy of the Reformed Church in America, each congregation and each consistory retains the responsibility of deciding whether the Spirit of God is calling any woman to an office. The ultimate authority for calling, ordaining, and installing is on the local level. No deliverance of General Synod on the question of woman's eligibility to office will change the Reformed principle of church polity that the power of ordaining and installing rests in consistory and classis. This power and authority is in no way bound or restricted by the General Synod declaring that on the basis of its interpretation of Scripture, the offices in the church ought to be open to women as well as to men. Each consistory and each classis has the solemn responsibility of deciding whether practical difficulties and possible resulting tensions would restrain them from opening an office to a woman.

Moreover, your committee is convinced that the office in the Church of Jesus Christ is indivisible. The several offices are not independent of one another. While there are differences of accent, there is not a difference of essential nature. The three offices together represent the one office of Jesus Christ, the head of His Church, as Prophet, Priest, and King. Accordingly, to open, say, only one office, the office of deacon, to women would do violence to the essential oneness of the office in Christ's Church. The question basically is whether a woman in the Church can be ordained to represent Christ to His Church.

Accordingly, your committee recommends that General Synod send down an overture to the classes, asking that they vote on the following proposal: The offices in the Reformed Church in America shall be open to women and men alike beginning with the year 1962.

Your committee further recommends that should this proposal receive the necessary two-thirds vote of all classes and General Synod by declarative statement make it a policy of the Reformed Church in America, the necessary changes in the constitution and the liturgy be referred to the respective committees on constitution and liturgy for proper phrasing prior to their submission to the classes, which then, of course, will have to be voted on independently by the several judicatories.

In its study of the question of the ordination of women, your committee has discovered that from time to time various irregular situations have arisen resulting

possibly from an inadequate understanding of the nature of the office and the several ministries in the Church of Jesus Christ. There is lacking, we believe, in the Reformed Church in America, a clear grasp of the Biblical meaning of the office and of the ministries, which lack seems to indicate a need for further study to lead our denomination in thinking through once more, as was done in the time of the Reformation, the nature of the Church of Jesus Christ, the nature and function of the ministries, and the nature and function of the offices in the church.

Accordingly, your committee recommends that a committee be appointed to make a fresh and Biblical study of the nature of the office and the ministries and their respective functions, and bring back a report to the General Synod.

Finally, since your committee has now finished the task assigned to it by the Synod of 1954, we recommend that the committee be discharged.

This report is respectfully submitted by the Committee on the Ordination of Women.

G. T. VANDER LUGT, Chairman  
LAMBERT PONSTEIN  
ANDREW W. MEYER  
RICHARD C. OUDERSLUYS  
VERNON H. KOOY