



## Report of the Committee on Women in Church Office

Submitted to the Fifty-fifth General Assembly (1988)

[Note: General Assembly reports (whether from a committee or its minority) are thoughtful treatises but they do not have the force of constitutional documents—the Westminster Standards or the Book of Church Order. They should not be construed as the official position of the OPC.]

### I. INTRODUCTION

### II. FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- A. [The Regulative Principle](#)
- B. [The Nature of Woman as Created and Redeemed](#)
- C. [The Order of Authority and Subordination to Which Men and Women Are Subject](#)

### III. WOMEN AND SPECIAL OFFICE

- A. [The Nature of Ordination and Special Office](#)
- B. [The Office of Elder](#)
- C. [The Office of Deacon](#)

### IV. WOMEN AND GENERAL OFFICE

- A. [Biblical Teaching on the Identity of Women](#)
- B. [Women in the Life of the Early Church](#)

### V. CONCLUSION

### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

### [APPENDIX: WOMEN DEACONS? FOCUSING THE ISSUE](#)

### [MINORITY REPORT](#)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. History of the Committee

In response to an overture from the Presbytery of the Midwest the 51st General Assembly (1984) established a committee of three members (Messrs. Cottenden, Conn and Silva) "to consider the hermeneutical aspects of the debate over the role of women in ordained office and to report to the 52nd General Assembly with specific applications to this issue." This Committee presented a preliminary report which discussed some of the hermeneutical tensions involved in such a study and provided a series of hermeneutical guidelines. It quoted extensively from the 1978 report of a similar committee of the Christian Reformed Church.

The 52nd General Assembly (1985) recommitted the whole

matter, including the preliminary report with its recommendations and the report of the advisory committee, to the Committee, which it enlarged by the addition of two members (Messrs. Gaffin and Knudsen). Two alternates (Messrs. Strimple and I. Davis) were elected. They became members shortly after the assembly due to the resignation of two of the original members (Messrs. Conn and Silva). The recommittal motion further instructed that "an exegesis of passages relevant to the debate over the role of women in ordained office be included in the Committee's report to the 53rd General Assembly." The Committee determined, in the light of this addition to the mandate, not to attempt another systematic treatment of hermeneutical principles. Rather, it sought to identify the texts of Scripture which appear to have the most bearing on the matter and to exegete them raising particular hermeneutical questions as they occurred.

The 53rd General Assembly (1986) continued the committee in order that it might complete the section of women and the diaconate. An alternate (Mr. Reynolds) was elected. He became a member shortly thereafter due to the resignation of Mr. Cottenden. The Committee did not complete the section on the diaconate, but decided to present the partial report which it had prepared for the 53rd General Assembly to the 54th General Assembly.

The 54th General Assembly (1987) recommitted the entire report with the recommendations of the advisory committee to revise and expand the report in order to present a completed report to the 55th General Assembly (1988).

#### B. The Present Report

The present report is restructured to include additions recommended by the advisory committee of the 54th General Assembly. The title has been changed to state the exact nature of the report. There is a new section on the Biblical idea of ordination (III,A.). Exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:15 has been added. The section on Priscilla and Aquila has been rewritten (IV,B.1.). The exhortation to sessions has been rewritten as a conclusion to the entire report.

Beyond these recommendations the Committee has included considerable church historical material (II,A.2.; III,A.3. & C.2.). The Committee also decided to begin the report with a section on hermeneutics, part of which is based on the work of the original committee (II,A.). Material has also been added to the section on the role of women in the N.T. (IV,B.3.).

## II. FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Care must be taken in applying sound hermeneutical principles to the subject of women and church office such that the church does not adopt extracanonical norms for Christian conduct and take patterns from modern society and use them to control the interpretation of Scripture. The Bible is God's complete and final revelation to man and in its light all disputes ought to be settled (*WCFI:X.*). In considering the question of women in office we need to be especially careful not to yield to the *Zeitgeist* of either feminism or male chauvinism which dominate our humanistic age.

#### A. The Regulative Principle

##### 1. Historical background

It is one of the hallmarks of the Reformed church that it has developed a self-conscious hermeneutic especially in the area of church government and worship. This has variously been denoted as the "Regulative Principle," "The Puritan Principle" or "prescriptive principle."

The clear formulation of this principle as found in the *Westminster Confession* was the result of a century of controversy in England over the question of the extent of the Reformation in the area of ecclesiology: church government and worship. In fact the initial parliamentary mandate for the Westminster Assembly concerned *only* these matters.

It should be noted that the specific formulation of the regulative principle in the era of Church history was a specific application of the broader principle of *sola scriptura* or the sufficiency of Scripture as it is expressed in *WCF*I:VI. from the very outset of the Reformation.

By the time of the Reformation the British and Continental Reformers were forced to formulate a specific doctrine of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. "The Reformers did recognize a Christian tradition, but only a Christian tradition based on, and derived from, Scripture, and not one that equaled or surpassed it in authority." (Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979 [1932], p. 169).

In the areas of church government and worship, Luther, along with the Anglican Reformers, allowed practices not warranted by Scripture as long as they were not expressly prohibited, placing the *onus probandi* upon those who would oppose such unwarranted practices.

But it is with Calvin that the regulative principle begins to emerge explicitly. In government and worship Calvin demanded positive warrant from Scripture, and thus introduced what English Calvinists promoted as the *jus divinum* theory of church government (cf. William Cunningham, "The Reformers and the Regulative Principle," in *The Reformation of the Church*, pp. 38, 43).

In his treatise, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, written to be delivered at the Diet of Spires in 1543, Calvin makes his position quite clear (*Selected Works: Tracts and Letters*, Baker Reprint of Calvin Transl. Soc. ed. 1844): "I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not *expressly* sanctioned by his Word" (p. 128; emphasis added). He goes on to quote 1 Sam. 15:22 and Matt. 15:9.

This view of the regulative principle held sway in Scottish Presbyterianism and traveled to America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In America the regulative principle came to clear expression in writers such as John Girardeau, a southern Presbyterian professor of the nineteenth century. In his treatise *Instrumental Music In Public Worship* (1888) he spends the first part of the book asserting and proving the Biblical authority for the regulative principle. "...A divine warrant is required for everything in the faith and practice of the church" (p. 23).

Girardeau divides his Scripture proof into "didactic statements" and "concrete instances." Under the former he lists: Numbers 15:39, 40; Exodus 25:40; Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs

30:5, 6; Isaiah 8:20; Daniel 2:44; Matthew 15:6; 28:19, 20; Colossians 2:20-23; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 and Revelation 22:18, 19. Under concrete examples of the application of this teaching he cites: Cain and his offering (Gen. 4); the strange fire of Nadab and Abihu (Numb. 16); Moses' smiting the rock at Kadesh (Numb. 20); Saul's offering at Gilgal (1 Sam. 13); Uzza's mishandling of the ark (1 Chron. 13:7, 8; 15:11-15); King Uzziah's usurpation of the priesthood (2 Chron. 26:16-21); King Ahaz's usurpation of the priesthood (2 Chron. 28:3-5).

## 2. Church standards

The Westminster Standards are clear in setting forth the regulative principle with a full galaxy of proof texts. WCF I:VI; XX:II; XXI:I; LC Q. 3.

It should be noted that the word "worship" for the Puritan authors of the Confession often included matters of government and discipline. Hence in Ch. XX,II, "in matters of faith, or *worship*" is the limit of what may bind the Christian conscience. In Ch. I,VI, "the government of the church" is included under what must be "either expressly set forth in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture."

Our *Form of Government* is likewise clear in applying the regulative principle to government as well as worship along the lines of historical *jus divinum* Presbyterianism.

### Chapter I -- *Christ the King and Head of the Church*

2. *Jesus Christ, who rules in his church by his Word and Spirit.*

3. *Christ orders his church by the rule of his Word; the pattern of officers, ordinances, government, and discipline set forth in Scripture is therefore to be observed as the instruction of the Lord. Church government must conform to the scriptural pattern and follow the specific provisions revealed in the New Testament* (p. 2; emphasis added).

### Chapter III -- The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

3. *All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God* (p. 6; emphasis added).

Girardeau sums up the regulative principle: "A divine warrant is necessary for every element of doctrine, government and worship in the church; that is, whatsoever in these spheres is not commanded in the Scriptures, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence from their statements is forbidden" (*op. cit.*, p. 1).

3. The principle as it relates to the question of the ordination of women The answer to the question of whether or not women may be ordained to the New Testament offices of elder or deacon depends entirely upon the establishment of *positive Scriptural warrant*. Scripture and our confession require positive warrant by express statement or valid inference. The *onus probandi* rests upon those who would establish the practice of ordaining women. Thus the exegesis of relevant passages of Scripture is incumbent upon those who would

answer such a question to the satisfaction of our church.

The care with which we consider the application of the regulative principle to this question should be enjoined upon us by the warning of Principal Cunningham: "When this general truth (i.e., the regulative principle) is denied, there is no limit that can be put to the introduction of the inventions of men into the government and worship of Christ's house" (*Historical Theology, op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 72).

## B. The Nature of Woman as Created and Redeemed

### 1. The identity of woman by virtue of creation

#### a. The generic unity and the individuality of man and woman

The early chapters of Genesis speak of man and woman as a unity and also as individuals. As they relate the story of creation, they speak, on the one hand, generically. God created man, both male and female. With a slight change of focus, they speak, on the other hand, of man and woman individually.

These two perspectives are joined in a striking way. It is said that God created "man" (Gen. 1:27). God counsels with himself, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). This reference is to man generically; but immediately thereafter, as reference is made to man's rule over the creatures, the attention shifts to man distributively. God counsels with himself, "They shall rule ..." (Gen. 1:26). The same pattern occurs in the next two verses. "Man" is used generically, "And God created man ..." (Gen. 1:27); but this generic word "man" refers to both male and female, "male and female he created them." It is interesting that both the singular pronoun "him" (*otho*) and the plural "them" (*otham*) appear in this sentence. "Man" is used generically, including both male and female; but, with a slight shift of focus, male and female are considered individually and the plural is used. God's blessing is pronounced on male and female, "God blessed them and male and female are charged to fill the earth and to rule over it. Later, the man, Adam, is clearly distinguished from the woman, Eve. For instance, it is the woman, not the man, who first sins (1 Tim. 2:14).

The generic unity of man and woman is further indicated in that woman is taken out of man (Gen. 2:23). She is taken from man's side; she is fashioned from man's "rib" (Gen. 2:21, 22). God could have created man and woman separately and then brought them together. According to the record, he did not: he created man and then formed woman out of man. Eve is called woman, because she is taken out of man.

It has been ascertained that human beings have both masculine and feminine qualities. Whether one is male or female depends on the predominancy of one set of qualities over the other. There are rare cases where feminine characteristics predominate in one who has a male body, and *vice versa*. We regard such confusion as abnormal; but its possibility emphasizes the generic relatedness of male and female, who are both referred to in the generic term "man."

#### b. The complementarity of man and woman in their difference

In their unity, man and woman also differ, and in their difference they complement each other. This is brought out clearly in the Genesis account. The Lord says that it is not good for man to be alone and counsels with himself to make a

"fitting helper for him" (Gen. 2:18). God brought the birds and the wild animals to man, to see what he would call them (Gen. 2:19). Adam gave names to the cattle, the birds, and the wild beasts; but, as the record says, "for Adam no fitting helper was found" (Gen. 2:20). We need not think that we are presented here with a series of experiments and failures. Our attention is focused on the inability of man to find in the lower creation anything with which he could identify in such a way as to fulfill his deep-seated need. It is only as woman is formed out of what has been taken from his side that Adam can name or identify one to whom he can relate in this satisfying way. In Adam's response there is a jubilation of recognition. He names or identifies her thus: "Then the man said, 'This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken' " (Gen. 2:23). In recognizing and naming Eve thus, Adam sets her apart from all the rest of creation.

The generic unity and complementarity of man and woman is sometimes explained in terms of the Androgyne theory. According to this theory, man and woman are originally one. They are then separated and after their separation are involved in a continual search until they find each other again. This theory indeed teaches the generic unity of man and woman. It thinks of the original man/woman unity, however, as a complete whole. It is only when the two parts are separated that they seek each other out to be reunited. The book of Genesis also teaches the generic unity of man and woman. But it speaks of Adam as seeking for something that will complement him, even before Eve has been taken out of his body. He has a need that only the formation of the woman will satisfy. When Eve is formed, the kind of creature with whom he can have satisfying fellowship has appeared on the scene, and he recognizes her and names her appropriately. Even though the Bible speaks of man generically, as male and female, it is clear that its teaching does not square with that of the Androgyne theory.

The Bible teaches that there is a diversity between man and woman, between male and female; but with this difference there is a unity. In his created estate, before woman was taken from his body, man needed woman. According to the Bible, male and female complement or "round out" each other. This cannot be understood simply in physiological terms; the unity-in-diversity of male and female must be understood in terms of what makes man man and the full individuality of man and woman.

#### c. The high standing of woman as the complement of man

The Genesis account ascribes to woman an exalted standing. As Adam names her, he recognizes something in her that clearly distinguishes her and sets her apart from the other creatures and that constitutes her a fitting helper for him. She has in common with these creatures and with the man, that she has been taken from the ground. Together with them she is an "earthling." Nevertheless, she has been taken out of man. She shares with Adam his having become a living being by virtue of God's breathing into him the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). When God counsels to make man in his image and likeness, he is also speaking of her. God also speaks of woman individually when he gives man and woman the place of dominion over the creation. It is she whom Adam recognizes as the one who can properly complement him.

The appropriateness of Eve did not reside simply in the fact that she could offer Adam "social" or even "spiritual" fellowship. There is an inner bond between the man and the woman that is expressed in Adam's excited declaration, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). What immediately follows is the description of the marriage bond that we call "the institution of marriage."

d. The complementarity of man and woman expressed in the marriage bond

It is difficult to escape the conclusion, that the complementarity of man and woman, which is an expression of a unity in their difference, is brought to quintessential expression in the marriage bond. The Bible strongly suggests that it is in marriage that the mutual complementation of man and woman comes to its fullest expression.

In this context, it is possible to understand why in the marriage relationship man and woman are said to become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). We rightly associate becoming one flesh with sexual union. The believer is forbidden to join himself with a harlot, because he thereby becomes "one flesh" with her (1 Cor. 6:16). Sexual union, however, cannot exhaust the meaning of "becoming one flesh." In view of the biblical teaching on the subject as a whole, it is better to think of sexual union as an integral part, but only as a part of becoming one flesh. The apostle Paul expresses the depth of the relationship when, as he speaks of the institution of marriage, he refers to a mystery and says that he is speaking of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). The bond between man and woman in marriage is like that of Christ and the church.

## 2. The identity of woman in Christ

a. As Stephen B. Clark notes: "Nowadays many assume that Galatians 3:28 is the place in which we find the heart of scriptural teaching about the roles of men and women. Moreover, many interpret Galatians 3:28 to mean that ideally in Christ there are no role differences between men and women, an interpretation which opposes Galatians 3:28 to all the other texts which assert such a difference. According to this line of interpretation, this tension should be resolved by giving a preference to Galatians 3:28" (*Man and Woman in Christ*, p. 138).

A recent exponent of this approach is F. F. Bruce, who writes in his commentary on Galatians in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (p. 190): "...if a Gentile may exercise spiritual leadership in church as freely as a Jew, or a slave as freely as a citizen, why not a woman as freely as a man? Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus as in 1 Corinthians 14:34ff. or 1 Timothy 2:11ff. they are to be understood in relation to Galatians 3:28, and not *vice versa*."

It is your Committee's judgment that the context in which this verse appears supports Clark's conclusion as the more accurate one (pp. 138-9):

While Galatians 3:28 does provide a helpful perspective on men's and women's role in the New Testament, it is hardly the *locus classicus* on men's and women's roles. It does not even properly qualify as a key text since it does not explicitly address the subject of the roles of men and women ... For a key statement on men's and

women's roles, one should look at the passages on personal relationships and social order that are directly concerned with the matter.

b. The fact is that there seems to be general agreement among those appealing to Galatians 3:28 in the current discussions as to Paul's basic teaching in this text. There are certainly differences of opinion regarding the precise force of the apostle's references to the law (verses 21, 23, 24), the pedagogue (24, 25), baptism (27), *et al.*: but it must be clear to all that these closing verses of chapter 3 are part of his impassioned argument for the gospel of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, a promise which the addition of the Law four hundred and thirty years later could not nullify. The same Scripture that reveals that all are sinners announces the good news that salvation is promised to all who believe, whatever their race, social status, or sex.

The basic thrust of verse 28 is expressed in various ways in the recent literature, but there is essential agreement that it speaks of the oneness of male and female as beneficiaries of God's grace in Christ. Everyone who believes, without distinction is God's child and an heir to the promises of the covenant made with Abraham.

c. Since the theme of the rest of the epistle focuses on the distinction between Jew and Gentile, it has been asked why Paul here adds the contrasting pairs slave/free and male/female. And it has become common to suggest that he is consciously rejecting the Jewish thanksgiving of his time that God had not created him a Gentile, a slave or a woman. The earliest written source for such a Jewish prayer seems to be the second century A.D., but the maxim is found earlier among the Greeks; and it is assumed that such a prayer was part of Paul's Jewish training.

The basis for such a thanksgiving was not disparagement of Gentiles, slaves, or women as such but rather recognition of the fact that significant religious privileges and responsibilities were open only to free Jewish males. Women, proselytes, and slaves were not fully responsible members of the worshipping community. Women did not have equal access to God's presence with men. They were allowed only as far as the Court of Women.

It may be that Paul was aware of such a Jewish prayer and that a recognition of this fact can deepen our appreciation of his affirmation that believing Gentiles, slaves and women are all full and equal members of Christ's body; but it is not at all clear how a recognition of a possible allusion to such a prayer necessitates the conclusion that Galatians 3:28 requires a denial of all role differentiation in the church.

d. Another popular suggestion is that Galatians 3:28, like I Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11 (and Rom. 10:12), represents an early Christian baptismal formula. Again, this may be the case. Baptism is certainly prominent in all these contexts. And in such a setting the reference to sex would take on special significance since the Old Covenant sign (circumcision) was applied to males only. But again this would underscore the soteriological thrust of Galatians 3:28. "The woman ... comes into the covenant relation of God's people through her own faith and baptism, and is fully part of the covenant relationship with God" (Clark, p. 141).

e. Attention is often called to the change in construction when Paul states the third pair in Galatians 3:28. After the two references to *ouk eni...oude*, Paul adds *ouk eni...kai*. The most likely suggestion is that Paul is here influenced by the LXX rendering of Genesis 1:27 (*arsen kai thelu epoiesen autois* - cf. Mark 10:6), but more by way of natural reminiscence than purposeful allusion. Bruce points out (p. 189) that the "slight change of construction" makes "no substantial change in meaning."

f. Certainly it would be a mistake to imagine that Paul is suggesting that in Christ the original created male-female relationship is negated. Redemption does not destroy but rather renews creation. Redemption does not destroy the creation ordinances of God. Contemporary rhetoric often seems to obscure this, however. Howard Keir, for example, writes that: "Paul states unequivocally that for those 'in Christ' natural distinctions no longer exist ... the old Adam has been manifestly dissolved in Christ and the new humanity, free from distinctions of the old world, takes its place" (*Evangelical Quarterly*, LV [1983], 31). Whether Keir is calling for some new androgynous order in the church is not made clear.

g. Actually the evidence that the apostle is employing the "New you are all one (New Man?) in Christ Adam" imagery when he says here that Jesus" is not totally compelling. Appeal can be made to the echo of Genesis 1:27 in "male and female." Appeal is also made to Genesis 2:24 as the background of "you are all one" in Galatians 3:28 (though Paul does not follow the LXX "*sarka mian*"). And the strongest argument perhaps is the fact that in the similar text, Colossians 3:10, reference to renewal in the image of the One who created the first Adam is clear. But, again, renewal in the Second Adam is just that -- *renewal*, not destruction, of the created order.

h. As we shall stress again below (c.2.), Galatians 3:28 certainly does have social implications regarding the interrelations of men and women. It should be evident, however, to those who affirm the absolute authority of the whole Bible as our rule of faith and life that our own conclusion regarding such "implications" must not be allowed to set aside the clear teaching of the Scripture when it addresses such a question as the qualifications for special offices in the church, but rather our fallible and unauthoritative conclusions must be judged and revised in the light of Scripture. But for many contemporary Christians there's the rub. "It is a fairly common assumption in current interpretation that unity and equality in Christ, *coram Deo*, if consistently understood, implies both functional interchangeability in all social groups, including the Church, and strictly egalitarian, non-hierarchical patterns of authority" (John Jefferson Davis, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 19 [1976], 7).

There are in general three possible answers to the question of how the texts we will consider under II, B. & C. relate to the teaching of Galatians 3:28 regarding the positions of men and women in the church.

(1) The teaching of these other texts contradicts the teaching of Galatians 3:28, and so a choice has to be made as to which is truly Christian, truly in line with the gospel of Christ; and the choice obviously must be for Galatians 3:28. In its bald form (Paul was correct in Galatians 3:28; Paul was wrong in those other texts) this view may appeal to few. But with certain refinements in the interest of preserving respect for Paul as a

teacher, this view is very popular today. Krister Stendahl speaks in the same sentence (*The Bible and the Role of Women*, p. 35) both of Paul's understandably gradual transcendence of "the inherited fundamental view" and of the special "circumstances at Corinth" (see option 2 below). Howard Keir suggests that in 1 Corinthians 11:13-17 "the argument ... is tortuous to say the least and uncharacteristically Pauline;" and therefore may well be an interpolation (p. 33 of work cited above). In dealing with the Corinthian text, William Klassen can speak of the way Paul accommodates or compromises the freedom he had spelled out so clearly in Galatians 3:28 when writing to a church which "found this freedom too threatening." But regarding 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Klassen concludes:

The whole of this section has to be rejected as so blatantly contradicting Paul's clear teaching ... that it cannot be seen as normative for early Christianity. To argue on the basis of God's creative sequence for the submissive role of women is out of character for Paul ... We have, therefore, no other option but to treat 1 Timothy 2:9-15 as the work of someone in the early church who could not come to terms with the freedom of Jesus and Paul on this matter ... It is hard to measure the damage it has done in the history of the church. Responsible exegesis demands that we come to terms with it" (*From Jesus to Paul*, ed. by Peter Richardson and John C. Hurd, pp. 203, 204).

Though they differ among themselves as to how they do it, all such views may be seen as various ways to "come to terms with" the perceived contradiction between Galatians 3:28 and these other texts.

(2) Perhaps this second "answer" to the relationship between Galatians 3:28 and the texts dealing explicitly with women in the church situation should be considered but another variety of answer (1). (The fact that a writer like Stendahl combines both answers points in that direction.) But here the exegetes do not speak at all of contradiction but rather of a basic harmony. The harmony, however, is achieved by asserting that the women-in-the-church texts are all so conditioned by the culture and the time that they are no longer normative. Keir says that 1 Corinthians 14:34 addressed "clearly a local problem" (Keir, p. 38). Osborne says that the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is based on the implications of women teaching men in the first century. Since those implications are not present in our time, the teaching is no longer authoritative (Grant Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 20 (1977), 337-352). F. F. Bruce seems to suggest a similar approach, though his comment is very brief.

We will examine the "culturally-conditioned, therefore not normative" interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (below III,B1.) and reject it. In an interesting article in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* CXXXI (1969), 50-58, Madeleine Boucher insists that to a first-century Jewish mind like Paul's, there was no tension between two apparently different views of the role of women, "a theory of subordination and a theory of equality." She appeals to Peter 3:7 as evidence for this and suggests that Judaism and Christianity "were alike in teaching at once the religious equality and the social subordination of women, and that no break occurred between the rabbis and Paul on this matter."

She herself agrees with Stendahl that we today must choose between Galatians 3:28 and Paul's view that the creation order grounds a certain subordination, but she insists that we be clear that "the tension arises from *modern man's* inability to hold these two ideas together" -- and that we find no support in the Bible for choosing the one idea and rejecting the other.

(3) There is but one answer to the question of the relationship between Galatians 3:28 and the texts we shall consider below under III,B. & C., that is open to the Bible-believing Christian, if he is not convinced that the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is so culturally conditioned as to be no longer normative for the church; namely, that full equality and oneness for male and female in the Lord and role differentiation in the church are compatible and are both a part of God's authoritative revelation to his church today.

Clark suggests that "unless we assume that Paul is normally incoherent, it would make more sense to begin with the view that Paul had some way of putting together passages like Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, which were probably written within a year or two of one another;" and that Galatians 3:28 "is not directed against those differences of social role for men and women which other Scripture passages indicate are based upon the way God created the human race" (p. 150).

Clark stresses that according to the Pauline perspective, reflected most clearly in the so-called household codes, "As long as a certain relationship exists, it needs an order." This is where he finds Paul King Jewett's position so clearly untenable. "No one can arrive at the combination of exalting the sexual relationship and eliminating role differences on the basis of scripture. The whole position can only be explained as an attempt to find a basis in scripture for some favorite opinions of our contemporary society" (pp. 159-160).

And this is where the insistence that the church must achieve consistency in eliminating all distinction based upon any of the three coordinate contrasts in Galatians 3:28 founders. Clearly the comparison among the Jew-Greek, slave-free, and male-female relationships does not apply in *all* respects. "In Galatians 3:28 Paul compares these relationships according to one common quality. All three involve status distinctions in one's relationship with God according to the Mosaic Law. In other respects the three relationships are very different, and Paul's approach to them differs" (Clark, p. 158). Slavery is a man-made institution, a sinful one at that, and it is rightfully abolished altogether. But male-female relationships are ordained by the Creator. They are not abolished, and they are still governed by role relationships in accord with God's created order. Those are perhaps correct who translate 1 Corinthians 7:21, "if you can gain your freedom, do so" (N.I.V.). Paul would never give such advice to marriage partners or to children. In 1 Peter 3:1-7 there is reflection upon the full equality and oneness of the wife with the husband "as a fellow-heir of the grace of life."

It is perhaps worth noting, also, in response to such biblical feminists as Jewett, that the revealed life of the Trinity demonstrates that functional subordination for creative or redemptive purpose in no way demeans essential personhood (see Davis article, p. 208).

In conclusion the apostle Paul teaches in Galatians 3:28 that in terms of the believer's relation to God in Christ there is

absolutely no distinction between male and female, each is viewed as child and heir with full covenant rights and privileges.

### C. The Order of Authority and Subordination to Which Men and Women are Subject

#### 1. Authority and subordination as expressed in the marriage bond

The Bible is clear that together with the generic unity of man and woman and their mutual complementation, there is a definite order between them in the marriage relationship. Woman was taken out of man. The New Testament interprets this to mean that woman was created for man and not man for woman (1 Cor. 11:9). Carrying through the analogy between Christ, the head, and the church, his body, it teaches that the man is the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23). Wives, therefore, are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22), even as the church submits to Christ (Eph. 5:24). This relationship should not be misunderstood. Scripture teaches that the husband is to cherish and nurture his wife as Christ cares for his body, the church (Eph. 5:25), and as a man naturally cares for his own body (Eph. 5:28). The natural authority he has with his wife gives the husband opportunity to make room for her and to let her come to herself in the fullest way. In doing this he asserts his place of headship and leadership, but in such a manner that the mutual complementation of himself and his wife comes to expression. Conversely, the manner in which he and his wife complement each other is molded by the particular relation of the authority and subordination that holds between them in their marriage, on the analogy of the relationship between Christ and the church.

#### 2. Is the relationship of man and woman in marriage paradigmatic of the relationships in general?

Clearly since they speak of the one man and of the One woman, the first two chapters of Genesis focus attention on the marriage bond. Are the relationships that pertain there typical of an order that holds between man and woman in general, or are they restricted to marriage? This is by no means an easy question to answer. But we remember that God called man and woman, individually, to do more than enter into marriage, procreate, and fill the earth. God gave the dominion over the earth to both man and woman, individually, and called them to subdue it. That the terms of the cultural mandate extend beyond marriage gives us warrant to believe that there is a broad terrain of society on which man and woman relate to each other in such a way that the order between them is determined only by their individual ability and training, and not by a typical relationship of authority and subordination, as in the family. Their relationship as man and woman in other connections, such as that of the church, would then depend on whether this particular grouping is characterized by a typical authority/subordination relation between men and women, or whether it is composed of a free association in which men and women relate as individuals.

#### 3. The effects of the fall on the identity of woman (Gen. 3)

##### a. A hermeneutical principle

The Bible teaches that there has been a distortion of the relationship between man and woman, male and female,

because of the fall. We take it as an established principle of interpretation that the relationships between man and woman in the form that they take after the fall are more or less distorted forms of what they were in the pristine created order. Even though the distortion is at times grotesque, we may understand that the created order was not destroyed by the fall but only distorted by it. The above principle may be deduced from a consideration of the terms as a whole of the curse that fell on man and woman. God's curse did not remove the ground from man, nor did it prevent man from tilling it; the curse declared that man would till the ground and obtain its fruits with difficulty. God's curse did not prevent the woman from bearing children nor from enjoying the children she bore; it declared that the woman would bear children with difficulty and pain.

#### b. The distortion of the relationship between man and woman

The curse that was pronounced on woman suggests that the natural relationship between husband and wife had been disturbed by sin. It suggests, further, that this disturbance affected the relationship of authority and subordination that pertained between them. We read, "Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). As we saw, the complementarity of man and woman comes to quintessential expression in the marriage bond. This complementarity can exist only on the foundation of difference between man and woman, male and female. In marriage there is a natural order, of authority and subordination. The terms of the curse of the woman, however, suggest that these natural relationships have been disturbed. The order involved is still there; but it has been distorted, so that it is often obscured almost beyond recognition.

#### c. What this distortion entails

It is difficult to interpret Genesis 3:16 and to discover just what is meant by the woman's "urge" being to her husband and by her husband's ruling over her. Employing the above hermeneutical principle, however, we may infer that as a consequence of sin there is a distortion of the natural desire of the woman for her husband. In addition, the statement that her husband will rule over her suggests that the natural authority of the husband has been distorted so as to become coercive. It has also been suggested that Genesis 3:16 has in mind an effort on the part of the woman to wrest authority from her husband. On the part of some women, on the contrary, there is a slavish dependence on men. Whatever may be involved, we have here a distortion of the created order, in which the true identity of the woman is obscured.

That there is a distortion of the natural order only brings more firmly to our attention the fact that there is a relationship of authority/subordination in marriage and a mutual need of the marriage partners for each other.

### III. WOMEN AND SPECIAL OFFICE

#### A. The Nature of Ordination and Special Office

##### 1. Biblical

The idea of office is tightly woven into the fabric of Scripture. It is closely related to the idea of calling. These ideas are prominent in the New Testament; but they also have an

important place in the Old Testament, relating even to God's establishing man as his vicegerent in the world.

In the Old Testament, the idea of office comes to clear expression in the Levitical priesthood. This priesthood was established by way of redeeming the firstborn males of Israel. By reason of their being spared when the angel of death passed over the households in Egypt, these firstborn became dedicated to the Lord. The tribe of Levi then took their place and was set apart for the priestly service of God. Aaron was given the office of high priest, and the entire tribe of Levi had priestly office and functions in their courses.

Moses too had office. God chose him as His instrument to redeem the Israelite people from Egypt, freeing them from this alien dominion and restoring them to Himself, who had claimed them as His own and had placed His seal on them. Moses had a supreme position, exercising functions as prophet, priest, and king. God spoke to him in a way superior to that of the ordinary prophet (Num. 12:6-8). Moses interceded for Miriam, at the behest of Aaron, the high priest (Num. 12:11-13). He ruled the people, first alone and then with the 70 elders (Exod. 18:13ff.). God sustained Moses in his position, in the face of challenges, like those of Levitical priests (Num. 16) and of Aaron and Miriam (Num. 12).

In the New Testament, the idea of office is clearly expressed in the apostolate. The apostles were called to a special position, to perform special functions. Their office brought with it overriding authority in doctrine (teaching), church order, and discipline. There were clear requirements for office. Prominent among them was that they had seen the risen Christ. When Judas lost his place among the apostles (Acts 1:17, 20 quoting Psalm 69:25) because he betrayed Jesus, another was chosen to take part of the ministry and apostleship, from which Judas fell, that he might go to his own place (Acts 1:22, 25). It was Matthias who was chosen by lot to be numbered with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:26), taking Judas' place.

The Seven also had office. The need for their office arose because the apostles were unable to fulfill all the responsibilities that were thrust on them. A place, a position, opened up, and men were chosen to fill it. These were chosen from among good men who were filled with the Holy Ghost; but they were chosen to fill an office that corresponded to a need in the church.

The above instances clearly illustrate the idea of office in the Old and New Testaments. The idea is more deeply rooted, however. It pertains to the place God gave man from the beginning. As Adam is formed from the ground, he is made in God's image and likeness and is given dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:26-28). He has a place that carries with it an office; he is God's vicegerent. This position carries with it the calling to love and serve God with all his heart and to subdue the creation to God's glory. This calling relates to man generically, to both male and female. Further, it is with man, both male and female, that God enters into covenant, saying that He will be their God and that they will be His People. To understand the relation of man to God and to the creation as a whole, one must include the idea of office.

Scripture as a whole teaches that man, with his talents and abilities, has been called by God and has been set in a position of authority and responsibility. In each case, the offices and functions are not simply reflexes of subjective talents and

abilities ("gifts"). Indeed, the gifts are important. It is reasonable, furthermore, that there should be a congruence between any particular office and the gifts that are required to perform the functions of that office. Nevertheless, Scripture does not teach that office flows out of these subjective talents and abilities. Nor does it teach that there must be a congruence of office and gifts in any particular case.

Throughout, our attention is focused on the office, its functions, and calling to it. Gifts are in order to fill the office; the office does not exist because of the gifts. And the relation between office and gifts is not always uniform. It might be expected that there would be a congruity between office and gifts; but Scripture often focuses on the unexpected. One may well have an office with its corresponding functions but also be strongly impressed by the fact that he has these not because of the adequacy of his own gifts but because of God's grace. The Levitical priesthood was drawn from a particular tribe. It does not follow, however, that this tribe had more natural ability than the others to serve in this capacity. Moses himself complained that he lacked the qualities to serve as God's redeemer and to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, and Aaron was sent along as a spokesman. For Moses, governing the people was a great burden. Seeing his predicament, his father-in-law, Jethro, suggested that elders be appointed. Further, Moses gave way to impulsive and disobedient action, which resulted in his not being able to enter the land of promise. The apostles were men of authority; but they were by and large simple men, without the wealth of talent one might expect of leaders (Acts. 4:13). The apostle Paul was a man of ability and was well-educated; nevertheless, he himself details his own lack of qualifications to be an apostle, calling himself a miscarriage (1 Cor. 15:8). The tenor of Scripture teaching is that office is prior. One may be impressed by the lack of proportion between his own qualifications and the requirements of the office he holds. Even if he has an abundance of talent, one must still channel these talents and abilities (gifts) according to the office he holds. An abundance of gifts does not mean an abundance of callings and offices. The man of few gifts who faithfully carries out the responsibilities of his office is better than the man of many gifts who scatters his efforts or who in any way shirks his responsibilities. One is judged by his faithfulness. But whatever the proportion may be between gifts and calling -- whether they coalesce or stand in a paradoxical relationship -- office is prior. It does not flow out of endowment with talent and ability.

There are instances in Scripture, however, where the possession of a gift appears to bring with it an office and calling. We may think of the special gifts of the Spirit that were given at Pentecost. The gift of prophecy carried with it the right and the responsibility to exercise this gift in the congregation. The same may be said of the gift of tongues and gift of healing. This indeed was the case; but it does not follow that these instances are paradigmatic of the relationship of gifts and calling in general, nor does it follow, even in regard to these special gifts, that the office simply flowed out of the gift. The Scriptures teach that these special gifts were apportioned by the Holy Spirit to satisfy certain needs. These special gifts were given as a witness especially to those who were outside of the church, to demonstrate God's presence and power. Indeed, the possession of such a gift brought with it the right and the responsibility of using it -- thus the possession of such a gift endowed one with an office -- but the very speciality of these gifts militates against the idea that the pattern here holds for

the relationship in general of gift and office. The Scriptures present this relationship as a whole in a different way. Further, even in regard to the special gifts, it by no means follows that the office simply flows from the gift. Before the gifts were apportioned, there was already a clear need for them; there were definite functions for them to fulfill. The Scripture testimony suggests that the gifts were given for these definite purposes. Thus, the accent again falls on office and function. One receiving a particular gift would have the office and fulfill the function; but it does not follow that the office would flow out of the gift.

Some Christians, however, have indeed taken the special gifts as paradigmatic of the relation of gift and office. The New Testament age, they say, is the age of the Spirit. The Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to men. Empowerment with such spiritual gifts imparts to one a place of authority and a function akin to office. It is often thought that the presence of such gifts is a reflection of personal piety. On the surface, this thinking is democratic. Spiritual leadership belongs to anyone in the congregation who displays spiritual gifts. Each may possess gifts of the Spirit through prayer and other spiritual exercises. In this way of thinking, office and the authority flowing from it are thought to be a reflex of the spiritual gifts given to individuals in the church. This thinking involves an interpretation of the idea of office that differs markedly from that presented above. Office as spoken of above, it is said, belongs to a legalistic era, as in the Old Testament, or to temporary arrangements, such as one finds in the New Testament apostolate. When the age of the Spirit has fully come, such an idea of office falls away; "office" then depends on the subjective possession of spiritual gifts. There are some who regard any idea of the priority of office as an attempt to rationalize the Spirit, to "corral" the Spirit and spiritual gifts in the interests of order.

The above pattern of thought is more than an emphasis on the Holy Spirit; it involves an interpretation of the Spirit and spiritual gifts, as well as of the order in the church, that stands in opposition to Scriptural teaching. In Scripture, the Spirit and His work do not stand in antithesis to order. In fact, Spiritual gifts and their use are for the upbuilding of the church and are subject to the order that God has ordained for His church. They must be seen in the context of calling and office, and of the functions related to these. The above pattern of thought, which is called "spiritualistic," often results in disorder, as men, convinced that they are endowed with the Spirit and spiritual gifts, arrogate authority to themselves and even suppress the exercise of spiritual gifts on the part of others in the congregation. Indeed, spiritual gifts are important; the church should seek to maximize their use. Nevertheless, office does not flow from them, and those who have them -- even those who have many spiritual gifts -- must still assume a servant role in their leadership, channeling the use of their gifts according to their calling, for the edifying of the church.

The importance of office in the teaching of Scripture comes out clearly, when office is honored, even when subjective qualifications are lacking. A case in point is the apostle Paul's apology for his remark concerning the high priest Ananias, when the latter ordered him struck on the mouth (Acts 23:5). In answer to the question, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" Paul replied, quoting Exod. 22:28, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'" In criticism of those who

"reject authority and slander celestial beings," Jude cites an extreme example, "But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' " (Jude 8, 9). Such passages do not deny the importance of proper qualification for office; they simply highlight the importance of office and the respect that should be given to it.

Understanding the Biblical idea of office does not of itself give one a criterion as to whether women may be ordained to office in the church. It relates very clearly, however, to reasons that might be given for such ordination. It militates against the idea that women have a claim on office because of apparent gifts for ruling or serving. It especially militates against the idea that the church is unjust to women in not giving them office, because certain women display gifts and it is unfair to them not to give them the offices in which these gifts may be used. An understanding of the Scriptural teaching about office in its relationship to gifts will draw our attention to the office and qualifications for it and not to the gifts first of all. One must decide, on Scriptural grounds, whether this or that office in the church is open to women. If it is indeed open to women, then they have the responsibility to use their gifts there in fulfilling their calling. If it is not open, the church should make it possible for the women in the church to use their often outstanding gifts, in other, appropriate ways.

## 2. Church historical

It is the particular burden of this section to look at ordination only in terms of *its nature with reference to authority* in the history of the church. While all of the offices are essentially a *special service* in the church, the question before us is the question of whether or not authoritative leadership is implied in ordination and special office. This special emphasis should not be allowed to eclipse the accent on servanthood which attaches to all offices in the church of Christ.

Though the major emphasis of the Reformers was in the area of soteriology, concern for ecclesiology grew as the Reformation progressed. Luther reacted strongly to the sacerdotal view of office and ordination and therefore rejected the *character indelebilis* idea of ordination. Calvin sought to define and organize the offices of the ministry according to the New Testament. It remained for the later Reformers and Puritans to clarify and define a Biblical doctrine of ordination.

Both Calvin and Luther reacted strongly to the Radical Reformation's perversion of the "priesthood of all believers." The Anabaptists denounced all government, both civil and ecclesiastical (Clark, in *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries*, John Robbins, The Trinity Foundation, 1985, Appendix A -- "The Ordination of Women," p. 67; cf. C.R.C. *Report 44*, p. 681). For the Reformers, the priesthood of all believers and the necessity of special office in the church were not contradictory but complementary in nature. Luther and Calvin were not simply reacting to Anabaptist extremes, as the Christian Reformed Church's *Report 44* seems to imply (pp. 681ff., cf. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 106). They were responding to unbiblical error by searching the Scripture for a proper view of office.

As with many ecclesiological matters, it remained for the British Puritans to explicate the principles of the Continental Reformers. The great John Owen (1616-1683) gives a lucid

definition: "Ordination in Scripture compriseth the whole authoritative translation of a man from among the number of his brethren into the state of an officer in the church" (*Works*, Vol. XIII, p. 219).

It was with Owen's contemporary, George Gillespie (1613-1649), that the nature of ordination in its relationship to authority became explicit. In Gillespie's *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* he refuted the Erastians who maintained that church elders have no authority to govern (Clark, in *Scripture Twisting*, *op. cit.*, Appendix B -- "The Presbyterian Doctrine of Ordination," p. 87). Gillespie maintained that the Scriptures, in Hebrews 13:7 and 1 Timothy 3:4-6, 12; 5:17, give elders the clear authority to rule (*ibid.*, p. 88). Scripture makes clear references to the ordination and election of church officers in Acts 1:15, 23; 6:2,3; 14:23.

This ordination, Gillespie insisted, "standeth in the mission of the deputation of a man to *an ecclesiastical function with power and authority* (emphasis added) to perform the same; and thus are pastors ordained when they are *sent* to a people with power to preach the Word, minister the sacraments and exercise ecclesiastical discipline among them" (*ibid.*, p. 91). He goes on to say "the essential act of ordination [is] a simple deputation and application of a minister to his ministerial function *with power to perform it*" (emphasis added, *ibid.*, pp. 92, 93).

Gillespie clearly refutes the view which sees ordination as merely "the church's recognition that an individual has the gifts for a particular service," and "does *not* confer authority" (emphasis added, cf. Foh, *Women and The Word of God*, pp. 235 and 233).

Dr. Samuel Miller (1769-1850), professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government in Princeton Seminary, in his *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (1831) defined ordination: "That solemn rite, or act, by which a candidate for any *office* in the Church of Christ, is authoritatively designated to that office, by *those who are clothed with power for the purpose*" (p. 275). Those who ordain have the power to ordain others to the same office. Just like a civil judge, the elder is clothed with power to execute his office. "They are fully invested with the office, and with all the powers and privileges *which it includes* (emphasis added, p. 291). "Ordination is an act not only official, but also *authoritative*" (emphasis in original, p. 292).

In the contemporary Reformed churches, Christ's transmission of delegated authority through ordination is reflected in the vows of officers and the congregational vows of submission to the officers. This is true of *deacons'* as well as elders' vows in the CRC (*Report 44*, p. 690).

In the OPC Form of Government in Chapter XXV, 6.c. (p. 81) in the prescribed form for the ordination of ruling elders *and deacons*, the congregation is asked to "promise and yield him all that honor, encouragement and *obedience in the Lord*, to which his office, according to the Word of God and the constitution of this church, entitles him" (emphasis added; the RPCES form was identical, cf. Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67; cf. FG, XX,2.,3.,6.).

It is just at this point that the question of the ordination of women especially to the diaconate becomes germane. Dr.

Gordon H. Clark has concluded that in every instance of Biblical ordination (cf. Saul and Uzziah in light of Exod. 30:30-33), ordination confers authority to act in a particular capacity, whether priest, king, elder or deacon (Clark, *op. cit.*, Appendix B, p. 86). "Ordination is induction into an authoritative *order*" (*ibid.*, Appendix A, p. 67). Since the form "deaconess" in Roman. 16:1 gives no evidence of ordination or office (*ibid.*, pp.77, 78); and since "Scripture explicitly forbids women to teach or exercise authority, it is a violation of divine law to ordain a woman" (*ibid.*, Appendix B, p. 108).

## B. The Office of Elder

Since the nature of ordination and special office has just been discussed, in this section we will focus on those passages that bear most directly on the issue of the ordination of women to the office of elder.

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33b-36; 1 Timothy 2:8-3:7 (cf. Titus 1:5-9)

a. These three passages are the major New Testament texts on the relationship between men and women and their respective roles in the corporate or communal life of the church. Consequently, they, especially 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, have become crucial in the debate over the role of women in ordained office, especially the office of elder. They are perceived as addressing that issue more directly than any other texts in Scripture. Those who argue against women elders find the most explicit support for their position in these passages; those who argue the contrary usually expend a great deal of effort in trying to show that they do not exclude women elders.

b. In current treatment of these passages, particularly 1 Timothy 2, there are three basic positions: (A) Paul, the man, intends an absolute, perpetual exclusion of women from the office of elder, but Paul is wrong and therefore to be disregarded. (B) Paul, the inspired apostle, intends, and therefore God intends, to exclude women from the office of elder, but that exclusion is necessitated by circumstances (cultural and/or religious-ecclesiastical) unique to the time and place of his original readers or at least other than our own. The exclusion, then, is limited in its applicability and temporary; by God's design it is not relevant today, at least directly, and therefore is no longer binding. (C) Paul, the inspired apostle, intends, and therefore God intends, an absolute, perpetual exclusion that is binding until Christ's return. On the assumption of the divinely inspired origin and authority of these passages, only (B) and (C) merit consideration; is the exclusion in view temporary or permanent? localized or universal?

c. Particularly in the last decade or so, these passages, especially 1 Timothy 2, have been scrutinized intensively in relation to the issue of women's ordination. The result is a bewildering, almost overwhelming, array of interpretive details and hypotheses, of exegetical claim and counterclaim. That gives rise to the great danger of getting stuck in a morass of conflicting interpretive opinion and so of losing sight of the "forest." So it is all the more important to strive for balance and to lay hold of what these passages clearly teach in the midst of much that is admittedly imponderable and uncertain. The discussion that follows, then, does not attempt exhaustive exegesis, but seeks to grasp that clarity, primarily by identifying

boundaries or parameters for properly understanding these passages.

d. All three passages are expressly didactic in character and include legislative elements. At the same time they, like all Scripture, are historically conditioned; they are "occasional," that is, addressed to specific problems in a particular time and place. That "occasional" factor in no way prevents these passages from containing teaching of enduring validity, but it can be a source of some difficulty in trying to identify that validity. How are we to distinguish within these passages between abiding norms and what may be temporary, localized expressions of those norms? (Clear examples of the latter are the specific form of head "covering" in 1 Corinthians 11 and the "braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes" in 1 Timothy 2:9). It needs to be stressed, then, that to pose this question is not a sure sign of weakened or abandoned confidence in the authority of Scripture, but is prompted by the text itself. Everyone has to wrestle with this question.

e. In fact, none of these passages *explicitly* addresses the question of women's ordination. In 1 Corinthians 11 the issue is women praying and prophesying, apparently in public; nothing is said about office or ordination. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 the issue is women speaking/teaching "in church" ("in God's household," 1 Timothy 3:15); "it is the *publicity*, not the *formality* of it, which is the point" (Warfield, *The Presbyterian*, October 30, 1919; emphasis added). The time-honored conclusion that the latter two passages exclude women from ordained office is an (apparently unavoidable) *a fortiori* inference: because women are prohibited from speaking in public gatherings of the church they are therefore necessarily excluded from the ordained office of teaching in the church.

f. How are we to understand the references to women praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5, 13? Charles Hodge, following Calvin, believes that Paul is making a concession for the sake of argument: although he does not approve of women speaking in church meetings, as 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 plainly show, he grants that practice here in the interest of highlighting his main point, namely, the impropriety of women praying and prophesying *with uncovered heads*. Warfield, on the other hand, stresses the lack of clarity in 1 Corinthians 11:5, holding at the same time that "there is no reason whatever for believing that 'praying and prophesying' in church is meant."

But there are several substantial objections to this understanding. First, if the passage is read on its own terms, its plain suggestion is that women praying and women prophesying in public meetings of the church are recognized and accepted practices; nothing in the passage even intimates disapproval, and it is even more unlikely (see the third objection below) that the passage is concerned with private activities. It seems fair to say that Hodge and others reject this suggestion only because of the resulting contradiction with what they believe 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 plainly teach. Second, the fact that Paul *repeats* his reference to women praying at a *different* point in his argument (verse 13) counts against the idea that the reference is concessive and points instead to an established practice. Third, Hodge recognizes that verse 5 takes for granted that women receive and exercise the gift of prophecy (*1 Corinthians*, p. 305); so, since in his view the public exercise of the gift is prohibited,

presumably he is left with its private exercise for women. But what can that mean? In the light of the overriding emphasis in chapters 12-14 that all spiritual gifts are given "for the common good" (12:7) and "for the edification of the church" (14:12) as well as the stress in chapter 14 on the special, heightened value of prophecy just in this respect, such a notion of "private prophecy" is a virtual contradiction in terms and certainly an artificial abstraction.

Our conclusion, then, is that 1 Corinthians 11:5, 13 imply that in some form public prayer and prophecy by women was an accepted practice in the churches known to Paul (see verse 16; cf. the four daughters of Philip the evangelist at Caesarea who were known by the fact that they prophesied, Acts 21:9).

g. 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 is not decisive for the question of women's ordination.

(1) It is not as clear as some think exactly what Paul intends to forbid. Within the passage itself a sweeping prohibition on women speaking (publicly) in church would seem to be undeniable. With 1 Timothy 2:11ff. also in view, Warfield, for instance, speaks of "these two absolutely plain and emphatic passages" (that establish the exclusion of women from "specifically the functions of preaching and ruling elders"). But he can assert such clarity about 1 Corinthians 14 only because, as we noted above, he considers 1 Corinthians 11:3ff. to be so unclear as to present nothing counterindicative. As we have tried to show, however, 1 Corinthians 11 clearly implies that some women were praying and prophesying publicly with Paul's tacit approval.

On that assumption, then, and on the further assumptions (1) that Paul is not contradicting himself and (2) that 14:33ff. is not a non-Pauline gloss, it follows that 11:3ff. limits the apparently absolute sweep of the prohibitions in 14:34 in some way. How? Several explanations have been offered (see J. Hurley, *Man and Woman In Biblical Perspective*, pp. 186-188). While in our judgment none is entirely convincing, most satisfying perhaps is the view that in the light of the immediately surrounding context, 14:33ff. prohibits women specifically from participating in the (authoritative) judging or evaluation of prophetic utterances. *How* exactly the prohibition is limited is not so easy to answer; *that* it is not absolute, however, seems clear in the light of 11:5, 13.

(2) 1 Corinthians 14 deals with the specific matter of prophecy and tongues and their exercise. The chapter as a whole is structured by a comparison between these two gifts in the interest of showing the relatively greater value of prophecy. That contrast runs like a backbone down the body of almost the entire argument, beginning with verses 2 and 3 and culminating in the concluding declaration of verse 39. Now it is certainly possible that in verses 33b-36 Paul could momentarily digress from his central argument to address another matter. But that is not likely, given the structure just noted, nor is there anything in the passage that demands such a parenthetical excursion. This confirms that verses 33b-36, whatever their precise meaning, are related in some way to the exercise of prophecy. But then, on the assumption that prophecy and tongues are revelatory gifts that were confined to the apostolic, foundational period of the Church's history and do not continue today, we are brought to the conclusion that 1 Corinthians 14, including verses 33b-36 with their prohibition on women speaking, addresses a particular set of issues in a

church situation that by God's design no longer exists; what is said about the exercise of prophecy and tongues is not directly applicable to the Church today.

For the foregoing reasons, then, we conclude that 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 has no direct bearing on the issue of women elders.

h. The situation in 1 Timothy 2 differs significantly

(1) Numerous efforts have been made (in some cases, we should not hesitate to recognize, by those fully committed to the inspired authority and integrity of Scripture as God's Word) to show that the commands of verses 11, 12 are no longer applicable today. Those efforts, by now sustained and repeated, have nonetheless been unsuccessful. They are unconvincing in handling some of the details of the passage (e.g., in trying to show that "quietness" [verses 11, 12] is somehow not intended to exclude women from the teaching or exercise of authority in view, or in maintaining that *authentain* [verse 12] means the rebellious abuse or some other *misuse* of authority). Unconvincing as well are efforts to reconstruct the background at Ephesus that allegedly limits the applicability of Paul's commands to that time and place. No doubt his prohibition is occasioned by the particular circumstances of his original readers (what statement in Scripture isn't?), but an accurate profile of the opposition he is concerned about has not been demonstrated persuasively. Nor in all likelihood can it be, given the limitations of the biblical and existing nonbiblical data. Probably it was some form of Judaism or Jewish Christianity with syncretistic, Gnosticizing tendencies, but if and, if so, how far and in what manner it had penetrated the Ephesian church remains unclear. It is an extremely questionable hermeneutical procedure to attempt to limit the current applicability of biblical teaching, especially a command, on the basis of an historical reconstruction that necessarily is largely speculative. It is risky indeed, as many today are doing, to view the prohibition in verse 12 "as based *primarily* on a situation for which we have no clear evidence" (D. Moo, *Trinity Journal*, 2 [1981]:217).

(2) There are certainly a number of exegetical uncertainties in this passage (e.g., what exactly is the analogy between men and women in verses 8-10? are women's prayers in view in verse 9? how are we to understand the use of Genesis 2-3 in verses 13, 14? the reference to childbearing in verse 15?). But it is thoroughly wrongheaded to hold that because of these difficulties in the surrounding context it is arbitrary in principle and therefore not permissible to draw firm conclusions about the commands of verses 11-13, especially to conclude that they are still binding today. The extension of such an hermeneutical approach to Scripture as a whole would mean that because it contains "some things that are hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3:16) therefore nothing it teaches is clear.

In fact, with all that remains imponderable about Paul's argument, it is hard to deny that he is plainly basing the commands of verses 12, 13 (1) on an order established in creation at the beginning and (2) on the fact of the sinful malfunction of that order at the Fall, and that he therefore intends that as long as the present creation order exists the commands continue in force.

Several broader contextual considerations reinforce this conclusion.

(a) We need always to be on guard against our tendency to treat the Pastoral Epistles as a kind of first Book of Church Order, which they are obviously not. Still, the Pastorals have a unique role in the New Testament canon. They embody apostolic provision for the postapostolic future of the church, particularly as they order aspects of church life for that coming time, "until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:14).

(b) The controlling concern in the section 1 Timothy 2:1-3:16 is "how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God" (3:15). This means that 2:8-15, despite some puzzling elements (e.g., the reference to childbearing in verse 15) addresses (permanent) relationships in the church community as a whole, not just between husbands and wives.

(c) Within the section 2:1-3:16 Paul goes on immediately, connecting directly with 2:8-15, to deal with the permanent offices in the church, beginning with the qualifications of the overseer/elder (3:1-7, cf. Titus 1:5-9). In other words, in 3:1ff., Paul orders and makes positive provision for the teaching and rule he has just prohibited to women.

(3) This last observation, (c), provides an important qualification of the commands in 2:11, 12. We have already seen [g.(1), above] that 1 Corinthians 11:3ff. limits the apparently absolute imposition of silence on women found in 14:34, 35. In keeping with that limitation, 1 Timothy 3:1-7 suggest that 2:12, 13 prohibits women specifically from exercising the teaching and ruling functions reserved to the office of elder. Warfield's statement quoted above, then, needs to be modified. In the case of 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 the point is not only "publicity" but also "formality," formal (official), public teaching and ruling; women are not to be (ordained as) elders.

(4) An important substructure of Paul's argument in this passage, explaining in part his use of Genesis 2 and 3, is the unique analogy that exists between the church and the *family*. The basic form and role relationships established in the home (cf. Eph. 5:22ff.; Col. 3:18-21) have a carryover into the church: the elders are to the rest of the church as the husband/father is to the wife/children in the family. This substructure, rooted primarily in the biblical doctrine of the covenant, reflects the parallel found throughout Scripture between the family and the church (the covenant community as a whole), a parallel unlike that between any other human institutions. This unique correspondence, we believe, is one that only a Reformed doctrine of the church, in distinction from the various ecclesiologies of non-Reformed evangelicalism, is able truly to appreciate and capitalize on in trying to identify and articulate a genuinely biblical rationale for defining the role of women in the church. A fundamental reason why women are not to be ordained as elders is that the church is not an aggregate body of *individual* believers but *families* (believers together with their children) in *covenant* with God. As Paul says, the church is "God's household." In our judgment there can be little doubt that an unbiblical individualism, present in many who are otherwise fully committed to the authority of Scripture, is a source of considerable confusion in current debates about women's ordination.

## C. The Office of Deacon

### 1. Biblical

Is the office of deacon open to women? Admittedly this is a difficult question to settle exegetically but not, we think, impossible. Therefore we offer the following considerations in support of the position that Scripture does not authorize the ordination of women deacons.

a. Acts 6:1-6 records the first official appointment, not of deacons in the sense of that office mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:8ff., but of those who were to oversee the distribution of what was given to meet the needs of the church's poor in Jerusalem. The difference between the Seven and the later deacons appears from the fact that at least two of the former (Stephen, 6:7ff., and Philip, 8:5ff., 26ff., 21:8) continued to carry on substantial word-ministries, the kind of ministry apparently excluded from the activity assigned to the latter. The apostolic appointment of the Seven seems to have been a temporary, *ad hoc* arrangement, which nonetheless quite properly guided the church "analogically" in the later development of the diaconate.

In the light of the preceding paragraph it would be precarious to draw a conclusion from the exclusively male character of the Seven to the exclusion of women from the diaconate. At the same time, however, we should not overlook or minimize the authority vested in the Seven (and hence, eventually, in the diaconate). Specifically, they were entrusted with authoritative oversight of distributing to the poor; in that sense they were overseers (v. 3 "appoint over" A.V.).

b. Philippians 1:1 ("the overseers and deacons") -- the only New Testament passage where the two offices are paired in a single phrase -- says nothing directly about the issue of women deacons. It is worth noting, though, that no conclusions ought to be drawn from either this pairing or the respective designations concerning the *authority* of each office, either absolutely or relative to the other. There is to be sure, no New Testament instance of elders being called "minister" or "servant" (*diakonos*), but Christ himself is so designated (Rom. 15:8; cf. Matt. 20:28) as is Paul, as an apostle, repeatedly (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23, 25). Conversely, as we noted, in the light of Acts 6 deacons can be viewed as overseers. Certainly the eldership, in view of its assigned responsibility for the ministry of the word, has a certain priority or leading function in relation to the deed/mercy ministry of the diaconate. But, we submit, it would have been entirely in keeping with New Testament teaching for the elder also to have been called a *diakonos* (after all, "minister of the word" has become a customary description of some who occupy this office, cf. Acts 6:4); nor would there have been anything inappropriate in the occupant of the office of mercy being designated by *episkopos*. An element of authority resides in the office of deacon; authority, oversight, in that sense, "rule" is at issue for the office of deacon as well as the office of elder.

c. Romans 16:1, 2 and 1 Timothy 3:11 are the two passages usually appealed to as referring specifically to (official or ordained) women deacons. Careful exegesis of the two passages in context, however, shows that such a reference is by no means certain nor, in the case of 1 Timothy 3:11, more likely; the result in each case is an exegetical standoff.

In the case of the Romans 16:1, 2, taken by itself, *diakonon*, applied to Phoebe, is naturally, perhaps even more likely read as a fixed or official designation. (To observe that such a reading would hardly be questioned if the person referred to

were a male is gratuitous -- male deacons are clearly mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, while this would be the only reference, without any other New Testament support, to a woman deacon.)

But there is nothing in the passage that demands an official sense. Nor is there anything -- in either the syntax or the reference to Phoebe as *prostasis* - that makes it unnatural to take *diakonos* here in the less specific, nonofficial sense it has elsewhere in the New Testament. The view of Cranfield, for instance, that a general reference here is "perhaps just conceivable" is too grudging as well as exegetically unwarranted; such a reference is quite natural. It should be noted that in only three out of thirty New Testament uses of *diakonos* is the official sense clearly warranted (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12).

In 1 Timothy 3:11 the perennial debate, going back at least to the Greek Fathers, is whether "women" (*gunaikas*) refers to (a) women deacons (deaconesses) or (b) deacons' wives. That all the women in the congregation are in view, as sometimes proposed, can be dismissed, since the immediate context is concerned with special or particular groups within the church.

In favor of (a), apparently the view inclined to, more or less decisively, by the majority of modern scholars, and against (b) are the following arguments:

- (1) the adverb "likewise," "similarly" (*hosautos*) repeated from verse 8, points to a new category or class of officials, as does the list of qualities parallel to those in verses 8-10;
- (2) if deacons' wives were in view, we should expect an article (*tas*) before "women," or at least the pronoun "their" (*auton*);
- (3) to single out deacons' wives while making no mention of overseers' wives would be very strange;
- (4) although the New Testament does not know the technical term "deaconess" (*diakonissa*), this verse, together with Romans 16:1, hints at that office, alluded to already in Pliny's letter to Trajan (A.D. 112) and firmly in place in the church's life by the third to fourth centuries.

In favor of (b) and against (a) are the following considerations:

- (1) to interrupt a description of the qualifications for (male) deacons (verses 10, 12) by injecting qualification for women deacons would be awkward and unlikely; much more plausible, despite (2) above, is that the "women" of verse 11 have some auxiliary or dependent identity in reference to deacons, most likely, that of being their wives;
- (2) if Paul had wished to introduce a separate class of women deacons it would have been easy for him to make that clear by introducing *tas diakonous* either directly after or instead of "women;"
- (3) that Paul would mention the wives of deacons but not of overseers may be explained by the likely suppositions (1) that, like deacons themselves, their wives would be younger and therefore relatively unknown and their lives subject to more intensive

scrutiny, and (2) that by virtue of the differences between the two offices deacons' wives could be more directly and extensively involved in the official activities of their husbands than would be the case with overseers' wives;

(4) later in the letter a lengthy section is devoted to ordered women workers or ministrants in the church (the "enrolled widows" in 5:9-16); note the similarity between the requisite qualities in 3:11 and those for older women in Titus 2:3, where there is no question of women deacons;

(5) the most likely antecedent to the eventually emergent office of deaconess is the order of widows;

(6) "if some women were deacons, further qualifications would be unnecessary" (Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The Trinity Foundation, 1983, p. 61).

A perusal of these two sets of arguments reinforces the aptness of Kelly's remark that 1 Timothy 3:11 "contains a puzzle which will probably never be solved to everyone's satisfaction"; neither set is decisive.

d. For both passages, then, the issue of women deacons will have to be settled by other relevant considerations, if present, from their immediate and wider contexts. The context of Romans 16:1, 2 appears to provide nothing pertinent; the description of Phoebe as a *diakonos* remains ambiguous. But the immediate and larger context of 1 Timothy 3:11 definitely weighs against a reference to women deacons.

Our reasoning is as follows. As shown above (III B), Paul's exclusion of women from the eldership in 1 Timothy 2:12 rests, not on a presumed constitutional inability of women to teach or exercise authority but on the unique, covenant-based analogy between the family and the church ("God's household" 3:15). The structure of authority in the home and in the church mirror each other; the headship of elders in the church answers to the headship of father (and husband) in the family.

The question, then, is this: is the diaconate, too, an office from which women are excluded by the church-family analogy? Is the point of that analogy special office as such or only the office of elder? Put another way, does the exercise of authority over men prohibited to women in 2:12 only have in view the offices of elder or the office of deacon as well?

At least three contextual considerations favor the more comprehensive exclusion.

(1) The requirements for overseer (verses 1-7) and deacon (verses 8-10, 12, 13) are linked in a parallel fashion. "Likewise" (*hosautos*, verse 8) functions to reinforce that parallel, but the parallel itself, as the large degree in overlap of specific requirements for each office shows, does not depend on it. Philippians 1:1 (the "overseers and deacons," distinguished within the congregation as a whole) underscores this parallel. By virtue of the parallel, then, if women are excluded from the one office -- unless there be some offsetting consideration(s) -- they are excluded from the other.

(2) More pointedly, the parallel is made explicit on the issue of *authority*. In verses 4, 5 and 12 -- note in

virtually identical language; the parenthetical comment of verse 5 applies equally, following verse 12, to deacons -- a requirement for both the deacon as well as the elder is that each must manage/lead/rule (*proistemi*, cf. 1 Thess. 5:12) his own family if he is to take care of God's church. Certainly the sphere of ministry assigned to each is different, nonetheless there is a parallel between the authority of the eldership and that of the diaconate.

Further, the rationale for that parallel authority is also made explicit. It lies in the analogy between family and church. In both instances, for the deacon as well as the elder, at issue, by analogy, is the authority of headship in the home, the authority of the father/husband. In that light, the parallel requirement that the overseer/deacon, if married, be "the husband of but one wife" (vss. 2, 12) is a further argument against women deacons.

(3) What in effect is the topic sentence for the entire section (2:1-3:16) is found in 3:15: "how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household." The location of this paragraph sentence, occurring immediately after the qualifications for deacons, confirms that the family-church analogy, as that analogy involves the exclusion of women from special office, still controls the argument to that point. The exercise of authority over men prohibited to women in 2:11, apparently, includes the office of deacon as well as that of overseer.

Nothing in this section of the text offsets these three observations, unless we insist, without adequate warrant as we have seen, that 3:11 by itself demands a reference to women deacons.

To resist this conclusion and seek to maintain a place for women in the diaconate, we wish to observe, seems to have some unanticipated consequences, least of all acceptable to the advocates of this view. If we hold that women may be deacons but not elders, the question is inevitable: why does the family-church analogy function to exclude women from the office of elder but not from special office in general? The answer to this question cannot now be found in the *idea* of office as such but will have to be sought instead in the difference, in *content*, between the two offices. That, in turn, (1) will involve recourse in some form to the sexist view that constitutionally women do have the capacity for deeds of mercy but not for the presumably more demanding task of expounding and teaching the word of God, and so (2) will also result in a devaluation of the diaconate as lower or less important.

Within the broader controlling context, then, 1 Timothy 3:11 does not refer to women deacons. There is some merit to the suggestion (cf. Fairbairn) that Paul is deliberately vague or general in his reference to "women;" in view are both the wives of deacons who were sometimes associated with their husbands in diaconal activities as well as other women who, without being set apart officially, were entrusted with various kinds of diaconal service (perhaps best expressed in the translation "deaconing women"), especially, in view of the greater separation between the sexes in the culture of that day, among women.

If this treatment of 1 Timothy 3:11 in its broader context is sound, then the passing, ambiguous reference to Phoebe as *diakonos* in Romans 16:1 must give way to that more substantial New Testament teaching that women are not to serve in the office of deacon.

Conclusion. The issue of women deacons is a difficult one to resolve exegetically. But the relevant New Testament data do fix the coordinates of a trajectory pointing to the conclusion that women are not to be ordained as deacons. Nor does the New Testament make provision for a separate office of deaconess in parallel with the elders and deacons.

## 2. Church historical

### a. The nature of authority in the diaconal office

The purpose of this section of the report is to set forth selections from church history on the nature of the diaconal office as it concerns authority. The question before us is whether or not the diaconal office bears the authority which Paul expressly forbids women to exercise in 1 Timothy 2:12.

#### (1) Ancient and medieval period

The earliest reference to the diaconate outside of the New Testament is found in Hermas' (ca. 90-150 A.D.) *Similitudes 9-27* as he refers to deacons as "such as have been *set over* inferior ministries" (Samuel Miller, *An Essay in the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church*, New York, 1831, p. 221, emphasis added). It is important to note the similarity of language between Hermas' "set over" and the request of the apostles in Acts 6:3 to choose men to "appoint over." It is the language of presidency of leadership. This is more explicit in Origen (ca. 185-254 A.D.): "The Deacons *preside* over the money tables of the church." Elsewhere he uses *manage* (*ibid.*, p. 221, emphasis added). It is also noteworthy that Eusebius (d. 380 A.D.), Chrysostom (344-407 A.D.), Jerome (345-419 A.D.) and other ancient fathers saw Acts 6:1-4 as the institution and inception of the New Testament diaconate (*ibid.* pp. 222ff.). Irenaeus was first to do so (C.R.C., *Report 32*, p. 501).

Calvin quotes the *Apostolic Canons* (XL, Fulton, *Index Canonum*, pp. 93f.; McNeill, *Institutes*, p. 1073, f. n.) in his *Institutes*, Book IV, ch. IV, sect. 5: "We decree that the bishop have in his power the affairs of the church. For if the souls of men (which are more precious) have funds, so that on his *authority* all things may be distributed to the poor through the presbyters and *deacons*, and be administered with fear and all carefulness" (emphasis added).

The ancient period gives clear testimony to the fact that the office of deacon was viewed as one of authoritative leadership in temporal service.

#### (2) Reformation period

Martin Luther in his *Address to the Nobility* (1520) said, "deacons ... should help him (the minister) to *govern* the people ..." (Gordon Clark, "The Ordination of Women," Appendix A in Robbins, *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries*, p. 69, emphasis added).

*The French Confession of 1559* says, "It (the true church) ought to be *governed* according to the policy which our Savior Jesus

Christ has established, that is, that there be pastors, supervisors *and deacons*" (*ibid.*, p. 69, emphasis added).

"The French included deacons in the consistory and delegated them to major assemblies" (*Report 32*, p. 508).

The Dutch began at Emden (1571) to shape a binding church order which included deacons on the consistory (*Report 32*, p. 509). Deacons were considered officers ordained to authoritative leadership along with "pastors and elders," albeit in a different area of service to the church.

Calvin, in his reply to the Synod of Lyons, asserted: "Deacons and elders, being the arms and hands of the Pastor ... may, also distribute [the bread and cup] to those who are remote from [the pastor]," (Clark, *op. cit.*, p.70, cf. Quick, *Synodicon* I, p. 53).

In speaking of "two distinct grades" of deacon in Romans 12:8 Calvin makes the distinction between those who administer the diaconal work and those who perform the work itself: "Unless my judgment deceive me, in the first clause he designates the deacons who distribute the alms. But the second refers to those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick. Of this sort were the widows who Paul mentions to Timothy [1 Tim. 5:9-10]. Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor. If we accept this (as it must be accepted), there will be two kinds of deacons: one to serve the church in *administering* the affairs of the poor; the other, in caring for the poor themselves. But even though the term *diakonia* itself has a wider application Scripture specifically designates as deacons those whom the church has appointed to distribute alms and take care of the poor, and serve as stewards of the common chest of the poor. Their origin, institution, and office are described by Luke in The Acts [Acts 6:3]" (*Institutes*, IV, III, 9, McNeill, p. 1061, emphasis added).

In commenting on Philippians 1:1, Calvin refers to deacons as "stewards who *superintended* the distributing and receiving of alms." Calvin found the origin of the diaconate in Acts 6. His distinction of two kinds of deacons is significant because the first grade carries with it an authority on administration which the second does not. The reason for this is plain: women in the office had to be subordinate to male leadership and care for the poor under male administration.

### (3) Modern period

#### (a) Post-Reformation

In 1611 the King James or Authorized version of the Bible translated only 4 of the 103 uses of *diakonos* and its cognates with the word "deacon." The reason is that only in these four places is the reference to the "office" clear (i.e., Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12, 13). The K.J.V. has accurately used the term only in these places. Elsewhere it has translated the Greek word as "servant" or minister." All Christians are exhorted to be "minister(s)" in Matthew 20:26. The translators however know that the English word "deacon" carried with it the idea of office and authority. Hence they translate Romans 16:1 "servant."

In the same century John Owen refers to the authority of deacons: "This office of deacons is an office of service, which gives not any authority or power in the rule of the church; but being an office, it gives authority with respect unto the special

work ..." (*Works*, Vol. XVI, p. 147).

In the nineteenth century Samuel Miller in his chapter on "Elders and Deacons" argues for a clear distinction between the two offices in light of past confusion of the two even in Reformed churches. But in doing so he does not diminish the authority connected with the office of deacon. He pleads for deacons to do what the Bible calls them to do: care for the whole range of Church temporalities. As they do so Miller clearly perceives them as *authority leading* in that capacity. Deacons are "*managers* of all ... fiscal concerns of each congregation" (*op. cit.*, p. 237, emphasis added). They "*preside over* collections and disbursements for the poor" (*op. cit.*, p. 242, emphasis added). Here again we find the language of Acts 6, and a clear association of authoritative leadership with the office of deacon.

#### (b) Contemporary

Dr. James Hurley in his *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* argues for the ordination of women to the diaconate because he believes the authority connected with the diaconal office is of a different sort than that which Paul prohibits to women in 1 Timothy 2 (p. 233). Even so he does admit, "It is clear that the deacons of Acts 6 possessed a certain amount of authority in their distribution of food" (p. 226).

Dr. Gordon Clark argues that the office of deacon, however distinct it may be in many other respects from the office of elder, requires the same submission from the congregation as any other office to which Christ has delegated authority. The congregational vow in the old Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) is the same as in the present OPC: "Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive the *brother* as a ruling elder (or *deacon*) and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement, and *obedience* in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of the Church, *entitles* him?" (Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 66, 67, emphasis in Clark's quote; cf. OPC FG, Ch XXV,7.c., p. 83).

Clark goes on to deal with Romans 16:1 by pointing out that appeal to the masculine form of *diakonos* as evidence for office is grammatically unfounded; as *only* the masculine form appears in extrabiblical literature as well as in the Bible (*op. cit.*, p. 77). This form applies to men and/or women in its varied usage. Hence Clark concludes "the term *diakonos* applied to Phoebe, is no evidence that she was ordained" (*op. cit.*, p. 78).

For those who appeal to the hapaxlegomenon *prostatis* (v. 2, K.J.V. "succourer"), in its meaning as "ruler, authority or presiding officer," as proof that Phoebe was ordained with authority over "many" people, too much is proven (*op. cit.*, p. 78). For then she would have *presided* over Paul (v. 2). In fact the word may also mean "succourer, helper, servant" (as the *diakonos* indicates in v. 1). This then is clearly demanded by the context (p. 78); not to mention Paul's own prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12. So reasons Clark.

Clark then asserts that 1 Timothy 3:11 is the exegetical center of the debate upon which the need for "the demonstration of biblical warrant" hangs. The meaning of the word *gunaikos* is the key (*op. cit.*, p. 81). In context the best that can be done is to posit probability that the *gunaikos* were women deacons and not either wives of deacons (and possibly elders) or unordained female assistants. But probability falls short of the

"demonstration" necessary to establish biblical warrant (*op. cit.*, p. 82).

Clark concludes his paper: "The office of deacon is an office which involves the exercise of ecclesiastical authority. In Pauline churches it was closed to women. It therefore must be closed to women in our day. And furthermore, with the Pope, John Knox, the Scottish Kirk, and all Christendom, we believe that the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in refusing to ordain women is solidly Biblical, against which likelihoods have no logical force" (*op. cit.*, p. 83). The Synod of the RPCES, Synod of 1977, agreed (*op. cit.*, p. 61).

In our church (OPC) the question had not been raised at the General Assembly until our study committee "on the hermeneutics of women in ordained office" was erected in 1984 by the 51st General Assembly in response to an overture (#9) from the Presbytery of the Midwest (*Minutes*, pp. 15, 57, 235).

In 1980 The Presbytery of New York and New England debated a proposed overture, which called for the ordination of women to the diaconate and defeated it (cf. minutes of stated fall meeting October 2 and 3, items #23 & 31).

In 1977 Dr. Leonard Coppes (OPC) adumbrated his position on the subject in his book on the development of biblical offices with emphasis on the diaconate titled *Who Will Lead Us?* He traces the diaconate to Acts 6 and maintains that the diaconate is part of the ruling office as office in the first century diversified under the guidance of the foundation-laying apostles. This diversification we begin to see in Acts 6: "Just as the apostolicity (sic) was divided into prophet and elder, so the eldership was divided into teaching and ruling elder and into elder and deacon" (p. 112). In Acts 6 seven "men" were chosen to be ordained "over this business" (i.e. of service of the widows). *epi* ("on" or "over") denotes delegated authority. "It was their responsibility to superintend or discipline benevolence" (p. 125).

Clark notes a similar relationship when he says "though the deacons are subordinate to the minister, they participate in that authority" (*op. cit.*, p. 70). So in OPC ordination, the elders receive the deacon as taking "part of this office with us." (*FG*, XXV,6.f., p. 82). Finally, Coppes notes that to say Phoebe "holds the office of deacon runs contrary to the whole biblical concept of office," (*op. cit.*, p. 135).

In conclusion, history indicates that the church has always attributed authority to the office of deacon. Furthermore, although the range of tasks performed by the diaconate has varied throughout church history the authority to lead in those areas of service has been uniformly recognized. In fact even those such as Samuel Miller and John Owen, who would restrict the tasks to those defined in the New Testament, attribute the same "kind" of authority to deacons as to elders. The tasks differ but the authority of office is the same.

It is therefore no accident, but rather historic consciousness which underlies our *Form of Government* in this regard. In our home mission works elders oversee (and often execute) diaconal work until deacons can be ordained (*FG*, XI,7., p 20). The diaconate is, therefore, an outgrowth of the ruling office (cf. *FG*, XIS., p. 19; XIII,7. the session shall "supervise the activities of the diaconate," p. 25). Though the "service is distinct from that of rule" (XI,1., p. 19, emphasis added) the

board of deacons shall "oversee the ministry of mercy" (XI,4., P. 19, emphasis added).

It is therefore historically (and we believe primarily biblically) consistent in light of this view of the authority of the office of deacon to restrict the office to "men." *FG*, XXV,1., (p. 79) restricts election of elders and deacons to "male communicant members." *FG*, XX,1., & 2., (p. 38) on "Ordination and Installation" refers to the ordinand as "male" seven times. In Chapter V on "Offices in the Church" (p. 10) all ordained officers (including deacons) are described as "called of Christ *to minister with authority*" (emphasis added).

#### b. Women and the diaconal office

##### (1) The ancient and medieval period

The earliest apparent reference to "deaconesses" is found on a letter written by Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, to the Emperor Trajan in 111 A.D. He reported, "I have judged it necessary to obtain information by torture from two servicing women (*ancillae*) called by them 'deaconesses' (*ministrae*)." It has been suggested that on using the Latin *ministrae* Pliny was translating the Greek word *diakonoi* (C.R.C. *Report 32*, p. 501, cf. D. Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, Baker, p. 501 fn.). It is at least clear that the women have a special designation indicating their special service to the church. But the precise nature of that service and its relationship to office is unclear.

The first clear reference to "deaconesses" is found in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (300 A.D.). This Syrian church order specified the function of deaconesses. They were to visit sick and poor women and carry the sacrament to them; aid the clergy in the preparation of women for baptism and instruct female catechumens (*Report 32*, pp. 501, 502; *Report 39*, p. 579; Foh, *Women and the Word of God*, pp. 255, 256).

The *Apostolic Constitutions* (c. 381 A.D.) depicts the apostle Bartholomew instructing bishops to lay hands on deaconesses in the presbytery and pray, "O Eternal God ... who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah, who also in the tabernacle of the testimony, and in the temple, didst ordain women to be keepers of thy holy gates, ... do thou now also look down upon this thy servant, who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her thy Holy Spirit ...!" (*Report 39*, p. 579).

Philip Schaff in his *History of the Christian Church* (Vol. III, p. 260) notes that this "ordination prayer," combined with the fact that the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) reduced the required age for the consecration of deaconesses from the apostolic requirement of 60 years of age (1 Tim. 5:9) to 40 years of age, places the custom of ordaining deaconesses "beyond dispute" (fn.).

It is interesting to note the equation of deaconesses with the "widows" of 1 Tim. 5:9. It was considered wise to have mature women, who had been married and raised families, engaged in the diaconal work. The fact of their being widows was in no way linked to asceticism but rather to the practical freedom it entailed (cf. Calvin, *Institutes* IV, XIII, 18). Furthermore, it should be noted that the 19th Canon of the Council of Nicea (325 AD.) "reckoned deaconesses among the laity, who have no consecration" (Schaff, Vol. III, p. 260, fn.).

In the late fourth century Ambrosiaster charged that the custom of the ordination of women was a Montanist error (Foh, *op. cit.* p.241, fn.).

With the rise of asceticism in the fourth and fifth centuries, the office of the "deaconess" generally disappeared. Schaff suggests that there are two reasons for the decline: (1) the introduction of celibacy into the priesthood and (2) the want of good deaconesses (*History* Vol. III, p. 262). Furthermore, the function of deaconesses was reduced to doorkeepers at the women's entrance of the church (*Report 39*, p. 579). Though some sources show counsel (*Report 32*, p. 502), with the rise of convents diaconal talent was drawn away from the church.

In 441 AD the first synod of Orange replaced the ordination of deaconesses with a mere benediction. The Burgundian Council of Epaon (517 AD.) and the second council at Orleans (533 AD.) likewise forbade the ordination of deaconesses (Schaff, *op. cit.* Vol. III, p. 261, fn.). The latter council went a step further than the previous two in decreeing, "No woman shall henceforth receive the *benedicto diaconalis* [which had been substituted for *ordinatio*], on account of the weakness of this sex" (Schaff, p. 262).

These Gallic councils spelled the end of the office of deaconess by the sixth century in the Western church. The office continued in the East until the twelfth century.

It is significant that the first clear evidence for the office of deaconess does not appear until the late fourth century. And within a century the Western church had second thoughts about such ordination and officially did away with it. In fact, even during this period some sources suggest commission "by appointment rather than by ordination by laying on of hands" (*Report 32*, p. 502).

Throughout that brief period, when the office did exist, it was clearly restricted in two important ways: (1) it was a ministry to women performing functions demanded by Christian propriety for which women are uniquely equipped (*Report 39*, p. 579; *Report 32*, p. 502); (2) it never did "enjoy the some official status" as the male office of deacon (*Report 32*, p. 502).

The office did not exist in the Middle Ages.

#### (2) The Reformation period

With the dawning of the Reformation, we see the beginning of a new appreciation for the biblical role of women in the church.

John Calvin found a biblical mandate for women to provide diaconal service in 1 Tim. 5:9ff. In his *Institutes* (1559) he distinguishes that service from Roman Catholic monasticism and celibacy.

But how is it lawful to apply this passage of Paul to nuns? For deaconesses were created not to appease God with songs or unintelligible mumbling, not to live the rest of the time in idleness, but to discharge the public ministry of the church toward the poor and to strive with all zeal, constancy, and diligence in the task of love. They did not vow celibacy to present God some sort of service in abstaining from marriage, but only because they were thus freer to perform their task. Finally, they made this vow not at the beginning of youth, or even in the flower of life -- to learn too late by

experience over what a cliff they had plunged; but when they seemed to have passed all danger, they made a vow no less safe than holy. But not to press our opponents' two points, I say that it was unlawful to receive women into the vow of continence before the age of sixty, inasmuch as the apostle admits only women of sixty years [1 Tim. 5:9] but bids the younger women marry and bear children [1 Tim. 5:14] (Book IV, III, 18, 19).

In Book III, 9, Calvin describes "two distinct grades" of deacons in his commentary on Romans 12:8: those who *distribute* alms; and those who *actually care for* the poor and sick.

Of this sort were the widows whom Paul mentions to Timothy [1 Tim. 5:9, 10]. Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor. If we accept this (as it must be accepted) there will be two kinds of deacons: one to serve the church in *administering* the affairs of the poor; the other, in *caring* for the poor themselves" (emphasis added)

Women held the "public office" of caring for the poor while the first grade of office was limited to men who took leadership in administering the distribution of alms. "This ideal was put into practice at the hospital in Geneva, of which Calvin was a boardmember. Although John Calvin advocated deaconesses in his *Institutes*, he did not mention them in his *Ordinances Ecclesiastiques*" (*Report 39*, p. 580).

Calvin's commentary on pertinent passages is informative. Calvin is not very clear in his comments on Romans 16:1, 2 with reference to Phoebe. He even refers to "her office." In his footnote Beveridge points out that this is unwarranted by the word *diakonia*. But it is noteworthy that Calvin wrote this Romans commentary in October 1539, perhaps less than a decade after his conversion. The comments on 1 Timothy 3 were penned 17 years later in July 1556 by a mature Calvin. Calvin concludes that 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to both the wives of elders and deacons as aids to their officebearing husbands. Referring to 1 Timothy 2:11ff., Calvin emphasizes that women were forbidden to teach *in the church* due to the two fundamental reasons which Paul derives from creation and redemption (Genesis 2 and 3). He goes on to show the invalidity of recourse to extraordinary examples of female leadership in passages such as Judges 4:4 (Deborah). This, he insists, was to shame the church and "does not overturn the ordinary rules of government." At this point it is clear that however he may have used the phrase "her office" in Romans 16:1, 2, he did not have authoritative leadership in mind.

The Genevan influence can be seen in the French Reformed churches. Deaconesses were occasionally seen to function alongside the consistorial diaconate.

When the Prince of Sedan, for example, turned Reformed in 1559, he established the 'Sisters of Mercy' with formerly monastic revenues. Similarly in La Rochelle there was a deaconesses' house. Women in these Protestant Orders lived communally by an agreed upon order or rule. They were not bound by lifelong vows, but for however long they were part of the movement they devoted themselves to the care of the sick, the aged, and the poor. Aspects of the French and Walloon diaconate influenced the Dutch Reformed tradition (*Report 32*, p. 506).

In 1556 the Reformed leaders in Amsterdam designated twelve deaconesses to run a home for aged women, an orphanage, and to do a form of house visitation two by two and to report anything needing their attention to the Amsterdam deacons. These were elderly women of proven Christian virtue. As in France, however, the deaconesses of Amsterdam seem to have been an institution which was not part of, yet which was in some sense under the direction of, the consistory (*Report 32*, p. 508).

The Convent of Wesel, 1568, chaired by Datheen, marks the generally accepted point of departure for the shaping of the Dutch church order. Formulations from earlier Walloon assemblies gave way for various reasons to those of Wesel and subsequent gatherings. Wesel's nineteen statements on deacons included such positions as defining the office as a ministry of mercy, recognizing Calvin's two types of deacon, and allowing local latitude on many issues related to implementing the office. Because of its significance for today's discussion of women in office, Wesel's provision for women deacons is noteworthy. It allowed that where appropriate, older women of proven and honorable behavior could, following apostolic example, be appointed as deacons.

It is important to note that Wesel defined consistory as elders and pastors. Thus the gathering that admitted women to the full diaconate excluded them from the consistory, which by definition excluded all deacons (*Report 32*, p. 509).

In the church of Wesel four women were elected by the presbyters and ordained for the period of one year. Problems arose when married women (not only widows), and some of them even younger than sixty years of age, also were elected, this being contrary to what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 5:9. When the matter was brought to the Synod of Middleburg in 1581, it was decided not to introduce women into the office of deacon 'for the sake of several inconveniences,' except in times of danger, e.g. plagues (*Report 39*, p. 580).

J. L. Schaver in *The Polity of the Churches* (Vol I, Chicago, Church Polity Press, 1947, p. 144) comments on the reception of the office of deaconess in the Netherlands. "In the time of the Reformation the Reformed churches of the Netherlands for a short while favored the instituting of the office of deaconess, but already in 1581 they decided not to introduce it. On the whole, Reformed churches in the Netherlands favor the employment of women in support of the deacon's office when this is needed, but they are opposed to placing women in official service."

Similar to the Ancient period, the brief period in which Reformation churches ordained women as deaconesses reveals:

(a) A clear distinction of the role and office of "deaconess" from that of "deacon";

(b) That the church had second thoughts about ordaining women to this office.

(3) The modern church

(a) Post-Reformation

In the seventeenth century, the Baptist John Smyth classified deaconesses and widows in the same office and admitted only

women over 60. These were ordained and took a vow of celibacy. Their duties were visiting the sick and poor (*Report 32*, p. 504).

The "Kaiserwerth Movement" in nineteenth-century Germany has influenced Lutheranism up to the present. Theodore Fliedner, a pietist, introduced the female diaconate. The first "Deaconess House" was set up in Kaiserwerth on the Rhine in 1836; others followed: Berlin, 1847; and hospitals in Dresden, Strasburg, London, New York, Pittsburgh, etc. in the 1840s (*Report 32*, p. 503; Schaff, Vol. II, p. 262, fn.).

In the 1860s, the Church of England ordained deaconesses to a lifelong position by the laying on of hands by the bishops (*Report 32*, p. 504).

In the late nineteenth century, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland introduced the "commissioned" deaconess. Subsequently, a number of Reformed churches in England, Iceland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States recognized the function or "order" of deaconess (*Report 39*, p. 582).

Scottish Professor Douglas Bannerman of Free College, Edinburgh, in his *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church* (1887, p. 501) deals with the deaconess in the New Testament church. He saw in Phoebe "the beginnings of deaconess work distinctly indicated." The qualifications for "women" in 1 Timothy 3 indicates that duties similar to the deacons' were carried out by women as "natural *assistants* in ministering to women in distress or sickness [emphasis added]." According to Bannerman, it is an open question whether such women were members of deacons' families or "formally set apart to the work as deaconesses."

Among American Presbyterians, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America voted (93 to 24) to ordain women to the diaconate at the Synod of 1888 in Pittsburgh. While believing the eldership is clearly prohibited to women, they maintained that based on Acts 6 no such proscription applies to the diaconate. Since women are equal in status with men in the church and since women can penetrate the domestic sphere in a way which men cannot, the office is open to them. Women's right to participate in the diaconate is clearer in Scripture (e.g., Phoebe, Rom. 16:1, 2) than their right to partake of the Lord's Supper (*The Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, Nov., 1888, Vol. 26, no. 11).

One thing is clear from our survey of this period: a wide range of diaconal service has been rendered by Christian women in a variety of ecclesiastical settings. What is *not* clear in the practice of the church is the official status of such women.

For our purposes, it is worth noting that both in the nineteenth-century Church of Scotland and in the secession Free Church of Scotland *ordination* of women to the diaconal office was purposely not practiced. This, we believe, indicates (1) that the diaconal service of women has been recognized as a necessary auxiliary to the ordained diaconate and (2) that this auxiliary service is defined in terms of specific diaconal ministry *to women*.

#### (b) Contemporary

Voices in the contemporary debate are legion. Hence, I will limit my survey to our own Reformed and Presbyterian circles.

In 1947 J. L. Schaver in his *The Polity of the Churches* (Vol. I, pp. 143-145) concluded that the evidence for Phoebe and the "women" of 1 Timothy 3 being officers is so slender as to hardly warrant their ordination.

While continuing to discuss the subject of women in ecclesiastical office the Reformed Ecumenical Synod made the following decisions:

i. 1968 -- "that member churches should be cautious to proceed in the direction of the entrance of women into the diaconal office. Each church must make its own responsive evaluation of its situation and decision" (Art. 108, p. 60).

ii. 1976 -- "That synod recommend to the member churches that they make full use of the gifts and services of women in the diaconal service, in *auxiliary capacities* and in appropriate teaching situations [emphasis added]" (*Report 39*, p. 584).

In 1984, after extensive discussions, the Christian Reformed Church decided to open the office of deacon to women at the discretion of the consistories.

In their widely used *Deacon's Handbook*, two Christian Reformed elders, Berghoef and DeKoster, encourage the use of the diaconal gifts of ordination (p. 96).

In continental reformed churches the fact that deacons are part of the local consistory with elders has been pointed to as complicating their consideration of admitting women to the diaconate (*Report 32*, p. 512).

In presbyterian churches the clear distinction between elders and deacons has been used to argue that since the authority and rule prohibited by Scripture to women is unique to the eldership, the church may ordain women to the diaconate without disregarding that scriptural principle.

In speaking of the diaconate, Dr. James Hurley (RPCES) in his book *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Zondervan, 1981, p. 223) argues, "... the office does not entail authority of the sort prohibited to women in 1 Timothy 2. The 'women' of 1 Timothy 3 are best understood as a group of persons set parallel to the bishops and deacons. They would most naturally be assumed to be deacons. The example of Phoebe, who is identified in Romans 16:1 as a *diakonos* (deacon/servant) of the church in Cenchrea, lends positive (but not indisputable) support to this conclusion. 1 Timothy 3 does not specify the relation of the female deacons (or women) to the males."

Similarly, Susan Foh (OPC) in *Women and the Word of God* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1979, p. 96) argues "Women's subordination in the church is not incompatible with the function of deacons ... to do works of service." Furthermore, she maintains that ordination doesn't confer authority, but simply recognizes God's gifts (p. 233).

Professor Gordon H. Clark entered the 1976 RPCES Synod debate, of which Dr. Hurley was a part, with a paper titled "The Ordination of Women" (reprinted in Robbin's *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries*, Trinity Foundation, 1985, Appendix A., pp. 61-83). He argues that because ordination is "induction into an authoritative *order*, women may not be *ordained* to the diaconate. Exegetically, Clark examines the case for ordained

deaconesses from Rom. 16 and 1 Tim. 3 and finds them wanting positive warrant for such a conclusion. The Synod decided not to ordain women to the diaconate.

#### (4) Conclusion

From this survey of church history we may conclude the following:

(a) In all the periods, the ministry of "deaconess," whether ordained or unordained, has been essentially *to women* with diaconal needs.

(b) In all the periods, ordained women were in some way subordinate to male clergy. In Calvinistic reformation churches this was formalized in the clear distinction between two grades of office: deacons who administered as leaders and deaconesses who extended the services. Throughout history women have performed diaconal functions as auxiliary to male leadership.

(c) In the Ancient and Reformed churches, the brief periods during which women were ordained as deaconesses came to an abrupt end with the rescinding of ordination.

The lesson we ought to learn from this is that women's diaconal services may be encouraged and recognized without ordination. Their ordination to office does not have the clear warrant of Scripture. All of this may suggest some type of appointment to diaconal service.

## IV. WOMEN AND GENERAL OFFICE

### A. Biblical Teaching on the Identity of Women

1. Our consideration of the proper ministry of women in the church must take into account what the Bible says about the identity of women in Creation, the effects of the Fall, and the identity of women in the Christ. Only then will we have an adequate basis for considering the role of women in the church.

It has often been implied that Galatians 3:28, relating as it does to the position of men and women *coram Deo*, has nothing to say regarding their interpersonal roles and relationships in church and in society. This would seem impossible to maintain. As Stephen Clark says (*op. cit.*, p. 151) "... the view that Galatians 3:28 only applied to people's standing before God neglects the communal or social consequences of religious distinctions. In Paul's time, religious differences were the basis of social structure."

And this is not merely something that we would expect theoretically. It is something that we see happening in the church in Paul's day. "Paul saw social implications of the new oneness in Christ for male-female relationships. It is noteworthy that women in the early church were taking on some roles prominent enough to be mentioned in Paul's letter" (*Report 33 - Committee on Headship in the Bible, Agenda for the 1984 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church*, p. 320).

The exclusion of women from special office in the church (the eldership and diaconate) is a negative conclusion and so leaves open the question of what sort of ministry is given to women in their office as believers. Concerning that large question we offer several general observations.

Women, too, are part of the body of Christ (Gal. 3:27, 28) and the unity and the fellowship of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3, Phil. 2:1); they, too, have been baptized with the Spirit (Acts 2:17, 18, 1 Cor. 12:13) and so share in the distribution of the Spirit's gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 14ff.). The question, then, how women may give legitimate expression in the congregation to these gifts, including the biblical insights and discernment given to them by the Spirit, must receive a positive answer. The principle of 1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12; 1 Peter 4:10 is that in the church spiritual gifts are given to edify others; and what is given to edify others obviously must come to expression if others are in fact to be edified.

2. Within the New Testament, 1 Peter 4:10, 11, perhaps better than any other passage, provides an overall perspective on the answer to the question before us:

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very word of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength that God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

Citing these verses in this format serves to highlight some pertinent observations either about or prompted by them:

a. The immediate context makes plain that Peter is addressing the whole church, men and women alike.

b. In view are all the gifts given to the church in their full diversity and as shared in by every believer ("Each ... whatever gift ...").

c. Each gift, a particular ministration of God's grace, is to be used for serving (*diakonountes*) others.

d. Verse 11 provides a fundamental profile on the gifts given to the church. Each of the gifts, in their full totality, reduces to either one of two kinds: speaking or serving (*diakonei*; note that this is a different, less broad use than that of the same verb earlier in verse 10, reflecting the variable meaning of this verb, and its cognate noun *diakonos*, in the New Testament). The ministry of the general office, embracing the exercise of the gifts of all believers, has a basic, twofold structure: *word*-ministry and *deed*-ministry.

e. It is difficult to deny an inner correspondence between this twofold structure of the general office and the permanent, twofold structure of special office in the church; the one reflects the other. Specifically, the eldership answers to the word-ministry of the general office, the diaconate to its deed-ministry. These two special offices are not only established in the church so that those who occupy them may exercise the respective ministries of each office to and for the rest of the church. Rather, their special office identity involves that, as head and fathers, they are also to lead the whole of "God's household," men and women alike, in the diverse word- and deed-ministries committed to the general office (cf. Eph. 4:12).

3. In working at our assignment we have been impressed with the paucity of explicit biblical evidence against women's ordination, a paucity all the more remarkable in view of the fact that some are making that issue a mark of fidelity to biblical Christianity in our time. We have also been struck, for instance, how extensively Calvin's remarks on these passages

are based on what is "unseemly" and "incompatible" with "natural propriety" and "common sense" (*Commentary on First Corinthians*, Fraser translation (Eerdmans, 1960, pp. 306f.; his comments on the 1 Timothy 2 passage for the most part refer the reader to what he has already said on 1 Corinthians 14). Similarly, the comments of Charles Hodge on 1 Corinthians 11:13 are revealing (the text is "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?"; but what Hodge says here he would apply as well to women speaking publicly in church meetings):

This is an appeal to their own sense of propriety. The apostle often recognizes the intuitive judgments of the mind as authoritative.... The constitution of our nature being derived from God, the laws which he has impressed upon it, are as much a revelation from him as any other possible communication of his will. And to deny this, is to deny the possibility of all knowledge.

As we have reflected on such statements we have come to recognize that the strength of much of the current opposition to women's ordination stems from a very large premise, a premise that is not taught in Scripture itself but is assumed to underlie and solidify biblical teaching on the subject.

What is that assumed premise? In the words of one fairly recent Reformed exponent of it, "the premise underlying the Biblical teaching on this subject is that the Creator has not equipped women for positions of authority and initiative in the Christian Church. Her constitution, both in its strength and in its weakness, renders it inappropriate that she had such positions ... To require a woman to exercise an authoritative, teaching ministry is like requesting her to sing bass. It is a violation of nature"; "the woman is not constitutionally fitted to be the asserter, maintainer and defender of the Christian faith ... If her Creator intended her for submissiveness, can the woman hope to cope adequately with a situation requiring authoritative and assertiveness?" (Donald MacLeod, *The Banner of Truth*, 81 [June 1970]: 37, 40).

It is the premise that often includes the ideas that men are relatively more important than women and that women are more susceptible to temptation (A. Schlatter, *Die Briefe an die Thessalonicher, Philipper, Timotheus und Titus*, [1950], p. 143), that woman "is easily misled and easily misleads. The world has always sized her up in this fashion: she is both seduced and seducer. Sharpness of discernment is not in general her principal quality" (E. L. Smelik, *De brieven van Paulus aan Timotheus, Titus en Filemon*, [1961], p. 42, that "the peculiar power and usefulness of women depend on their being the objects of admiration and affection" so that "the refinement and delicacy of their sex ... should be carefully preserved" by permitting them in church to learn as much as they wish but not to speak (Hodge, *First Corinthians*, p. 305).

These statements have come to light randomly during the course of our reading. They could easily be multiplied.

Does any among us wish to defend this premise, particularly its "ontology" of women or the doubtful piece of natural theology expressed by Hodge? We doubt it. Yet we dare say that because of deeply rooted cultural and historical factors that have found their way into the thinking and life of the church, virtually everyone of us is under its influence to one degree or another. And as long as that premise continues to control and the decidedly unbiblical elements in its assessment of women

persist, we will not be able to put the issue of women's ordination in proper perspective, nor will we be able to make necessary and constructive advances in grasping why *Scripture* prohibits their ordination. We need to be especially sensitive here to the apostolic injunction found in another context, "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6).

## B. Women in the Life of the Early Church: Some New Testament Observations

### 1. Priscilla

#### a. Acts 18:24-26

In the missionary context set forth in these verses, Priscilla and Aquila instruct Apollos. Previously, the ministry of Apollos, while forceful and Scriptural, had not been conducted from the perspective of the fulfillment that had already arrived in Christ ("he knew only the baptism of John," vs. 25); his "adequate" teaching about Jesus needed to become "more adequate." That lack is supplied by the teaching he receives from Priscilla and Aquila.

Noteworthy is the fact that in this teaching activity, as elsewhere with one exception, Priscilla is not only paired with her husband, but her name is mentioned first. Perhaps this implies some kind of initiative or superior expertise; perhaps it simply implies that she is better-known. No firm conclusion can be drawn. At any rate, her (apparently full) involvement in teaching Apollos is plain.

Priscilla, however, does not teach independently of her husband. What occurs is fairly described as a mutual or joint effort ("they," in "their home," vs. 26). Further, their instruction is given privately, not in public but in the context of hospitality extended to Apollos.

It is not easy to assess the complete significance of the latter circumstance. Very likely a strategic element is present; Priscilla and Aquila are concerned not to do anything in public that might diminish the reputation and ministry of Apollos. But is there perhaps as well an intimation that the teaching takes place in a private, nonpublic setting, because Priscilla, as a woman, is involved? The text does not provide an answer. Nor, at the same time, is there any indication that the teaching was "official," that is, that Priscilla (or Aquila) occupied special office in the church. In sum, the teaching that Apollos received from Priscilla (or Aquila) is best understood as private and personal, nonofficial and nonpublic.

#### b. Romans 16:3

In this context of "serving" (vs. 1), "helping" (vs. 2), and "working hard" (vss. 6, 12), Paul mentions Priscilla and Aquila as "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." Paul's "fellow workers" comprise quite a band of men and women in this "greetings" chapter and elsewhere in the New Testament; e.g.: Urbanus (vs. 9), Timothy (vs. 21), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and "the rest" (Phil. 4:2, 3), Aristarchus, Mark and Justus (Col. 4:10, 11), Philemon (Philemon 1), Demas and Luke (Philemon 2).

The designation "fellow workers" personalizes and intimates an apparently extensive support system of service. Such men and women were extensions of Paul, widening his ability to direct the life of the church in various locations, especially to care for

various needs that arose. It is difficult to specify their service in detail and to circumscribe its extent. In the light of the contexts where their work is mentioned as well as 1 Peter 4:10, 11 (cf. above, IV,A.2.), it may fairly be seen to cover the full range of ministering the gospel in word and deed. Also, without undercutting the special office structure in the church, their activity gave them an identity that in relation to himself Paul sees as genuinely collegial rather than subordinate.

Priscilla and Aquila are especially valued members in this partnership for the gospel. Their impressive self-sacrifice and love is evidenced in the fact that, Paul says, "they risked their lives for me," their renown is such that both, Priscilla at least equally with Aquila, have the gratitude of "all the churches of the Gentiles" (vs. 4).

c. 1 Corinthians 16:19 (cf. Rom. 16:5)

Aquila and Priscilla find mention here in relation to "the church that meets at their house." It is precarious to draw conclusions based on the fact that in this instance Aquila is mentioned first. Perhaps there is in this order an intimation that Aquila, as head of the household, takes the lead in extending the greetings of the church. However, it is, after all, "their house," not "his." Also, in Romans 16:5 there is an identical description (the church meeting "at their house") where Priscilla has just been mentioned first (vs. 3).

d. 2 Timothy 4:19

This text adds nothing to our discussion except to reinforce two things: the high profile of "Priscilla and Aquila" in the heart and labors of Paul, and Paul's heavy reliance on Priscilla and Aquila.

e. Conclusions

(1) It cannot be said that women would never teach men. Priscilla, together with Aquila, taught Apollos.

(2) In the one passage where Priscilla's teaching is mentioned, it is a joint effort. She is a coworker with her husband.

(3) Priscilla taught "at home." The New Testament is silent as to whether or not she taught the congregation as a whole or in a public setting.

(4) There is no reason to suppose that Priscilla had authority over her husband, or that their relationship was ordered in a manner other than that prescribed elsewhere by the New Testament (e.g., Eph. 5:22f.).

(5) Finally, the case of Priscilla reminds us that having gifts in the church does not imply or bring with it the right to hold special office. The possession of requisite gifts is a necessary but not a sufficient qualification to hold office. Certainly, the nongifted should not occupy special office. In no way, however, does that establish that the gifted have the right to office, and that office is merely the way in which, operationally, we make fullest use of their talents.

2. Phoebe

Romans 16:1, 2 contains the sole reference to Phoebe in the New Testament. While she is apparently a person of some importance in the early Christian community, her precise status is less clear.

Paul's commendation of Phoebe is rather full. First, he introduces her as "a servant of the church in Cenchrea," a rather official-sounding phrase, although, as we have already argued (cf. III,C.1 .c. above), not requiring a reference to the office of deacon. Secondly, she has been "a great help" to many, including Paul himself.

Paul's commendation serves a request he makes of the Corinthian church: "give her any help she may need from you." This request of itself seems to hint of a woman with some kind of mission, authorization, or capacity to enlist, if not command, resources for a specified ministry as she continues (presumably) to be "a great help to many people."

Although the phrase "*diakonos* of the church in Cenchrea" does not set forth the ministry of Phoebe in formal or official terms, deference is still very much due to Phoebe and her ministry. Also, the phrase perhaps points up that Phoebe does not operate on her own but is under authority, the authority of her "home" church in Cenchrea.

### 3. Other women

#### a. Romans 16

In addition to Priscilla and Phoebe, Paul mentions a good number of other women in his "greetings list" of Romans 16; e.g., Mary (vs. 6), Tryphena and Tryphosa (vs. 12a), Persis (vs. 12b), the mother of Rufus (vs. 13), etc. These women are characteristically "(very) hard workers" (vss. 6, 12) in their endeavors, laboring for the good of the Roman Christians and others. Some of them are especially dear to Paul; e.g., Persis (vs.12b) and Rufus' mother, who had befriended Paul in a motherly way (vs.13).

#### b. Philippians 4:2, 3

Two women mentioned here by Paul are Euodia and Syntyche. Along with his expressed concern about the disagreement between them and his exhortation for them to be reconciled, he recalls (1) that they "contended *at my side*," and (2) that in doing so they "contended ... *in the cause of the gospel*." The precise character of their ministry, however, is not spelled out.

#### c. "House churches" associated with women

Lydia (Acts 16:14, 15, 40) was a woman of some prominence and station in the community. She makes her home available for missionaries (Paul and Silas) and for "the brothers" (vs. 40) in a ministry of willing and generous hospitality. Mary, John Mark's mother, is pictured (Acts 12:12) as a courageous woman, willing to allow her home to be used for an "underground" prayer meeting to secure Peter's release from prison. Nympha (Col. 4:15) is yet another woman who makes her house available for the church to assemble.

#### d. Conclusions

(1) Paul pays women in the Christian community high honor.

(2) Such honor invariably devolves on their "hard work" and apparently diverse usefulness in the cause of the gospel.

(3) Their "hard work" is a work of "partnership in the gospel" (cf. Phil. 1:5); these women are Paul's partners in a variety of ministry contexts and situations. His choice term for describing

that partnership is "fellow worker," a term that suggests coordination, not subordination, a shared common involvement underlying whatever differences may be involved.

#### 4. The specific ministry of women

Besides the above examples of women's ministry to the church of Paul's day there are several passages in the Pastoral Epistles which have a more distinctly normative or prescriptive character: 1 Tim. 2:15; 3:11; 5:9, 10; Titus 2:3-5. These will be treated as suggestive rather than exhaustive of the positive role of women in the New Testament. The committee is aware that the argument against *ordaining* women must not be construed as negating or denigrating the ministry of women in the general office of believer. Hence we conclude our report not with what women may *not* do but rather with what they may and must do to be faithful to their Lord and Savior.

##### a. 1 Timothy 2:15

At least four possible understandings of this verse can be found among commentators. The differences focus on the understanding of the idea of the woman being "saved in childbirth." In his commentary on the pastoral epistles, Hendriksen summarizes these (pp. 111, 112):

- (1) saved by means of The Childbirth, i.e., the promised seed Jesus Christ,
- (2) saved, i.e., kept safely during childbirth,
- (3) saved through the meritorious efforts of childbearing,
- (4) saved by way of or in the sphere of childbearing.

The reasons for rejecting 1-3 are:

(1) While the messianic interpretation is not contrary to the analogy of faith, it has no precedent. Its only other usage is the verbal form in 1 Tim. 5:14, which refers to ordinary childbirth. Furthermore, this interpretation doesn't fit the context in which the subject is the woman's place with respect to man's authority in the church.

(2) "Protection" in childbirth does not fit the normal usage of the verb "saved." While it often means "to make whole" in the gospels, the Pauline usage is exclusively soteric (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 4:18). "Childbearing" is not narrowly defined as "giving birth" but has broad reference to the entire task of raising children. More decisive is the fact that v. 15 is meant to be a consolation in light of the exhortation of the previous verses. The focus is on roles, a concern considerably larger than mere safety in childbirth.

(3) The concept of meritorious salvation is contrary to the entire Pauline soteriology (cf. Rom. 3; Galatians). Moreover, Paul emphasizes "faith" in the second half of the verse.

(4) This alternative commands our respect because it fits the context and does justice to the Pauline usage of "saved." Covenant women are saved in their God-given, created roles as mothers in the tradition of Sarah, Elizabeth and Mary (cf. 1 Pet. 3:5, 6). The curse for which she was partly responsible, by failing to submit to her husband's authority, is lifted in God's gracious salvation. Now by recalling to her God-given role as a suitable helper in the Covenant task, the Lord promises to save her as she trusts and obeys.

Hence the preposition *dia* in the context refers not to the

means of salvation ("through") but the sphere in which one is saved (K.J.V. "in," "by way of," i.e., the "accompanying circumstance" [Lenski, *Commentary*, p. 572]).

Among commentators who have held this view are: Hendriksen, Gordon Clark, Calvin, Poole, Lenski, Trapp, Meyer, Vander Kam, and Fairbairn.

This sphere to which grace restores her is her highest dignity. As she raises children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord she "exerts tremendous influence." Christ came by her childbearing (Vander Kam, *Bible Lessons on 1 Timothy*, pp. 23, 24), as do all men (1 Cor. 11:11, 12). The promise of blessing to the godly woman who uses the whole range of her gifts and calling, both inside and outside of the home (Prov. 31:10, 11), *within* God's authority structure, is a promise which contemporary women need to take seriously.

#### b. I Timothy 3:11

Having denied the ordained status of the "women" (K.J.V. "wives") of this verse, it is all too easy to say no more. That is a shame, because whether these women were wives of elders or deacons or both, it is clear that Paul had "deaconing women" in view. They were recognized as special assistants to the ordained officers of the church. Phoebe is a classic example. Because of this association their spirituality had to be commensurate with the diaconate which they assisted.

Furthermore, there are aspects of diaconal ministry which can only properly be executed by women. These focus on (though they are not limited to) personal, private needs unique to women and needs in the area of hospitality.

Modern-day diaconates need to employ the gifts of women and even consider publicly recognizing some as officially associated with the diaconate in unordained status.

#### c. 1 Timothy 5:9, 10

Biblical concern for orphans and widows is an ancient one (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; Jer. 7:6). This concern is not blind sentimentality. Widows supported by the church must be "truly needy" in the sense of having no other means of support; and they must have lived as faithful covenant women who have used their gifts and calling as women to minister practically to the saints. Anna is a classic example (Luke 2:36, 37). It is interesting to note the accent on domestic service. Prior to 60 years of age the role of wife-mother is the norm (1 Tim. 5:1 *lf.*).

The point is that true covenant widows have much to offer the church from their godly experience, not the least of which is prayer (v. 5). The early church designated certain women "intercessors of the church" (Hendriksen, p. 173). Married women don't have the same amount of time available for intercession.

Though marriage is the Biblical norm, younger single women, like widows, need to be encouraged to develop gifts of service to use their freedom wisely as well as make themselves more "marriageable" in the wholesome covenant sense of that word.

The contemporary possibilities are endless. We need to replace our concept of "career," focusing on self-fulfillment, with the Covenantal idea of "calling." It was out of this sense of service (v. 10) that the "hospice" and the "hospital" grew. Hence: the modern orphanage, crisis pregnancy center, and L'Abri

Fellowship, which never would have given "shelter" to anyone without the tireless service of Edith Schaeffer.

d. Titus 2:3-5

Here is a broader category than widows. "Aged women" does not mean 60 or older, but rather "mature," i.e., "older," more experienced. They are to be examples of godly Christlike character and behavior. But they are also to be "teachers." The Greek word in v. 3 has the same root as the word used for the office of "teacher" in 1 Tim. 2:7, 2 Tim. 1:11, and the verb form used in the prohibition of women teaching men in 1 Tim. 2:12. The point is that while women are forbidden to give official instruction to men in the doctrines of the faith, mature women are encouraged to verbally instruct younger women in the specific area of godliness as wife-mothers.

The verb "teach" in v. 4 is different from that of "teachers" in v. 3. It is translated in other passages as: "to be sober minded" (v. 6); "to be sober" (v. 4); "sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). The idea is discipleship in godly wisdom. The mature wife-mother is to instruct, by word and deed, other wife-mothers in maternal wisdom and domestic discipline which distinguishes the Christian woman from her worldly counterpart. She might use Proverbs 31 and a host of Biblical examples such as Abigail and Lois. While the world teaches its women, like its men, to assert their rights and pursue self-fulfilling careers, the women of the church are to teach the pursuit of godliness (1 Tim. 2:9, 10; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4), submitting to their husbands, loving their children, "keeping" their homes, (vs. 4, 5). They will thereby witness to the world that God's Word is true (v. 5).

The positive calling of women outlined in the Bible is as wide and varied as any calling on earth. The feminist climate offers Christian women a unique challenge and opens a fruitful field of labor as they exemplify the richness and humanity of serving their risen Lord.

In conclusion, the church, exemplified in its ordained officers, needs to encourage and instruct its women as to the dignity of the unique role as women. We have only suggested lines of Biblical teaching along which this encouragement may take shape.

## V. CONCLUSION

To the degree to which we as a church have emphasized what women are forbidden to do, and failed to lovingly and wisely lead them to do what God's Word encourages them to do, we need to change our attitudes and the practices which flow from them. The church is always threatened with the attitudes of the flesh which lead men and women to abdicate their God-given roles and either domineer others or retreat from service. To be always reforming is to be always repenting and following our resurrected Lord.

Women, therefore, need to repent, where necessary, of the unbiblical desire to usurp authority in the church or the home. Men also need to repent, where necessary, of a failure to encourage women in the use of their gifts, and of making their womanhood more of a yoke than a privilege.

The church under the leadership of its officers needs to be thankful for the faithful women who serve the church in a rich variety of ways at present. We need to protect our women from being overwhelmed or seduced by the lie of secular

feminism which promises liberation for disobedience to God's authority structure and demeans the high calling of Christian women as wives and mothers. We need to instruct them as to their dignity as women in Christ (Gal. 3:28) and treat them accordingly.

Finally, sessions should consider ways to make greater use of the gifts of women in the total life of the church, so long as good order is not subverted by replacing or undermining or otherwise eclipsing the teaching and rule of the elders. Specific implementation should be left to the discretion of individual sessions, and will, no doubt, vary from session to session (cf. IV,B. above). And may the church be wonderfully adorned in these days with gifts from her risen Lord.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the report be sent to the sessions of the Church for study.
2. That the Committee be dissolved.

Ivan Davis  
Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.  
Robert D. Knudsen  
Gregory E. Reynolds, Chairman

[Note: Robert Strimple disagrees with the conclusions of the committee regarding exclusion of women from the diaconate; and therefore he plans to submit a minority report.]

## APPENDIX

### WOMEN DEACONS? FOCUSING THE ISSUE

This General Assembly has been served by the Committee on Women in Church Office with two reports concerning women and the diaconate. Both offer some fairly extensive exegetical argumentation but reach opposed conclusions: the one (the Committee) that women may not be deacons, the other (the Minority) that they may. However, in neither report, nor in the two taken together, does the basic difference between them -- and so perhaps the basic issue before this General Assembly -- come out as clearly as it might. (The full Committee did not have an opportunity to consider the report of the Minority; it was not produced until after the Committee report had been submitted for inclusion in the Agenda.

The basic difference between the two reports is not that the one favors while the other is opposed to women deacons. An even deeper difference is diverging conceptions of the diaconate as a (special) *office* or, correlatively and more specifically, of the *authority* of the (office of) deacon. For the Committee, women may not be deacons because 1 Timothy 2:12 prohibits women to exercise authority in the church, including the authority inherent in the diaconate; all authority in the church is a function, by covenant-based analogy, of the headship of father/husband in the home (Report, pp. ). The Minority rejects this position (pp. ) and holds that women may be deacons because the authority of the deacon is "delegated authority, authority exercised *under* the authority of the elders (p. ). The Committee and Minority differ because they have different conceptions of the authority of the deacon and, in that respect, of the office-character of the diaconate.

The ultimate resolution of this difference lies in Scripture. But what about our Form of Government? It might be said that its position concerning authority! office in relation to the

diaconate falls between the Committee and the Minority. But that position is surely closer to the former. On the one hand, the work of the deacons is "under the supervision and authority of the session" (IX:5.). On the other hand, the Form of Government subsumes the specific offices -- ministers, elders, and deacons -- under a generic notion of office: officers are those who "have been publicly recognized as called of Christ to minister with authority" (V:2.). Nothing here even suggests that the authority of the deacon, unlike that of the minister and elder, is *delegated* authority; rather, deacons, equally with ministers and elders, have their authority to minister from Christ. In the same vein, the procedures for electing, ordaining, and installing ruling elders and deacons are stipulated together in the same chapter and are identical for both offices: (1) the ordination/installation questions are the same for both (XXV:6.b.), and, correspondingly, (2) the congregation promises obedience, without qualification as to its character as *obedience*, to deacons as well as ruling elders (XXV:6.c., 6.e., 7.c.). Considered from the side of the congregation, and the obedience/submission asked (and required) of it, the authority of ruling elders and deacons is equal and parallel.

*Conclusion:* What recommendation 2 of the Minority intends, in detail, is not made clear. What is clear is its effect, if adopted. To revise the Form of Government to provide for women deacons will necessitate as well revising its underlying conception of the nature and authority of office. The General Assembly should recognize that -- measured by the existing understanding of diaconal authority in the Form of Government -- to "open the office of deacon to qualified women would bring the OPC into conflict with its subordinate standard of government. Scripture is our final standard and wherever it leads we are bound to follow, but we need to be aware of the full dimensions of the revision demanded to avoid conflict in our Form of Government and to be sure that Scripture really does demand such revision.

It has not been my purpose here to debate the report of the Minority. But several further observations do seem in order in light of the preceding comments.

1. (a) Can we be sure that the exercise of (official) authority prohibited to women in 1 Timothy 2:12 is neatly restricted to teaching and closely related ruling? After all, in terms of the verse itself and its syntax, the prohibited exercise of authority over men is made without qualification and, further, is parallel/in addition to the prohibition against teaching. The semantics of that syntax is open to interpretation, but the Minority has not addressed that question (see especially - where we might expect it at least to be mentioned -- the paragraph beginning p. ).

(b) Also, if, as the Minority holds, the authority of headship is not at issue for the office of deacon, why then does Paul stipulate that a deacon must lead/ rule/manage his household well (1 Tim. 3:12) -- essentially identical to the parallel requirement for overseers (vss. 4, 5)? If headship is not at stake in the diaconate, why single out proven headship in the home as a requirement for deacons (as well as elders) -- especially since, on the assumption that headship is not at stake, their worthiness for office could be adequately established by other criteria?

2. The Minority makes extensive use of the views of J. Van Bruggen, but does not follow them consistently. The tendency

of those views, based on his exegesis of the New Testament, is to break the close bond between overseers (ministers and elders) and deacons characteristic of Reformed church orders - so much so that the *office* of deacon (as an authoritative, ordained function) disappears; for instance, in setting out his own view, as far as I can discover, he never uses the word "office" (*ambt*) for deacons. Apparently, there is really only one office in the church today - that of overseer; all other organized, structured ministry, including the diaconate, exists - without need of ordination - by appointment of the overseers and under their direction (see, e.g., the summary paragraph on p. 117, *Ambten in de Apostolische Kerk*). In other words, in relation to the diaconate, Van Bruggen has freed himself from the issue of authority that continues to burden the Minority in his effort to argue for women in the office of deacon.

Van Bruggen's position on women deacons -- in the context of his stimulating, carefully argued work on offices in the apostolic church -- merits the thoughtful consideration of the larger Reformed community. But in his laudable attempt to remove deacons out from under the eclipsing shadow of the overseers, it seems to me, he has failed to do justice to the unique bond between the two, as a permanent church order, found in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3, and reflected elsewhere in the New Testament.

3. An overriding fear for me is that those who favor ordaining women to the office of deacon will suppose that thereby a victory has been gained for women, and their full and rightful participation in the life of the church at last secured. I suspect that the effect of such "victory," rather, will be to limit that participation and inhibit it from being as full as it ought to be. 1 Peter 4:10, 11 give clear profile to the dual principle of ministry (the gospel in word and deed) for all believers, men and women alike -- a principle that the dual office structure (elders and deacons) exists, in part, to facilitate by the leadership it gives (see the fuller treatment of this passage, p. ). In my judgment, only when the issue of women's role in the church is no longer encumbered with the question of ordination and office will the church make headway, on the principle of 1 Peter 4:10, 11, toward realizing an optimum exercise of gifts given to women - for showing mercy, yes, but for administering and teaching in the church as well.]

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

#### REPORT OF THE MINORITY OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN CHURCH OFFICE

The undersigned was a signatory to the report which this Committee submitted to the 54th General Assembly (see *Minutes*, pp. 252-272) and continues to be in agreement with the bulk of the Committee's report to this 55th General Assembly, since it is largely a restructuring and expansion of the earlier report. He does not believe, however, that the Committee is correct in the conclusion it has now reached, that the Scriptures exclude women from the diaconate. For that reason he wishes to make the following presentation for consideration by the church.

##### I. THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE AND THE BURDEN OF PROOF

As emphasized in the Committee's report, "Church government must conform to the Scriptural pattern and follow the specific provisions revealed in the New Testament" (*Form*

of *Government*, 1,3., p. 2). And therefore "The answer to the question of whether or not women may be ordained to the New Testament office of deacon depends entirely upon the establishment of positive Scriptural warrant" (p. 313).

But what must we require as to the nature of that positive Scriptural warrant? Must it be more clear and explicit than the warrant on the basis of which we have determined other matters relating to the worship and government of the church? Must it be more clear, for example, than the Biblical command which grounds the participation of women in the Lord's Supper? (The Committee notes the decision made by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America in 1888 and the suggestion made in their church magazine that "Women's right to participate in the diaconate is clearer in Scripture ... than their right to partake of the Lord's Supper" (see p. 342).) Must it be more clear than the Biblical warrant for the use of non-inspired hymns in public worship (a warrant denied by several of those whose statements of the regulative principle are cited by the Committee)?

The Committee cites Gordon Clark to the effect that "probability falls short of the 'demonstration' necessary to establish biblical warrant" (p. 337). Do we really want to take the position that we cannot act on the basis of what we believe the Scripture teaches, unless we find the Scriptural teaching so 100% transparent that no counterinterpretation with even the slightest degree of plausibility can be suggested? The requiring of such an absolute demonstration may well leave us paralyzed, unable to obey what we have adequate reason to believe the Bible to be saying. The New Testament seems to contain two texts (Romans 16:1, 2 and I Timothy 3:11) which speak quite directly to the subject before us here, because they speak of women deacons. The Committee insists that they provide no guidance to the church today, however, because "the result" of a careful attempt to understand these texts "in each case is an exegetical stand-off" (p.331). The undersigned believes such scepticism is unwarranted. It will be argued below that the weight of the exegetical evidence in each case comes down on the side of seeing a reference to women who served as deacons; and since it is the Scripture which must decide the issue, the church must have the courage to take a fresh, unbiased look at what the Scripture says. As the Committee report rightly notes, we must not be blinded by the *Zeitgeist* of the world (whether of feminism or of male chauvinism). Neither must we be content to follow the "easy course" of maintaining the status *quo* in the church simply because it is the *status quo*.

The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice for all. That means that in the matter before us each one of us must accept the responsibility of establishing the Biblical basis of his position. We must be careful not to make the mistake of thinking that the Reformed regulative principle means that only the "positive" position, the position that qualified women may be elected deacons in the church, needs to satisfy the burden of providing Biblical proof, while the "negative" position need provide no explicit Biblical teaching to the effect that women are to be excluded from this office.

As the Committee report puts it, "Understanding the biblical idea of office does not of itself give one a criterion as to whether women may be ordained to office in the church.... One must decide, on scriptural grounds, whether this or that office in the church is open to women. If it is indeed open to women,

then they have the responsibility to use their gifts there in fulfilling their calling" (p. 324).

The report itself reminds us of the way in which the early chapters of Genesis present "the generic unity of man and woman" (p. 314). The creation hymn of Genesis 1:27 seems to have as a leading purpose to emphasize the fact that both man and woman were created as the image of God. The Lord God creates man, his image, male and female, and gives them dominion over the lower creation. It is obviously true that male and female differ from one another, but "in their difference they complement each other."

Similarly, the redemption hymn of Galatians 3:28 accents "the oneness of male and female as beneficiaries of God's grace in Christ." "... in terms of the believer's relation to God in Christ there is absolutely no distinction between male and female, each is viewed as child and heir with full covenant rights and privileges" (pp. 319).

Given the Bible's clear teaching regarding the full equality of the sexes before God, we would seem to require some Biblical basis for excluding them from a particular role and office in the church at least as much as we would require a Biblical basis for opening it to them.

(The undersigned would note that he wrote the portion of the Committee's report dealing with Galatians 3:28 and refuting the notion that one might argue a case for women in a particular church office on the basis of choosing for Galatians 3:28 over against other NT. texts which contradict Paul's teaching here, or on the basis of insisting that "the women-in-the-church texts are all so conditioned by the culture and the time that they are no longer normative" (p. 318). Surely if the NT. explicitly excludes women from the diaconate, they must be excluded. Whether any NT. text does this is the question to be examined.)

As indicated above, the undersigned agrees with the Committee that I Timothy 2:12-13 "prohibits women specifically from exercising the teaching and ruling functions reserved to the office of elder" (p. 330). What does the NT. teach with regard to the office of deacon?

Let us begin by examining the two texts which seem to speak quite directly to the question of whether women may serve as deacons.

## II. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND WOMEN DEACONS

### A. Romans 16:1, 2

The apostle Paul writes:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is (also) a *diakonos* of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help (*parastete*) her in whatever manner she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper (*prostatis*) of many, and of myself as well.

Commentators are quick to note that *diakonia* is the key word, the most comprehensive term for the ministry of the New Testament church, and *diakonos* is the key word, the general term for all those who carry out that ministry. Indeed, Report 32 to the 1981 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church

observes that "the Greek words *diakonos* and *diakonia* are used for such a variety of functions and persons that one wonders how *diakonos* ever became a designation for a particular ministry or office in the church" (*Acts of Synod 1981*, p. 496).

It did become such an official title, however; and it is clearly used as such in Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3:8, 12, 13. (It may be that Romans 12:7 indicates that *diakonia* was at least "on the way" to such an official usage at an early time. See NASB margin, "Or, *office of service.*")

The question is whether it is used in such an "official" sense of Phoebe here. If Philippians 1:1 is the first reference in the N.T. to this particular office of Deacon, is Phoebe the first (and only!) holder of this office to be *named* in the N.T.? (We shall comment on the Acts 6 passage below.)

It is a serious mistake, in this writer's judgment, to conclude from the quite broad and general use of the word *diakonos* that this is a question which we simply cannot answer definitively and leave it at that. We must seriously consider whether perhaps the way in which the apostle speaks of Phoebe as *diakonos* here should properly incline us toward one answer or the other.

In other words, it is not enough to suggest, as the Committee report does, that there is nothing in the passage that absolutely *rules out* the "general" force of *diakonos* here. We must consider what are the elements in the passage which make it, as the Committee itself concedes (p. 331), more natural, "perhaps even more likely" that it should be "read as a fixed or official designation" here. (We must consider not simply the various *possible* meanings of the word *diakonos* in this text but its *probable* meaning in this particular statement with its particular construction. We might compare the way in which in the exegesis of Genesis lit has been so often noted, on the one hand, that the Hebrew word *yam* can be used to refer to something other than the twenty-four hour period it takes the earth to revolve once on its axis, with the response, on the other hand, that while this is certainly so, the meaning of the word in a construction which says "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" can hardly be doubted.)

We must consider what are the elements in the passage which compel a commentator like C. E. B. Cranfield to conclude:

It is perhaps just conceivable that the word *diakonos* should be understood here as a quite general reference to her service of the congregation; but it is very much more natural, particularly in view of the way in which Paul formulates his thought ... to understand it as referring to a definite office. We regard it as virtually certain that Phoebe is being described as "a (or possibly 'the') deacon" of the church in question, and that this occurrence of *diakonos* is to be classified with its occurrences in Phil. 1:1 and I Tim. 3:8 and 12. ("The Epistle to the Romans," vol. II, *The International Critical Commentary*, (1979), p. 781.)

The Committee rejects this conclusion as "exegetically unwarranted," (p. 332) but does not examine the exegetical arguments behind it. We shall indicate them briefly here:

1. The formula Paul employs in speaking of Phoebe as *diakonos* suggests that the reference is to the office of deacon.

He says: "*ousan* (feminine accusative present participle) ... *diakonon*." As noted in a 1987 study report produced for the coming National Assembly of the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK), such a participial phrase is "consistently used to identify the function someone has at a particular time, his or her performance of 'office' " (p. 5, unofficial English translation). Examples of this usage are found in John 11:49 ("But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being (*on*, masculine nominative present participle) high priest that year), Acts 18:12 ("But Gallio, being (*ontos*, masculine genitive present participle) the proconsul of Achaia ..."), and Acts 24:10 ("... for many years you (Felix) being (*onta*, masculine accusative present participle) a judge to this nation ...").

2. The *kai* (also) attested to by P46, B, and C\* (*ousan kai diakonon*) emphasizes this as a further consideration in Phoebe's favor in addition to her being a Christian sister (*ten adelphen hemon*). She is not only a Christian sister but also a deacon in the church at Cenchrea.

3. Most especially, the genitive phrase added ("of the church which is at Cenchrea") "does not simply inform us of the place from which Phoebe came, but underscores again her official status. Just as we, in regard to many positions, include the name of a place to emphasize the actuality of someone's position: 'John, mayor of \_\_\_\_\_, Peterson, pastor at \_\_\_\_\_, Philip, elder in ' ' " (NGK study report, p. 5). If Phoebe's service being referred to were merely of a general character, New Testament usage would make us expect it to be linked with *christou* or *kuriou* or *theou* rather than with a specific congregation.

(The Committee report simply states, without argumentation, that "the phrase '*diakonos* of the church in Cenchrea' does not set forth the ministry of Phoebe in formal or official terms" (p. 348). One is left wondering what terms the report would recognize as formal or official.)

4. At the end of v. 2 Paul adds the statement that "she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well." In an important 1984 book entitled *Ambten in de Apostolische Kerk*, Prof. J. Van Bruggen of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), sometimes referred to as the Article 31 churches, notes that this reference to Phoebe as "a helper" is to be distinguished from the designation of her as "a deacon" in v. 1. "If the words in v. 1 ('servant of the congregation') intended nothing other than to indicate that she has been helpful to many people, then v. 2b would be a superfluous repetition of the words in v. 1. In reality, however, Paul is making clear that she is not only *called* a servant (v. 1), but also really *is* (v. 2)" (Kampen: J. H. Kok, ch. V, f.n. 19, unofficial English translation). The NGK study report puts it this way: "There are two things mentioned about Phoebe: first of all, that she has a function in the congregation of Cenchrea; and secondly, the manner in which she performed her service. ... Paul here speaks of her *status* (deacon) and her service, the way in which she practiced her servanthood" (p. 4).

It is on the basis of these considerations that the NGK study report concludes: "Paul so strongly emphasizes terminology that points to an actual service that we have reason to affirm that she served the church at Cenchrea, really, as a deacon" (p. 5). Indeed, the understanding of Paul's reference in Romans 16:1 being to a recognized officer in the congregation is so "natural" that it seems likely that this would have been the

understanding of almost all translators and commentators had the name in the text been that of a male. The Committee calls this observation "gratuitous" since "this would be the only reference, without any other New Testament support, to a woman deacon" (p. 332). It is not gratuitous to emphasize how strong is the *prima facie* case for reading Romans 16:1 as an official reference (thus challenging anyone opposing it to look to the strength of his case), and to say that there is no other NT. reference to a woman deacon begs the question of the proper interpretation of I Timothy 3:11 (which text we shall look at next).

As noted above in Section I, it is often asserted that our Reformed regulative principle requires that the alleged instruction or example appealed to as providing the Biblical warrant for an ecclesiastical practice be *clear*. But this matter of clarity cuts both ways. We might well be expected to adopt the natural understanding of Romans 16:1, 2 unless the teaching of the N.T. elsewhere that it is not proper for a woman to serve in the office of deacon is so clear that we must conclude that this understanding of the Phoebe reference *cannot* be the correct one.

John Calvin found the "official" understanding of Romans 16:1 so natural that without really defending it he writes of Paul's commending Phoebe "first on account of her office" (compare argument 4 on our previous page above) and of our learning thereby that we should "bestow particular love and honour upon those who exercise any public office in the Church." The Committee report seems to find Calvin's comment something of an embarrassment because it begins to engage in some surprising "special pleading" here, first stating that "Calvin is not very clear in his comments" because he "even" (!) refers to "her office," and then finding it "noteworthy" that Calvin wrote his commentary on Romans "perhaps less than a decade after his conversion" (p. 340).

Calvin believed that Phoebe held the office described in I Timothy 5, that of "widow." That is most unlikely, however, since that passage reveals that widows were enrolled in order that they might have their financial needs met by the church, whereas the description of Phoebe in Romans 16:2 suggests that she was probably a woman of considerable means. The feminine word *prostatis* (which appears only here in the N.T.) was sometimes used like the Latin *patrona*, "patroness." While there is no suggestion here that she was this in a legal sense to "many," including Paul (certainly Paul as a Roman citizen had no need for such), the term probably does imply some measure of wealth and social position. (Note the word play with *parastete* and *prostatis*, cognates with different prefixes on the root *histanai*. *Parastasis* would have corresponded with the verb *parastete*, but Paul uses *prostatis* instead, probably because it "answered better to the official and personal eminence of Phoebe" (Liddon).

Others (e.g. Hodge and *TDNT*) see Phoebe as holding the office of "Deaconess" (which Calvin understood as growing out of the office of Widow). Evidently there was such a distinct office (separate from and perhaps under the supervision of the Deacons) in the early church. Some see evidence of such as early as Pliny's letter to Trajan early in the second century. But there is certainly nothing in Romans 16:1, or in I Timothy 3:11, which makes it *clear* that women Deacons held an office distinct from that held by men Deacons.

Before leaving this important text, two observations are of at least "postscript" interest. The first concerns the particular city in which Phoebe served as *diakonos*. Located on an isthmus, Corinth had two seaports; and Cenchrea was the eastern one (Acts 18:18). Like most ports it was "the most infamous and dangerous part of this already proverbially notorious town" (Walter Luthi). A congregation in such an area would most likely have special need to care for the poor, the sick, the widows, the orphans, as well as the needs of newly arriving fellow Christians from Asia. This accords well with what the church has come to view as the particular responsibility of the diaconate and with what is said about Phoebe's service in v. 2.

The second concerns the strong and quite general request by the apostle that the Roman Christians, male and female presumably, help ("stand by") Phoebe "in whatever matter she may have need of you." That is a kind of blank check endorsement which raises interesting questions concerning the relationship between initiator (Phoebe) and assistants (Roman brethren) which Paul envisions developing as Phoebe carries out *her diakonos* in Rome. It is interesting that even the Committee's report notes that: "This request of itself seems to hint of a woman with some kind of mission, authorization, or capacity to enlist, if not *command* (emphasis added), resources for a specified ministry as she continues (presumably) to be 'a great help to many people' " (p. 348).

#### B. I Timothy 3:11

In the third chapter of his first letter to Timothy, after describing the requirements of an overseer (*episkopos*) in vv. 1-7, Paul describes the requirements of deacons in vv. 8-10 and 12-13. Right in the midst of those words regarding the deacons this sentence appears (v. 11):

Women (*gunaikas*) likewise must be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

What "women" does the apostle have in view here? Several suggestions have been made in the history of interpretation, but the Committee seems clearly to be correct in deciding that only two seem plausible: (1) that women deacons are in view, (2) that deacons' wives are in view. A. G. Martimort notes against the suggestion that Christian women in general are in view that: "A reference to women in the middle of a passage concerned with deacons makes it seem likely that the women in question did have some relationship to the deacons being discussed" (*Deaconesses: An Historical Study*, Ignatius Press, 1986, p. 21).

Again, the Committee insists that the result of a careful study of the arguments for these two views ("women deacons" and "deacons' wives") "is an exegetical stand-off" (p. 331). But is it? The Committee itself notes that the understanding of Paul's reference in v. 11 as being to "women deacons" is "apparently the view inclined to, more or less decisively, by the majority of modern scholars" (p. 332); and there are very good exegetical reasons for this. We shall indicate the most important of the exegetical arguments briefly here, at the same time replying to the counterarguments presented in the Committee report:

1. V. 2 of this chapter begins "The overseer must be ..."; v. 8 begins "Deacons likewise"; v. 11 begins "Women likewise ..." The use of that adverb *hosautos* ("likewise," "similarly") points in each case (v. 8 and v. 11) to another class of officials, similar in some sense to the first class addressed (that of overseer). In

other words, the "women" in v. 11 are introduced as a class parallel to the deacons and the elders. (Contrast the way the women are addressed in v. 11 with the way the overseer's children are referred to v. 4.)

2. English translations of v. 11 sometimes insert an article ("the," RSV) or a possessive pronoun ("their," NIV) before the word "women," or "wives." It is important to notice that there is neither an article nor a pronoun in the Greek text. If the deacons' wives were in view, we would expect such a possessive. So significant does Van Bruggen view the absence of such a qualifier that he writes: "the Greek has no such possessive pronoun, so that we honestly must think of particular women who do not need per se to be married to the deacons. The women of the deacons enter the discussion for the first time in the next verse when it states that the deacons must be men of one wife."

3. "If it (v. 11) does not concern here a particular category of women, but the wives of the deacons, it is incomprehensible as to why qualifications for the wives of deacons are given, but not for the wives of overseers" (J. P. Versteeg, *Kiji op de Kerk*, Kampen, J. H. Kok, 1985, unofficial English translation of pp. 43-45).

The Committee offers what would seem to be the only plausible answer to this question, that the wives of the deacons evidently had a part in the work of their husbands in a way in which the wives of the overseers did not. In explaining why this should have been so, however, the Committee virtually concedes the point which the minority will emphasize below concerning the difference between the office of overseer and the office of deacon, and how this difference makes it appropriate that the office of deacon (but *not* the office of elder) be open to qualified women as well as to qualified men! "... by virtue of the differences between the two offices deacons' wives could be more directly and extensively involved in the official activities of their husbands than would be the case with overseers' wives" (p. 332 of Committee report).

4. While it is difficult to explain why Paul should have addressed deacons' wives but not overseers' wives (so difficult that the Committee ends up stressing the significance of the difference between the functions of the two offices which elsewhere it wishes to play down!), it is, of course, it is not at all difficult to explain why Paul should have addressed women deacons but not women overseers. In the apostle's view (1 Timothy 2:12) there should be no women overseers!

5. The first of the arguments for understanding v. 11 as being addressed to deacons' wives (which arguments are considered by the Committee as sufficiently weighty that "neither set (of arguments) is decisive" (p. 333) is that "to interrupt a description of the qualifications for (male) deacons (verses 10, 12) by injecting qualification for women deacons would be awkward and unlikely ... (p. 332)."

At first reading this counterargument does not seem very compelling. After considering more carefully what seems to be guiding the order of the apostle's thoughts, it becomes even less so. In vv. 8-10 Paul sets forth the requirements that apply to deacons in general, whether men or women. Since he then wishes to accent matters which apply to men deacons only (v. 12, that they be husbands of only one wife and that they direct their children and their households well), he first emphasizes

that the qualifications he has mentioned (vv. 8, 9) apply to women deacons as well as to the men. Awkward and unlikely? Not at all!

6. The Committee suggests that "if Paul had wished to introduce a separate class of women deacons it would have been easy for him to make that clear by introducing *tas diakonous* either directly after or instead of 'women' " (p. 332). Obviously it is not very compelling to speculate as to what Paul might have written in order to be more clear. Since *diakonos* with the feminine definite article does not appear in the NT., can we be sure that option was open to the apostle? When the NGK study report asks the question "why then are these women not called deacons?" it offers this suggestion: "because Paul wants to carefully distinguish them from their male colleagues; and since, at that time, there was no female coordinate form of *diakonos*, Paul designates them 'women' " (p.3). Martimort adds the thought that Paul could assume that the context would make clear what women he had in mind!

7. "What is of greatest importance is that the qualifications for the deaconesses are without distinction bound to the qualifications of the overseers and those of the deacons. It is difficult to deduce from here something other than that all these qualifications are of the same nature. They are all qualifications for official service in the congregation" (Versteeg).

8. The exegetical arguments for understanding this text as a reference to women deacons, and the exegetical arguments for understanding Romans 16:1 as a reference to a woman deacon, reinforce each other, of course. In considering neither text should it be argued: "But there is no other reference to a woman deacon in the New Testament." (See Section 4, third paragraph, on p. 360 above.)

In the opinion of the minority these exegetical arguments are very weighty indeed, and yet the Committee does not find them persuasive. Why not? The Committee is not persuaded by them because of what is viewed as an overriding contextual consideration, and with this we come to the *heart* of the Committee's argument against the propriety of women deacons.

In section III.B.I.h. (p. 330) of its report the Committee argues that "in [I Timothy] 3:1ff. Paul orders and makes positive provision for the teaching and rule he has just prohibited to women" (i.e., in 2:11-12), and "I Timothy 3:1-7 suggests that 2:12-13 prohibits women specifically from exercising the teaching and ruling functions reserved to the office of elder." It is further argued that a significant pointer to the theological, covenantal basis of that prohibition is found in the appeal to Genesis that immediately follows v. 12 and in Paul's designation of the church in 3:15 as "the household of God," namely, "the unique analogy that exists between the church and the *family*. The basic form and role relationships established in the home (cf. Eph. 5:22ff.; Col. 3:18-21) have a carryover into the church: the elders are to the rest of the church as the husband/father is to the wife/children in the family" (p. 330).

With this argument, contained in the report of the Committee to the previous General Assembly, the undersigned fully agrees. In the report to this year's General Assembly, however, the Committee extends the application of I Timothy 2:11, 12 to the office of deacon and argues that that text excludes women

from the diaconate also. From that argument the undersigned dissents.

It needs to be emphasized that the Committee in its consideration of the Biblical teaching regarding the office of elder did not simply extrapolate from the church-the-household-of-God analogy the conclusion that women are not to serve as elders in the church. Rather, the Committee tried to understand the clear statement of 2:11, 12 regarding a woman's not teaching or exercising authority over a man in the light of that analogy. To engage in a kind of purely deductive reasoning in the absence of an explicit exclusion of women from a particular function/office would be a different matter altogether. It would be to do what the Committee now attempts to do with regard to the office of deacon! To do this is to suspend too much weight on the analogy in the face, not only of the absence of an explicit "negative," a prohibiting/excluding statement regarding the diaconate, but also in the face of two texts which seem, on the basis of the most careful exegesis, to give positive indication of women serving as deacons in the NT. church.

Three arguments are presented for the Committee's view of I Timothy 2:11, 12 as prohibiting women deacons as well as women elders. We shall consider them briefly here:

1. "The requirements for overseer (verses 1-7) and deacon (verses 8-10, 12-13) are linked in a parallel fashion" not only by the "likewise" (*hosautos*) but also by the "large degree in overlap of specific requirements for each office ..." (p. 333). This is a most interesting argument because it would seem to prove far too much from the Committee's standpoint. As noted above (see argument 1, p.361), v. 11 *also* begins "women *likewise* ..."; and many have been struck by how "parallel" are the qualifications for all *three* groups -- overseers, deacons, and "women" (see argument 7, p. 362)! But, of course, if we are to see three groups of officials here, one being the "women" of v. 11, we can hardly argue that therefore the exclusion expressed in 2:11 extends to all three. (Mention is also made under point I of Philippians 1:1, a text which we shall consider briefly below.)

2. The Committee states that "the parallel is made explicit on the issue of *authority*" and that "the parenthetical comment of verse 5 applies equally, following verse 12, to deacons ..." As a matter of fact, however, the parenthetical question added in v. 5, asking "how will he take care of the church of God?" does *not* appear in v. 12. Deacons are required to manage well their own households, but they are not here said to be those who take care of the church of God.

Under this point the Committee also says that "the parallel requirement that the overseer/deacon, if married, be 'the husband of but one wife' (vss. 2, 12) is a further argument against women deacons." It is not clear how this is so if women deacons are singled out for instruction in v. 11 and men in v. 12 (see argument 5 on p. 362).

3. The Committee's weightiest argument would seem to be this one, namely, that "the topic sentence for the entire section (2:1-3:16) is found in 3:15: 'how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household,' " and that "the location of this paragraph sentence, occurring immediately *after* the qualification for deacons, confirms that the family-church analogy, as that analogy involves the exclusion of women from special office, still controls the argument to that point. The exercise of authority over men prohibited to women in 2:11,

apparently, includes the office of deacon as well as that of overseer" (p. 334).

It might well be said that the cogency of this argument is absolutely crucial to the Committee's argument. Without it there is really no valid reason to apply the prohibition of 2:12 not only to the office of overseer (which is immediately considered at the beginning of ch. 3) but also to the office of deacon. An issue of considerable significance to the church of Christ is thus resting on the foundation of this "topic sentence," and it is the opinion of the minority that the argument based upon it is not sufficiently compelling to overturn the argument for the propriety of women serving as deacons based upon (1) the fact that the Bible's teaching regarding the full equality of the sexes before God would seem to require a *clear* Biblical prohibition if women are to be excluded from a particular role or office in the church, and (2) the fact that we seem to have in the N.T. two texts which indicate that there were indeed women deacons in the N.T. church.

It is not at all clear that a "straight line" can be drawn logically from the fact that deacons serve in "the household of God" to the conclusion that therefore women may not be deacons. Surely there may be other reasons why deacons are included in Paul's discussion of proper conduct in the church, the household of God, other than that both deacons and overseers serve in a role analogous to that of father/husband in the family.

The Committee asks whether the point of the analogy that lies behind Paul's prohibition in 2:12 is "special office as such or only the office of elder?" (p. 333). It is worth noting, therefore, that nowhere in this letter do we find reference to "special office" but rather to special offices, that of overseer and that of deacon. Van Bruggen's comments at this point seem worthy to be quoted in full:

We often read (I Timothy 3) as a list of "the qualifications for *the* office bearers." But then we see at the head of the passage that Paul does not begin in v. 1 by saying, "He who desires an *office*, desires a good work." He writes, "He who desires *the office of an overseer* desires a good work." Vv. 2-7 then refer to that work of the overseer. How is it that all of a sudden deacons come into the discussion and how is it that Paul comes to serving women? It is because he wants to see the qualities of the office of overseer radiate over all who are helpful to the overseers as servants in the congregation. The overseers do not perform their work as soloists. They see to it that people who have special gifts for helping and serving also participate in the ministries of the church. And over the work of these who help and serve the same worthiness and piety must shine as upon the work of the overseers.

Yes, the undersigned understands the inspired apostle in I Timothy 2:12 to be excluding women not from special office in general but from the office of authoritative teaching and spiritual rule, the office of overseer, only. But the undersigned is totally baffled as to why the Committee insists that this recognition of the difference in the appointed function of the two offices must "involve recourse in some form to the sexist view that constitutionally women do have the capacity for deeds of mercy but not for the presumably more demanding task of expounding and teaching the word of God" (p. 334).

Certainly it is not a matter of God-created capacity or "constitution" but of God-appointed roles (structure), whether we are considering the husband/father in the family or the overseer in the church.

### III. ELDERS AND DEACONS, THE OVERSEERS AND THE SERVANTS

On the basis of the evidence presented above, the undersigned agrees with Van Bruggen that "we can establish the fact that the trail of the deaconess (women deacons) goes back into the New Testament itself. That is also the opinion of the ancient church, Calvin, the respected marginal notes of the *Statenvertaling*, and many Reformed authors."

Van Bruggen then asks the natural question: "How is it possible that in the Reformed tradition the almost constant recognition of deaconesses in the Bible has been accompanied by the failure in these same churches to appoint them?" His answer is that "It is in part involved with the fact that the diaconate is colored by the work of the overseer; and the Bible clearly says in I Timothy 2:12 that a woman in Christ's church is not permitted to teach or have authority over the man."

Van Bruggen's vivid term to describe this historic anomaly is a "derailment," and he sees it manifested in a variety of ways. For example,

For many years discussions within the Reformed Ecumenical Synod have brought to light that, on the one hand, when the Biblical starting point is accepted the offices in the church are closed to women but, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that deaconesses may be appointed. They are then, however, not female colleagues as such of the office bearer deacons; they are not *women-deacons*, but *deaconesses*. According to this kind of formulation, the problem seems to be in terms of the character of the deacon; he is an *office* bearer! But when the Bible nevertheless permits the having of deaconesses, is her male colleague (the deacon) then in the course of the centuries not encapsulated in a metaphorical network whereby deacons and deaconesses, separated by the high wall of "the office," are prohibited from coming into contact with each other and remain separated? Is there not in this line of thinking a derailment?

Another example of the "derailment" of the Biblical viewpoint, though from the opposite direction, is the way in which many in our day, as Van Bruggen points out, have seized upon the presence of women deacons in the New Testament "as an occasion to permit women also to the task of oversight and teaching." It is often "as a reaction to this," of course, that "others close to women even the door of diaconal work."

The solution to all such "derailed" thinking, the way to get our understanding back on the Biblical track, is to seek a more accurate Biblical understanding of the deacon. Van Bruggen thinks it not surprising, in light of how little data the New Testament supplies regarding the deacon, that the church has had difficulty here. By way of contrast, "the contours of the elders' task, which is to exercise oversight, are more clearly discerned due to the greater amount of New Testament data." But it is very important that the distinctive character of the deacons' office be discerned.

And Van Bruggen offers the interesting suggestion that it is when we *start* with the fact that there are women deacons spoken of in the New Testament (as we have done in this report) that "there is the greatest opportunity to be on track with regard to the specific contours of this service."

We have already noted that NT. data is scanty, but what does the evidence indicate that may help us to understand how it can be that the presence of women among the deacons does not contradict Paul's instruction in I Timothy 2:12 that women are not to teach or exercise authority over a man?

A. Acts 6:1-6

1. What "office" is being established here?

Some might question the use of the term "office" here at all. It does seem, however, that the appointment (v. 3) of seven to fulfill a specific task (to be "over this business," v.3), which seven then have the apostles' hands laid upon them (v.6), sufficiently justifies our using this term, even if we conclude that the office was *ad hoc*, with no succession.

That conclusion seems to be the consensus of the majority of those writing on the passage at the present time. (See the summary statement on p. 147 of the survey which appeared in the *Biblical Theological Bulletin*, 111:2, June 1973, and James Monroe Barnett, *The Diaconate* (Seaburg, 1981): "Their office was unique and was not continued in the Church" [p. 30].)

Although the verb *diakonein* appears in v. 2 and the noun *diakonia* in v. 1 (as well as in v. 4, where it refers to the *diakonia* of the Word), the seven are not called "deacons" here; and indeed the word "deacon" is found nowhere in the book of Acts. (It is interesting to note that the verb *episkeptomai* appears in v.3, the root of the term for "overseer" or "bishop," which fact proves nothing except that the appearance of certain roots in a passage should not be used to make the passage speak of offices which are not being spoken of.)

Many also use as an argument against seeing the office in view here as that of Deacon the fact that the later descriptions of the ministries of Stephen (6:8-7:60) and Philip (8:5-40; 21:8), two of the seven, indicate that their ministries went well beyond the ministry of the diaconate as later conceived. We read in 6:8 that "Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people." In vv. 9ff. we read of Stephen's wisdom and empowering by the Spirit as he disputed with certain Jews as a Christian apologist. Chapter seven records the climactic message before the Sanhedrin by this Spirit-filled exegete of the Old Testament and powerful polemicist. Philip likewise was a preacher of the gospel, proclaiming Christ to the Samaritans and performing wonderful signs among them. The Spirit commanded him (8:29) to preach Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch beginning from Isaiah 53 (v.35). He administered the sacrament of baptism (v.38). He preached the gospel to all the cities of Azotus until he came to Caesarea (v. 40). His residence there is called "the house of Philip *the evangelist*" in 21:8.

If the statement in vv. 3-4 would cause us to think in terms of a sharp distinction between *word-charismata* and *deed-charismata* (see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost*, p. 52), we must note that the accounts regarding these two of the seven which follow immediately upon this passage describing the establishment of their office focus

upon their most full and eloquent employment of *word-charismata*! "... they appear to function much like the apostles, particularly in the proclamation of the word and in working miracles" (Barnett, p. 31).

Attractive, therefore, is the suggestion (of Rackham and others, including, perhaps, Chrysostom) that the office of the Seven was unique in the same sense as the Apostolate was unique, that their task was essentially that of "assistants to the apostles" (the Seven may be viewed as related to the Twelve as the Seventy in Numbers 27:16ff. are related to Moses -- the use of *episkeptomai* in the LXX being seen as an indicator that the Numbers passage is the model for the Acts passage) and therefore that their gifts and calling were as broadly ranging as those of the Apostles, and that their office later gave way to that of the Presbyters, whose ministry was just as broadly ranging, at least until Deacons were appointed to take over the specifically "deed" ministries.

Pointers to this conclusion are said to be the use of "the Seven" as a title (21:8), parallel to "the Twelve" (6:2), the full record of their names (6:5), again parallel to the listing of the Twelve, the fact that after Stephen and Philip we meet with no "successors" other than the Presbyters (11:30; 14:23; 15:2; etc. -- again, "Deacons" do not appear in the book of Acts), and in particular the fact that the collection from Antioch for the brethren in Judea was sent "to the *Elders* by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" (11:30), not to the Deacons.

This understanding might well seem to be very attractive (and might seem to differ little from the view that the Acts 6 passage is the first reference to the appointment of *Elders* in the Christian church -- see W. K. L. Clarke, *Episcopacy: Ancient and Modern*, ed. by C. Jenkins and K. Mackenzie, 1930, 10ff., and A. M. Farrer, *The Apostolic Ministry*, ed. by K. E. Kirk, 1946, 138ff. -- since the only difference between the office of the Seven and that of the later Elders would seem to be in the titles used) were it not for the fact that, as a matter of fact, the Acts 6 passage does *not* describe the appointment of the Seven in terms of their assisting the Apostles in their ministry *generally* but rather in the matter of "serving tables" quite specifically and in explicit *distinction* from the tasks of prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Yes, it is true that what is immediately afterwards recorded regarding the ministry of Stephen and the ministry of Philip has to do with their *word* ministry; but nevertheless we cannot deny that the only task committed to the Seven *as* "the Seven" is what may be described as a *deed* ministry. Report 32 presented to the 1981 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church emphasizes that "other duties performed by the seven have later come to institutionalized expression in the offices we now know as minister of the Word and evangelist (and ... home missionary, foreign missionary, and even professor of theology!)" but when it speaks of "the breadth of duties assigned the seven" and of the care for the widows as "*among* the tasks assigned the seven" (emphasis added), it reads such breadth of functions "assigned the seven" into the text. The only task that we *know* was assigned to the Seven is recorded in v. 3. H. Meyer would seem to be correct in noting that there is no suggestion that their word-ministry was carried out specifically in fulfilment of their appointment as the Seven, but what we are to see is that the specific task of the Seven was by no means to exclude other Christian work in the measure of existing gifts." The congregation might well have decided to

select for the specific task of overseeing the distribution of the daily food provisions men who were already serving as, in some sense, "assistants to the apostles," but nevertheless the task for which they are set apart with prayer and the laying on of hands in Acts 6 is that of "serving tables."

With Meyer, therefore, we are inclined to see in Acts 6 the record of the first official appointment of those who would oversee the distribution of that which was given to help meet the physical needs of the church's poor, which record quite properly guided the church "analogically" in the later development of the diaconate (see Committee report, p. 331).

2. How does this passage bear on the question of the propriety of women deacons?

The conclusion we have reached concerning the particular office in view in Acts 6:1-6 (that it was an office assigned the "deed-ministry" of caring for the needy widows in the congregation, and that therefore, although it may have had itself a certain *ad hoc* character, its establishment was a guiding precedent for the church as it later developed the permanent office of Deacon) requires that we consider whether the inauguration of this "prototype diaconate" points to factors which are relevant to our understanding of whether or not *women* may serve as Deacons. Three factors speaking against the appointment of women to the diaconate have sometimes been suggested:

a. Do we not have in v. 3, it is sometimes noted, the explicit instruction of the Apostles to "select from among you, brothers, seven *men* ...," which instruction was carried out in the choosing of seven *males*?

Yes, this is certainly the case. And the word used in v. 3 (*andras*, from *aner*) is not the word which is used generically to indicate "person," "human being" (*anthropos*), but is the word which often accents gender, man in contrast to suggest that another number (than twelve) was chosen in order to show that the number Twelve (Apostles) was not normative!). But we do not believe that we need to know for certain the reason why that number was commanded in that situation in order to know that it is not binding for every council of deacons. In like manner, we need not establish definitively the reason for the selection of males only in the appointment of the original Seven in order to believe that this is not a normative regulation for every council of deacons.

The situation would be different, of course, were a definite restriction of the diaconal office to men only to be stated, based upon Biblical principle (as is the case with regard to teaching and ruling elders, I Timothy 2:12); but this is not stated in Acts 6, and we should be extremely careful not to read more into the intended instruction for us than is actually there.

b. In v. 6 we read that the Seven were brought before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. Some would argue that the very fact that Deacons also are to be *ordained* settles (negatively) the question as to whether women may serve as deacons. Ordination, it is argued, involves the commission of *authority*, and a position of authority must not be given to a woman (I Timothy 2:12). The Committee, for example, seeks to establish on both Biblical and historical grounds that "authoritative leadership is implied in ordination and special office" (p. 1022). It appeals to Gordon Clark's

statement that in every instance of Biblical ordination, ordination confers authority to act in a particular capacity, and then quotes his conclusion: "Ordination is induction into an authoritative order," and since "Scripture explicitly forbids women to teach or exercise authority, it is a violation of divine law to ordain a woman" (p. 326).

But there is a *non sequitur* here. One may well say on the basis of the Biblical evidence that ordination appoints one to a ministerial office and function with authority to perform it. The undersigned has no quarrel with such a definition. But it is a leap of logic to say that that office and that function in the case of the deacon involves the kind of teaching and ruling authority which the apostle rules out for women. *That* is what must be established, and we must not beg that question.

It should be noted, for example, that just two pages later (on p. 328) the Committee says: "Our conclusion ... is that I Corinthians 11:5, 13 imply that in some form public prayer and prophecy by women was an accepted practice in the churches known to Paul. In this way the Committee itself reminds us that we must be very specific as to precisely what kind of teaching and exercise of authority is forbidden to women by Paul's instruction in I Timothy 2:12.

Report 32 to the 1981 C.R.C. Synod notes that "authority can be defined as the designation, authorization, empowerment, or 'enablement' of an individual to do a certain task" and suggests that "with the early church and segments of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches" we should understand that "headship functions did not inherently apply to the particular ministry of deacons."

Again, our Committee emphasizes Gillespie's insistence that ordination "standeth in the mission of the deputation of a man to an ecclesiastical function with power and authority to perform the same" (p. 325); and the undersigned has no quarrel with that definition (as long as the reference to "a man" is not intended to rule out women). But note again that the nature of the authority to be exercised in the particular office depends on the particular office.

Similarly, in Samuel Miller's definition of ordination as "that solemn rite, or act, by which a candidate for any office in the Church of Christ, is authoritatively designated to that office, by those who are clothed with power for the purpose.... They are fully invested with the office, and with all the powers and privileges *which it includes*" (p. 326). The Committee has added the emphasis, and it is precisely what needs to be emphasized! The authority to be exercised by any church officer is that (kind of) authority which that particular office includes. And, as we shall need to spell out further, the authority of the deacon is not to be equated with the authority of the elder.

John Owen is another who makes the distinction between the *elders'* authority and the *deacons'* authority clear, although his point seems to have been missed by the Committee, which quotes him with approval (p. 336) as though supporting its position: "This office of deacons is an office of service, which gives not any authority or power in the rule of the church; but being an office, it gives authority with respect unto the special work ♦"

Remember Van Bruggen's suggestion that our understanding of the diaconate is "derailed" when we begin on the basis of some formal definition of the authority of special office in the

church and read the specific texts which speak of deacons in the NT. church in the light of that monolithic definition of office and authority -- and his suggestion that our appreciation of the particular role and function of the deacon will be brought back "on track" if we begin by noting that the N.T. speaks of women as well as men deacons and go on to ask what this teaches us about the nature of that office.

With regard to ordination, Van Bruggen questions whether its Scriptural necessity in the case of deacons has actually been established. He suggests that instead "an official commissioning and testing" might be employed. His questioning, of course, is based on the fact that traditionally the case for the ordination of deacons has rested primarily on the fact that the Seven in Acts 6 were ordained; and he does not believe the Seven can simply be identified as the first deacons. It seems to the undersigned, however, that in view of what has been seen regarding the analogical relationship between the Seven and the later deacons, and the fact that ordination in the N.T. church was not narrowly restricted to ordination to the office of elder (see Acts 13:3), there is no reason not to ordain deacons, as long as ordination is not misunderstood as in itself investing the recipient with spiritual rule in the church.

c. The Committee emphasizes on p. 331 that "we should not overlook or minimize the authority vested in the Seven (and hence, eventually, in the diaconate)" and draws our attention to the verb *episkeptomai* in v. 3, "put in charge of" (see our earlier comment above, Al. p. 367).

It seems to the undersigned, however, that the Committee's emphasis here is quite contrary to the thrust of the passage's important teaching regarding the role of the Seven, and by analogy later the role of the deacons. As noted above, the Seven are appointed as "assistants to the apostles." Now, there is a certain authority implied in that; but it is clearly *delegated* authority, authority in a particular area, authority exercised *under* the authority of the apostles -- even as the deacons, who were appointed later as "assistants to the elders" when the spiritual headship role in the church came to be exercised by the elders rather than by apostles, exercised delegated authority, authority exercised *under* the authority of the elders whom they helped.

Considering Acts 6:1-6 an instructive indication of how the position of "helper," "servant" developed in the early church, Van Bruggen offers the following scenario: "The council of the elders (the overseers) was established by the apostles or their assistants." "With the increase in ecclesiastical work for which the overseers knew themselves responsible, they provided for the help of male and female (I Timothy 3:11; Romans 16:1) helpers (deacons) who were allocated particular ecclesiastical tasks.... Their services can be very diverse. Of deciding importance is that they receive an ecclesiastical assignment for a particular service and that they have to perform their work with the same worthiness with which the overseers lead the congregation." As Van Bruggen notes earlier in his study,

Though the New Testament offers little information regarding deacons, it yet so happens to appear that there were also *female* helpers in the ancient church. Here is a striking difference with the elders or overseers. The overseers have as their task to shepherd the congregation by word and teaching, and the

woman is not allowed to fulfill that task. The woman is never permitted to teach or have authority over the man.... The reasons given for this are not timebound because they have to do with God's creation order and with the history of the fall into sin. That the woman's not being permitted to do the work of the overseers has nothing to do with a lesser value of the woman or with a timebound subordination with reference to her is evident when we see the women all at once come to full view alongside the deacons.

#### B. Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons (*sun episkopois kai diakonois*).

The important difference with regard to the authority exercised between the elders and the deacons would seem to be underscored in this greeting by the use of the, not merely *different*, but *contrasting* titles: "the overseers" and "the servants." (It has been suggested that these titles may correspond with Paul's reference in I Corinthians 12:28 to God's appointment in his church of "those able to help others," and "those with gifts of administration" [NIV].) Yes, all believers, including the elders, are servants of Christ, the Head of the church; but the deacons are servants in a special way that makes it appropriate for them to bear that designation as the special title of their special office, whereas it would not be appropriate for them to bear the title "overseers," "rulers."

Both here and in I Timothy 3 the deacons are linked with the overseers and mentioned second. Obviously no inference from this can be pressed, but the writers of Report 32 to the 1981 C.R.C. Synod note that "the most substantial material for defining the deacon's role in the early church probably exists only by way of inference," and they suggest that "this (the linkage and the order) might imply that they (the "servants") were considered as assistants and helpers under the authority of the overseers. The fact that they are called 'deacons' or 'servants' might justify this conclusion" (p. 498). And this would, of course, agree with what we have seen is a proper conclusion from the "analogy" of Acts 6.

Certainly the basis of the Committee's confidence that "no conclusions ought to be drawn from either this pairing or the respective designations concerning the *authority* of each office, either absolutely or relative to the other" (p.331) is not clear. And the suggestion that "it would have been entirely in keeping with New Testament teaching for the elder also to have been called a *diakonos*" - even though he nowhere is -- "nor would there have been anything inappropriate in the occupant of the office of mercy being designated by *episkopos*" - even though he nowhere is - is an amazing attempt to rewrite the New Testament!

Van Bruggen decries what he describes as "a leveling view of the offices" in which "the words, 'elder,' 'deacon,' and 'minister' become more detailed definitions of the word 'office,' " and this "becomes the accolade for reducing the three offices to a *leveling* symbol, while the word office receives a meaning that goes in the direction of a halo for the office bearer." He offers three arguments for recognizing the elders' *distinction* from the deacons which have not yet been touched upon, and they can be listed briefly here: (1) "the consistory is called 'council of

elders' (I Tim. 4:14, *presbyterion*); the elders determined the name and nature of the ecclesiastical board that had full powers with regard to activities such as laying on of hands upon Timothy;" (2) "the elder had a name which in Greek is used for people who are distinguished by their age, authority or office of giving leadership.... The deacon, however ... is called 'servant' and by that word are persons designated who are appointed in a *special* way for work that others also do;" (3) "the servants must satisfy the same qualifications as the overseers with the exception of the ability to teach" (which is linked with "rule" in I Tim. 2:12).

The Committee fears that such an understanding will "result in a devaluation of the diaconate as lower or less important" (p. 334). But surely if this view results from a proper recognition of the unique role of the elders in the church by the appointment of Christ her Head, what member of the body should quarrel with that?

#### IV. CONCLUSION

We began this study by acknowledging that the only basis for reaching the conclusion that qualified women, as well as qualified men, may be elected to the diaconate would be the discovery of positive Biblical warrant. The undersigned believes such warrant has been presented.

We have also suggested that that warrant will be acted upon by the church which acknowledges its full commitment to the absolute authority of God's inerrant Scripture, our only rule for faith and practice, only when the church is convinced that the election of women to the diaconate will in no way compromise the apostle's clear exclusion of women from the eldership.

Sad to say, contemporary advocacy of the admission of women to the diaconate has too often been embraced by those unwilling to be in submission to the Scripture at all points, with tragic confusion resulting. Van Bruggen notes:

In the twentieth century the discussion concerning the deaconess has been wrapped up with the general question of whether to permit women into all offices and with this the accompanying question of the continuing validity of Biblical revelation. ... For some, the Biblical data regarding deacons is really no longer interesting because they categorically set aside the Biblical data as time bound. ❖ Others ask themselves whether the New Testament deaconess provides a certain kind of alibi for the opening of the other offices to women due to the changing times.

Fear of the advances of such theological liberalism, however, should not be allowed to prevent us from entering into a more Biblical understanding of the office of deacon and the exciting possibilities for qualified women -- and qualified men! -- in that role. Van Bruggen writes:

...in the first congregations the distinction between overseers and deacons was stronger than in Reformed churches today and ... they were servants in a broader sense than deacons whose task is defined mostly in terms of care for the needy.... there are more activities in the congregation to which special persons need to be devoted. This is already evident in the fact that next to the deacons administration committees are instituted, volunteer hospital assistance is organized, youth

programs are created. It is impossible for the elders or overseers who must sustain the congregation by and under the word, by themselves, to perform everything that is necessary and desired for the proper functioning of the communion of the saints. For that they can appoint suitable brothers and sisters and charge them with special responsibilities in the church.

Recognizing the Biblical distinctiveness of both the elders and the deacons has proven more difficult for churches from the Dutch Reformed background with a tradition of seating both on the church consistory with little meaningful distinction than it should be for Presbyterians, and it is quite a new thought for congregations of the NGK when it is said at the conclusion of the 1987 NGK study report:

The presence of women in the church council does not violate the "subordination texts." The deacon is not a ruling office. That priority is reserved for the elders. A deacon is a servanthood office, a ministry of mercy and benevolence. The elders are responsible for the oversight and rule of the total life of the congregation, including the work of the deacons. Each office pursues its unique primary areas of responsibility in frequent regularly scheduled meetings, separate from church council meetings (p. 11).

Although Van Bruggen's important work has already been quoted extensively, the undersigned would like to conclude this report with this final thought from Van Bruggen's chapter:

The two Christians who in the beginning of the second century were given over to torture by the Roman *stadtholder* were slaves according to their societal position. They did work in the congregation of which we know nothing more except for this one thing: there was a name for that work. They were deaconesses, helpers in the church. This was in the time when disciples of the Apostles were still traveling through Asia Minor. The trail of deaconesses is old and proven. If it is buried under the sands of the centuries, it is well worth the effort to uncover. It provides also an opportunity for the deacons once again to get on the old track!

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the presbyteries and congregations be requested to study both this report and the Committee's report.
2. That a committee of three be appointed by the moderator to report to the 56th General Assembly concerning what amendments to the Form of Government would be required in order to open the office of deacon to qualified women, and how such amendments could most helpfully be put before the church for consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Robert B. Strimple

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