

Reasons for Questioning Women's Ordination in the Light of Scripture

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What guidance does the Bible give us for whether or not women should be ordained? The answer seemed clear until developments in the past century or so as women's roles have changed in society. These developments have helped us look at Scripture with new eyes. It now seems clear that the Church has not always been faithful to the fullness of the biblical witness to the dignity of women and the ministry God would have them exercise. Certainly the chief honor God has given woman as bearer and nourisher of life has been affirmed, but this is not the full extent of how we see women serving God in the Scriptures.

The increasing role of women in society, as they have jobs and positions of leadership formerly reserved for the most part for men, raises the question of whether the same should be true in the Church.² Pentecostal churches have ordained women for over a century, and many of the mainline Protestant churches have begun to do so, especially since the 1970s. But other Protestant churches, as well as the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches, have not followed suit.

The reasons for and against ordaining women are a very complex combination of issues related to Scripture,³ tradition,⁴ reason,⁵ and experience.⁶ The literature on the specific

¹ An earlier version of this article appeared in *The Evangelical Catholic* 16 (March/April and May/June 1994): 6-19, under the title, "The Biblical Vision." In that article I thanked David Mills for his help, and now for this revised and expanded version I am thankful for discussions with many people and in particular for the input of Stephen F. Noll, John Porter, and Todd Murden.

² Some who do not think women should be ordained also think women should not hold public office. Others make a distinction between public office and the family, including the Church as family.

³ In this paper I am working from traditional Christian views which accept that there are a number of sources of revelation but which see the Bible as inspired by God, the chief source of revelation under Christ as "God's Word written," and as containing a coherent and internally consistent witness. See Articles 6, 7, and 20 of the Anglican *Articles of Religion*, in *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Society, 1979), 868-69, 871; *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford UP, 1928), 603-04, 607. The quote is from Article 20. For those scholars and church leaders who do not view Scripture as the chief source of revelation the argument of this paper, even if accepted as valid, may be irrelevant since for them there are other sources of authority that can trump Scripture, even when it is clear and coherent.

⁴ Daniel Doriani's conclusion, after a survey of thought throughout the history of the Church, is that "women do all sorts of things in the church, including many kinds of teaching. But they must operate within the doctrinal guidance of the teaching office of the church, and must not claim formal teaching authority for themselves." "A History of the Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 267. Doriani's material is omitted from the second edition, published in 2005. For a striking example within the Catholic Church note St. Theresa of Avila who is a Doctor of the Church.

For a presentation of the evidence that women exercised roles associated with headship in the early Church see T. F. Torrance, "The Ministry of Women" in *Touchstone* 5.4 (Fall 1992): 5-12, and the rebuttal by Patrick Henry Reardon, "Women Priests: History and Theology" in *Touchstone* 6.1 (Winter 1993): 22-27. In his article, Torrance, a strong supporter of the ordination of women, concedes that "there is no canonical record of any office of woman presbyters." The source material referring to ordained women, deacons and presbyters, is provided in Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, ed. and tran., *Ordained Women in the Early Church* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005). See also Kallistos Ware, "Man, Woman, and the Priesthood of Christ," in *Man, Woman, and Priesthood*, ed. Peter Moore (London: SPCK, 1978), 68-90; and Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 404-444, which includes the Fathers' many attacks on gnostic sects whose views of men and women is quite similar to some views today.

topic of the ordination of women is itself large, let alone all of the related issues involved. In this brief article I will not try to survey the entire subject, but rather offer one way of viewing the biblical material that calls into question the ordination of women, and also offer a few suggestions for how the biblical pattern is Good News.⁷

The ordination of women is not only a complex topic, it is also an emotionally loaded topic because big issues are at stake. It is obviously such for women who feel called to ordained ministry. More generally, for many people it is seen as an issue of equality, and there is anger at the injustice and oppression involved if women are not able to serve God as they feel led.

Emotions run high for other reasons as well. Some think the Bible clearly rules out women being ordained—women are to keep silent in the churches (1 Cor. 14.34)—and so these people are upset by what they see as a rejection of biblical authority and a violation of God's patterns established at creation. Others think the New Testament clearly contains a vision for moving beyond any distinction of role between men and women—in Christ there is no male and female (Gal. 3.28)—so the Church should be modeling for society the advancement of women in leadership instead of promoting sexism and the devaluation of women. Indeed, rejecting the ordination of women in the minds of some seems inseparably connected to horrendous patterns of degrading women and violence against women in society and sometimes even within the Church.⁸ A topic that touches on these and other major emotional and worldview issues is challenging indeed.

It is also challenging because of the nature of the biblical witness, as hinted in the two texts just cited. Does the Bible have a unified view on this topic or does it contain

Ware notes, "The Greek Fathers although often negative in their opinion of the female sex, were on the whole absolutely clear about the basic human equality of man and woman" (85).

⁵ Some social scientists argue that a division of roles between men and women corresponding to headship and subordination is both natural (even biological) and a necessity for healthy families and society. See Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, 85-205; Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980), 369-506; Steven Goldberg, *Why Men Rule: A Theory of Male Dominance* (Peru, Ill.: Open Court, 1993).

⁶ Many people have changed their views on women's ordination, and related issues, through experiencing women in ministry and/or through a liberation from understandings and applications of the biblical material that have been anything but life-giving. See Alan F. Johnson, ed., *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

⁷ It should be noted that there is a spectrum of views on this issue, not just two. Each position, however, comes down either for or against the ordaining of women, even if there are differences in how this is understood and implemented. See Alvera Mickelsen, ed., *Women, Authority and the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986); Bonnidell Clouse, Robert G. Clouse, eds., *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1989); James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg, eds., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 121-39.

⁸ See, for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974). For a brief overview of views in the ancient world (Greco-Roman and Jewish) see Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 70-74, and, more extensively, Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 1: Introduction and 1:1 – 2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 605-37.

fundamentally diverse points of view? Certainly there is a great deal of diversity in Scripture of various sorts.⁹ While some scholars see the Scriptures as lacking in unity, even, on the level of individual documents, other scholars acknowledge the diversity but also recognize a fundamental unity to the witness of the Bible. But even if there is a fundamental unity, what are we to do with points of diversity or even possible contradiction? In the light of apparent contradictions in Scripture regarding the themes related to women's ordination it is common to appeal to core theological themes of the Bible to assess these various diverse texts. This approach is entirely appropriate to sort out the diversity of Scripture. But does the witness of the Bible to issues related to the ordination of women lack coherence? That is the question I want to explore in this paper, along with the related topic of some of the core theological themes touched on by this topic.

Thus, this topic is a good case study in Biblical Theology¹⁰ because Scripture contains texts that speak of equality between men and women and also texts that speak of headship and subordination. Are the equality texts the core vision and the other texts accommodations to a particular time and place? Or is there a coherence to the biblical material that gives us a core vision that incorporates all of these diverse texts and stretches our understanding of both equality and subordination? I have come to think that the latter is the case.¹¹

For the first 16 years that I had an opinion on the subject of the ordination of women I was in favor of it.¹² My training was under some of the most able proponents of women's ordination (whose training and friendship I continue to value highly) and my own sentiments were in favor of it, for whatever personal and cultural reasons. But as I taught on this topic a number of times, using it as a case study in a course on Biblical Theology, I found it easier to make the case against it than the case for it from Scripture.¹³ In what follows I offer a summary outline of how I think the biblical material fits together and a glimpse at some of the larger issues it raises, including our view of God, the nature of our relationship with God, the pattern of discipleship which is reflective of eternal life, and

⁹ For a brief survey of some of the forms of diversity in Scripture see my article "The Moon of our Darkness" available at <http://www.tsm.edu/sites/default/files/Faculty%20Writings/Whitacre%20-%20The%20Moon%20of%20Our%20Darkness.pdf> (or search the Trinity site at <http://www.tsm.edu>).

¹⁰ The term "Biblical Theology" is used in various ways. I use it for an approach to the Bible which sees it containing an organic unity amidst its diversity. For an example of this approach see T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, Graeme Goldsworthy, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000).

¹¹ As already noted, there are a number of specific approaches to the topic. The two positions represented in these questions are what I take to be the most common line of thought for promoting the ordination of women and my alternative.

¹² R. T. France notes that many, like himself, have changed their views to accept an egalitarian position, and adds, "I am not aware of many who have changed in the opposite direction." *A Slippery Slope? The Ordination of Women and Homosexual Practice—A Case Study in Biblical Interpretation*, Biblical Series B 16 (Ridley Hall, Cambridge, Eng.: Grove Books, 2000), 13. I share his impression. For another example of someone who has moved in the same direction as myself see Jen Pollock Michel, "The Accidental Complementarian," *Christianity Today*, March 2014, 23.

¹³ One of the main textbooks I used for several years was Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983). He offers hermeneutical principles and illustrates them by walking through various views on each of the four subjects mentioned in the title, finding that the Bible points towards pacifism and egalitarianism.

the issue of hermeneutics, that is, how we are to discern God's guidance through the Scriptures that come to us from ancient cultures. Not small issues!

While there are a number of large issues to touch on it is important that we be clear that the specific topic I am addressing is not ministry in general, but ordained ministry, that is, being set apart (put in "order") for certain forms of service in the Church. While I am writing from an Anglican perspective,¹⁴ most, if not all of what I discuss would apply in other expressions of the Church as well. The ministry of women is affirmed in the Old Testament and further developed in the New, as we will see. But at the same time, as I will try to show, the New Testament retains the notion of a general ordering of relationship between male and female, and the limitation to men of the roles of apostle (in the narrow sense of the term), overseer/bishop, and priest/presbyter is in line with this teaching.

Among the most common ways of supporting the ordination of women to these offices¹⁵ is to see a trajectory in the Bible. This trajectory begins with a major change in the view of women from the Old Testament to the New.¹⁶ Then within the New Testament itself the texts that reveal an equality between the sexes are contrasted with those that include a distinction of role between them. This contrast, even contradiction, is thought to show that there has been a radically new vision that was only partially appropriated during the period of the New Testament. A trajectory is established which points towards further developments, including the ordination of women.¹⁷ Since Galatians 3.28 is a key verse for this view I will begin with it.

Galatians 3.28

At the heart of the New Testament witness is the affirmation that in Christ God has accomplished redemption and has inaugurated the Kingdom of God, which is nothing less than a new creation. This radical change is now being worked out—already a nucleus of the new has been established, but we do not yet experience its fullness. In his Letter to the Galatians Paul is trying to help the Galatian Christians understand the implications of this act of God for the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's People. Galatians 3.28 is a very bold and exciting declaration: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."¹⁸

This verse is taken by some proponents of women's ordination to say that the distinctions between men and women have been erased in Christ. Others say some distinctions do

¹⁴ Note that I am not claiming this as "the" Anglican perspective—such a thing does not exist. But I do think my approach represents the beliefs and approaches of the classic Anglican formularies, as I will try to show.

¹⁵ The New Testament does not refer to "office," but this term is helpful for referring to those forms of ministry that are formally recognized within the community and to which individuals have been appointed.

¹⁶ Some start earlier, seeing the view in the Old Testament regarding women as an advance over its environment.

¹⁷ In a classic study affirming women's ordination Krister Stendahl asks rhetorically what he calls the crucial question, "Does the New Testament contain elements, glimpses which point beyond and even 'against' the prevailing view and practice of the New Testament church?" He thinks it does. *The Bible and the Role of Women: A Case Study in Hermeneutics*, Facet Books (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 34.

¹⁸ Citations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

remain, but that there is no longer any differences in roles and responsibilities between the sexes. Accordingly, this verse gives us the clearest expression of the radical new view regarding women that establishes the trajectory which includes women's ordination on its path. I agree that this verse speaks of a radical change, but what is the nature of this change and does it eliminate differences in roles and responsibilities between men and women?

In context Galatians 3.28 is a wonderful expression of the truth that all who are in Christ are such by faith and baptism.

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3.25-28).

The distinctions of race, status, and sex do not determine who can meet God in Christ, nor the intimacy one can have with God, nor do they divide those who are in Christ. As St. Paul says in a similar passage, "Christ is all, and in all"¹⁹ (Col. 3.11).

The old distinctions do not divide those who are one in Christ, but this does not mean that the distinctions have ceased to exist for those who are in Christ. Such an interpretation of Galatians 3.28 is called into question both by the context of this verse and by virtually everything Paul says elsewhere about each of these groups of people. Here Paul is explaining our access to Christ and relationship with Him, not roles in the family and the Church. Our equal access to and relation with God in Christ change our relationships with one another, but do not eliminate the distinctions, as we shall see.

That is, while Galatians 3.28 declares the good news of the unity of all Christians in Christ, it does not obliterate all distinctions within the Body of Christ. Instead, it changes the way the groups relate to one another, in keeping with patterns revealed in Scripture. This will become clear if we look at what Paul says elsewhere about these relationships.

Jew and Gentile

Jew and Gentile continue to exist as distinct groups within the Church and each has a distinct role to play in salvation history, as Paul explains in Romans 9–11 (see also Rom. 1.16; 2.9-10). The Church has not changed from being Jewish to being gentile, contrary to appearances and the opinion of many throughout the ages. It is neither Jewish nor Greek, not because the two have been completely homogenized or somehow transcended, but because it is composed of both in Christ, each with a role to play in salvation history. The vision in the Book of Revelation seems to suggest that we carry national, ethnic and racial distinctives into heaven, blending all of our diversity into a unified song to the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb (Rev. 5.9-10), not by homogenization but by

¹⁹ I am assuming the Pauline authorship of all the epistles traditionally attributed to him, apart from the Letter to the Hebrews. For those who think a number of these letters are actually deuteropauline any coherence I can demonstrate will suggest the later disciples of Paul were closer to their master's thought than is sometimes accepted. Even if Paul was not responsible for some of these letters they have been received as part of the canon by the church and thus should be viewed as authoritative.

incorporation of our distinctives into Christ, who is creating in Himself One New Man (Eph. 2.15).

Master and Slave

Likewise, master and slave in the Church continue to be master and slave (Eph. 6.5-9; 1 Cor. 7.20-24). When Paul writes to Philemon about his runaway slave Onesimus, he does not tell him to free Onesimus because all distinctions between slaves and masters have been erased in Christ. He says that Onesimus is still Philemon's slave, but now he is also his brother (Philem. 16).²⁰ This change obviously should make an enormous difference in how they relate to one another, as Paul explains, but the distinction still remains. Indeed, in Colossians Paul makes a statement very similar to Galatians 3.28: "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all," but he then goes on almost immediately to describe some of those differences, including instructions to slaves and masters (3.11; cf. 3.22–4.1).

Male and Female

In the same way, the distinction between male and female continues to exist. While Paul does not include reference to the male/female relation in Colossians 3.11, this omission does not mean he no longer believes that this relation has been radically impacted by the coming of Christ. Rather, it is clear that something of the pattern remains, for he continues in Colossians 3.18-19 with instructions to wives and husbands: "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." Colossians 3.11 is as radical as Galatians 3.28, but in its context it does not signal a new era in which all distinctions between the groups listed have been eliminated, including an ordering in the pattern of relations between male and female. So this passage in Colossians suggests that Galatians 3.28 is not, in fact, at odds with other texts in Paul about women and men, such as 1 Corinthians 11.2-16; 14.34-35; Ephesians 5.21-33; and 1 Timothy 2.9-15, contrary to those who argue for a trajectory that includes women's ordination.

While the radical vision does not mean these patterns of relationship have been eliminated in Christ, there are, however, some very important differences between these three sets of relationships. I will briefly consider these differences, for they will help us in our effort to understand the significance of the distinctions that do remain in these relations.

²⁰ "St Paul does not say δούλον [*doulon*, slave] but ὡς δούλον [*hōs doulon*, as a slave]. It was a matter of indifference whether he were outwardly δούλος or outwardly ἐλεύθερος [*eleutheros*, free], since both are one in Christ (Col. iii. 11). But though he might still remain a slave, he could no longer be *as* a slave.... The 'no more as a slave' is an absolute fact, whether Philemon chooses to recognize it or not." J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959, original 1879), 342-43. See also Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC 44 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 296-97.

Slaves, Gentiles, and Women

It is often suggested that just as the Church was slow to realize that slavery has been abolished in Christ (supposedly the teaching of Galatians 3.28), it has been even slower to recognize that the differences of role between men and women have also been abolished in Christ.

But the distinction between slave and free is different from that between male and female. Scripture does not teach that slavery is of divine origin, nor that it is part of the order of creation,²¹ as it does of distinctions between male and female. God is not said in Scripture to have established the roles between slaves and masters. Indeed, the Bible views slavery as undesirable (e.g., Exod. 21; Lev. 25; Jer. 34.8-17; and Paul himself in 1 Cor. 7), something it neither states nor implies of male headship.²²

God regulates the conduct of slaves and masters, in keeping with their new relationship in Christ, for as long as that relationship lasted. Thus, in coming to oppose slavery the Church was not dissolving a distinction of divine origin, as it would if it were to dissolve distinctions between male and female.

In the same way, the admission of the Gentiles to the Church is often cited as an analogy to the admission of women to headship roles. As with slavery, however, this is not an appropriate analogy. God had chosen Israel and separated her from the rest of the nations, but the other nations were also a part of His plan from the beginning. From the very moment He began to set apart a special people, He had the salvation of the other nations in mind as well. He said to Abram (Abraham) at that initial call: "I will make of you a great nation... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12.2-3). The Chosen People were chosen for the sake of the whole human race.

The inclusion of the Gentiles was indeed the cause of great dispute in the early Church. But the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus are both clear that the Gentiles were a part of God's plan from the beginning, and God revealed to His Church through His Apostles the mystery of His plan (cf. Eph. 3.1-13). The Bible does not contain similar teaching supporting the headship of women the way texts support the inclusion of the Gentiles.

Thus, in both cases the real parallel with women's ordination is the Church's hesitancy to change. The question, then, is whether this hesitation is justified. The Church had to overcome its hesitancy in regard to the Gentiles, for this was God's will, revealed in Scripture itself. There is no similar revelation that women are to be ordained and, as we will see, there is much against it.

²¹ "No one is a slave by nature," St. Basil the Great (died AD 379), *On the Holy Spirit* 20.51, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd), 8:32.

²² See the helpful discussion of the New Testament material related to slavery, especially as it is used by egalitarians such as Kevin Giles and William Webb, in Benjamin Reaoch, *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate: A Complementarian Response to the Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2012), 23-46.

So in denying headship to women (in passages we will soon consider) either Paul is inconsistent, not having seen the implications of his insight in Galatians 3.28, or the interpretation of Galatians 3.28 which sees Paul as affirming an elimination of distinctions, which in turn would support women's ordination, is not true to Paul's consistent thought. The historic Christian understanding of Scripture is that all its parts are consistent and coherent, and we must not, "so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another."²³

There are interpreters on all sides of this topic who affirm this view expressed in Article 20. Proponents of women's ordination affirm the unity by recognizing that some thoughts and practices have been left behind, which we all affirm for some things in Scripture, as we will see. But in this paper I will try to show that the various passages and themes related to the topic of women's ordination are not "repugnant" to one another. If they are indeed coherent with one another, then the approach to Scripture of Article 20 and its affirmation of Scripture as "God's Word written" lead us to embrace the historic church's rejection of women's ordination.²⁴

Thus the view that there is a trajectory in the Bible that leads to the ordination of women posits a contrast between Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28 that "in Christ, there is no male and female" and his teaching in other passages regarding male headship. The idea is that Galatians 3.28 represents a new idea so radical that it would take time to work out the implications. But Madeleine Boucher, a supporter of women's ordination, has argued that already in Judaism there were passages that spoke of women in egalitarian terms, so Galatians 3.28 was not as great a "breakthrough" as Stendahl and others have thought. Thus the presence of both equality and subordination themes found in the New Testament is found also within ancient Jewish literature. She concludes, "Then, the ideas of equality before God and inferiority in the social order are in harmony in the NT. To be precise, the

²³ Article 20 of the Anglican *Articles of Religion*, in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 871; *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 607.

²⁴ Krister Stendahl, as already noted, finds tension rather than harmony in the New Testament. "If we are right in describing the statements of I Corinthians 11:11-12 and Galatians 3:28 as pointing beyond what is actually implemented in the New Testament church, then they must be allowed their freedom; and the tension which they constitute must not be absorbed or neutralized in a comprehensive and hence harmonized 'biblical view.' If the actual stage of implementation in the first century becomes the standard for what is authoritative, then those elements which point toward future implementation become neutralized and absorbed in a static 'biblical view.'" (*The Bible and the Role of Women*, 35). Hans C. Cavallin, a Swedish New Testament scholar, quotes Stendahl's statement and responds, "But are there really any indications at all in the New Testament texts that the authors themselves were conscious of expressing any 'tendencies' [Cavallin's translation from Stendahl's original Swedish text] towards bursting that relation between man and woman which was founded by God, when he created male and female? If not, is it then proper to say that those who do not find any such tendencies are trying to harmonise the texts? Rather one might say that they try to take the texts as they find them, while Stendahl, according to *a priori* hermeneutical principles, attempts to undo that 'harmonious peace,' which undoubtedly is there to the *authors*, between the first and second half of 1 Pet. 3:7, and between Gal. 3:28 and 1 Cor. 14.34f. If Stendahl has not managed to understand how the New Testament writers have been able to avoid feeling that contrast which he himself feels, that is his problem." Hans C. Cavallin, "Demythologising the Liberal Illusion," in *Why Not? Priesthood and Ministry of Women: A Theological Study*, ed. Michael Bruce and G. E. Duffield (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1972), 87 (emphasis original).

tension did not exist in first-century thought, and it is not present in the texts themselves. The tension arises from *modern man's* inability to hold these two ideas together.”²⁵

How, then, might Galatians 3.28 fit in Paul's pattern of thought related to our discussion? As noted above, this text is part of Paul's larger eschatological perspective that in Christ God's act of new creation has begun. “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6.1). In the old order, circumcision counted for a great deal in one's relationship to God—God's covenant was with Israel, which gave them great privileges not shared by those outside Israel (cf. Rom. 3.1-2; 9.4-5). Now, in Christ, the intimacy with God to which those privileges bore witness can be experienced by both Jew and Gentile. One is still either a Jew or a Gentile, but the significance of that identity has been radically transformed. In Galatians 3.28 Paul is making the same point about other distinctions among people. As Boucher notes, “the contrasting pairs stand for any privileged class over against an unprivileged class. Rich/poor, slave/free, Jew/Greek, male/female—each pair illustrates the basic contrast high status/low status. What Gal 3,28 is saying is that persons of both high and low position can be brought together in the Church.”²⁶ In context Paul is arguing for, “the admission of Gentiles, law-free, into the Church,”²⁷ not the overthrow of the social order itself.²⁸

Boucher's point about status is helpful, but she misses the depth of Paul's thought. It is not just that those of high and low status can be brought together, but also that the very assignment of status has been undermined in Christ. This radical change that has come in Christ led to very countercultural patterns of life in the early Church, but it did not lead to elimination of all role distinctions and the structures of society.²⁹ For our topic, the main question is how this pattern of continuity and discontinuity worked out regarding women in ministry.

²⁵ Madeleine Boucher, “Some Unexplored Parallels to 1 Cor 11,11-12 and Gal 3,28: The NT on the Role of Women,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31 (1969): 57 (emphasis original). To the rabbinic texts Boucher cites, which are difficult to date (as she notes, 54-55), can be added some of the studies cited by Linda L. Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, contributing editor Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 110. As we will see, the role of women in the Old Testament was extensive, suggesting more affirmation of women in the Old Testament itself than sometimes thought.

²⁶ Boucher, “Some Unexplored Parallels,” 56.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Boucher notes that this point is corroborated by 1 Corinthians 7.17-24, where Paul “enjoins Christians to remain in their state of life” (*ibid.*, 56n17), though it should be added that Paul does say slaves should gain their freedom if possible.

²⁹ Those who argue for a trajectory that should be taken beyond where the New Testament goes with it recognize this fact, but, as already noted, they say the change is so radical that we should expect it would take some time for this vision to be worked out further. “It seems arguable, therefore, that even though our text does not explicitly mention roles and structures, its new creation theological setting call these into question in a most profound way.... And to give continuing *significance* to a male-authority viewpoint for men and women, whether at home or in the church, is to reject the new creation in favor of the norms of a fallen world.” Gordon D. Fee, “Male and Female in the New Creation: *Galatians* 3:26-29,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, contributing editor Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 185 (emphasis original).

Biblical Women In Ministry: Old Testament

In the Old Testament, generally speaking, men were in charge as leaders in the public spheres, political, economic and religious, as well as in the family.³⁰ The father was the head of the family, with chief authority and responsibility for the well-being of the family. At least in the earlier periods the father had a priestly role in the family,³¹ and throughout the Old Testament fathers had the principle teaching role.³² These roles which the father had in worship and instruction within the family were taken up as major elements of the priesthood as it developed, the priests having primary responsibility to instruct the people (Deut. 17.8-13; 33.10) as well as oversee public worship.

While the father had general authority within the family the mother had power and authority as well. In household life in ancient Israel, “senior women functioned as the COOs (Chief Operating Officers) of their household. They were hardly oppressed and powerless. Nor were they subordinate to male control in all aspects of household life. Rather, ... female-male relationships are marked by interdependence or mutual dependence.... men dominated some aspects, women others.”³³

Women also contributed to the teaching within the family. “Do not forsake your mother’s teaching’ (Prov. 1.8), seems unexceptional until we realize that the mother is not mentioned as a teacher in ancient Near Eastern literature.”³⁴ Indeed,

the mother stands on equal footing with the father before the children. Children are commanded to honour and fear both mother and father (Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3), the death penalty is exacted against the child that curses either one (Exod 21:15,17; Deut 21:18-21), both parents are instructed in the Law (Deut 31:12) and teach the children (Prov 1:8; 31:26) and both name the children. According to Vos, in the forty-five cases in which the Old Testament records the naming of children, the woman names them twenty-six times, and man fourteen times, and God five times.³⁵

³⁰ A more detailed discussion of the roles of both men and women in the Old Testament would need to note variations at different periods. Steven Goldberg, *Why Men Rule*, has made the case that this role for men is true in every culture. In a blurb on the back of the book Margaret Mead says, “...persuasive and accurate. It is true, as Professor Goldberg points out, that all the claims so glibly made for societies ruled by women are nonsense. We have no reason to believe that they ever existed.... men everywhere have been in charge of running the show.... men have always been the leaders in public affairs and the final authorities at home.” Goldberg does not say there have not been women rulers (e.g., queens and female priests), but that “there has never been any non-hierarchical society” and that males always hold “the overwhelming number of upper positions” (74). He thinks this is grounded in human physiology and thus inevitable. Such grounding in physiology could fit with the biblical view that this pattern reflects how we are created.

³¹ Gottlob Schrenk, “πατήρ, κτλ.,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:959-65, esp. 962-63.

³² C. J. H. Wright, “Family,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:764-65.

³³ Carol L. Meyers, “Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133/1 (2014): 21-22. She develops the picture much more extensively in *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013).

³⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 240.

³⁵ Bruce Waltke, “The Relationship of the Sexes in the Bible,” *Crux* 19/3 (1983): 13-14, citing Clarence Vos, “Women in Old Testament Worship,” dissertation for the Free University of Amsterdam, 1968.

And outside the household, in the larger society women were able to be active in prayer, worship, and ministry in very significant ways.³⁶ For example, we see them praying apart from their husbands, (Rachel, Gen. 30.22-24 and Hannah, 1 Sam. 1.9–2.11), and being visited by angels (Hagar, Gen. 16.7-13; 21.17-21 and the wife of Manoah, Judg. 12.2-25). There are examples of women bringing sacrifices to the Lord (Hannah, 1 Sam. 1.24-25, cf. Lev. 12.6-7), and we see them singing and dancing in worship, especially Miriam (Exod. 15.20-21) and Deborah (Judg. 5), but also more generally (1 Sam. 18.6-7; Ps. 68.25). While there is emphasis on the requirement that men appear before the Lord at the three major feasts (Exod. 23.17; Deut. 16.16), it is clear that women were included as well, along with the entire household (Deut. 31.9-13). Women could make vows to the Lord, though there are stipulations for how this works within the context of male headship (Num. 30.2-5), and women as well as men could take Nazarite vows (Num. 6.1-6).

While women played important roles in these areas there were also distinctions between men and women in worship and instruction, in particular, women were not priests. Note also that in Herod's temple the Court of Women in the temple did not allow them to get as close as men could to the inner sanctuary in the temple.³⁷ This latter point may be the main change between Old and New Testament signaled in Galatians 3.28 regarding men and women. Now the distinctions between men and women (and Jews and Gentiles) represented in the temple have been done away with in Christ, who is our point of access to God which the temple represented—there is no gradation in access to the Father in the Son due to such distinctions. The other difference just noted, the exclusion of women from the priesthood, is the point most relevant for our specific topic. To what extent the cultic role of the priest has been retained in the Church is debated, but at least the priest's role as one set apart for oversight and teaching is represented in the description of responsibilities of ordained leadership in the New Testament, as we will see.

Along with the roles and activities already noted, there are also examples of women in the Old Testament exercising significant leadership within Israel in the public sphere as

³⁶ “Woman in ancient Israel seems to have participated fully in the worship of the Lord, to have had standing in God's sight equal to that given the man, and to have borne no unusual onus of uncleanness. In other words, the woman's status in the cult was equal to that of the man. The single exception to this is the role of the priest. We saw in an earlier chapter, however, that women had reserved to them their own unique and crucial kind of intimacy with God: the bearing of children.” John H. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 178. For a popular level study of several women in the Old Testament, and a few in the New, see Jerram Barrs, *Through His Eyes: God's Perspective on Women in the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

³⁷ All people could enter the Court of the Gentiles, but only Jews, male and female, could proceed to the Court of Women. These courts were not part of the sanctuary itself, and only men could proceed further to the first circle of the sanctuary, the Court of the Israelites. Only priests could go further into the temple, and only the High Priest could go, once a year, into the inner sanctuary, the holy of holies (cf. B. Chilton, P. W. Comfort, and M. O. Wise, “Temple, Jewish,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 1168-69. Such gradation of nearness to God's Presence was part of the earlier tabernacle and temple as well. “This carefully arranged gradation involves a consciousness that the closer one gets to the inner sanctum, the nearer one is to the perfection of the divine presence. Even if an ordinary individual can never approach the holiest place, the existence of the concentric circles, as it were, of increasing holiness signified that the Holiest One of all could be found at the sacred center.” Carol Meyers, “Temple, Jerusalem,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:360, referring specifically to Solomon's temple.

advisors to the king (2 Sam. 14.1-33; 20.16-22) and especially as prophetesses. Prophets and prophetesses differed from priests in that they held no institutional commission (or ordination) to positions of leadership. But Miriam during the Exodus (Exod. 15.20), Deborah during the time of the Judges (Judg. 4–5), and Huldah during the Monarchy (2 Kings 22.13-14), played important roles in the life of the people. In Deborah's case this role went beyond that of a prophetess, for she was a *šopēt*, a tribal leader (Judg. 4.4). The story makes clear, however, that she played this role because, "the men were cowards and declined leadership."³⁸ Deborah's role conforms to the larger principle that God uses whomever He chooses in specific situations. That He does so does not mean that He has not given us norms to be followed. This story even affirms the norm that men should have been in leadership, but failed to do so. As Waltke notes, "Deborah did not seek to overthrow patriarchy through her gifts, but to support it."³⁹ Along with these happy examples there are also the less happy examples of the exercise of power and/or authority by woman, specifically, Jezebel (1 Kings 16.31–21.25) and Athaliah (2 Kings 11.1-20).

It is sometimes thought that women in the Old Testament were viewed as inferior to men and mistreated by men throughout society. There are certainly examples of such attitudes and behavior in the Old Testament, and it may have increased in Second Temple Judaism.⁴⁰ But this survey shows that along with patterns of thought and behavior in keeping with the curse at the Fall (Gen. 3.17) there are also examples of women being respected and exercising leadership and a wide variety of significant ministries.⁴¹

Biblical Women In Ministry: New Testament

Coming to the New Testament, we see women receiving instruction from Jesus as disciples (Luke 10.38-42), and several women were commended by name in the Gospels for their ministry to Jesus Himself (Luke 8.1-3; Mark 15.40–16.1). Others, especially Mary Magdalene, were even commissioned to proclaim His resurrection to His disciples (John 20.17; Matt. 28.10; Mark 16.7). These are very significant ministries, but more relevant to the question of ordination is the fact that Jesus did not choose any women to be among the Twelve Apostles, that is, to be among those actually appointed to a recognized position of leadership.⁴²

³⁸ Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 600.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 245. Waltke defines patriarchy as "the father's supremacy in the clan or family; the legal dependence of wives and children; and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line" (*ibid.*, 235n6). This term is discussed further below.

⁴⁰ Cf. Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1976); Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001; original Mohr/Siebeck, 1999).

⁴¹ "In some texts the woman of ancient Israel is portrayed simply as a class of property. In others she is depicted as possessing a measure of freedom, initiative, power and respect that contemporary American women might well envy." Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 42.

⁴² Georg Gunter Blum, "The Office of Woman in the New Testament," in *Why Not? Priesthood and Ministry of Women: A Theological Study*, ed. Michael Bruce and G. E. Duffield (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1972), 64. J. J. von Allmen notes: "The New Testament, in spite of the chance of total renewal which it provides for women as well as for men, never testifies that a woman could be, in a public and authorized way, representative of Christ. To no woman does Jesus say, 'He who hears you, hears me.' To no woman does he make the promise to ratify in heaven what she has bound or loosed on earth. To no

So while Jesus did not speak directly on the question of women's ordination, His appointing only men to His inner circle is significant in the light of the rest of the teaching of the Bible. Some have argued that Jesus' countercultural elevation of women is an argument for putting women in headship roles,⁴³ but to the contrary, it seems to confirm the distinctions we are noting in Scripture.⁴⁴

The idea that Jesus did not include women among the Twelve due to cultural accommodation seems very unlikely. We see Jesus running roughshod over numerous cultural assumptions of His day, including some of the popular views regarding women as disciples and close associates. Indeed, Deborah's example in the Old Testament, as well as examples in the surrounding culture,⁴⁵ could give precedent to including them as apostles, if our Lord would need such precedent. If the distinctions between male and female in leadership roles are as harmful, even sinful, as some claim, we might well expect Jesus to correct our misperceptions, as He did on other subjects. But the fact that He did not do so fits well with the view that the connections made between headship and the created order in Scripture is not an accommodation to the culture or a product of the Fall, but part of the way the Father has created us through the Son.

Jesus' example in appointing only men as His apostles is often rejected on the grounds that He also only appointed Jewish men. The assumption is that both choices were culturally determined. But these men formed the nucleus of renewed Israel (cf. Matt. 19.28; Luke 22.30; Eph. 2.20; Rev. 21.14) and therefore presumably had to be Jewish. In God's plan, Israel had to be restored and then through restored Israel God's reign would begin to spread to all mankind (cf. Matt. 10.5-6 with 28.18-20). Thus the role of the Twelve included some unique features. So the choice of Jews for the Twelve is in keeping with the stage of salvation history, and the choice of males fits with the larger issue of headship as it is developed in the New Testament.

The very fact that Jesus chose leaders for the community He was creating is significant for our topic. The Church has been an ordered place from the very outset. Having individuals set apart for leadership is Jesus' idea, not the result of some sociological dynamic like the routinization of charisma.⁴⁶ But this ordered community has a very countercultural view of ordered positions. Here there is a leadership without ranking or status, no inferior-superior. Jesus is constantly throughout the Gospels undermining the culture's focus on honor.

woman does he entrust the ministry of public preaching. To no woman does he give the command to baptize or to preside at the communion of his Body and Blood. To no woman does he commit his flock." Quoted by Ware in "Man, Woman, and the Priesthood of Christ," 71.

⁴³ See, for example, Aida Besançon Spencer, "Jesus' Treatment of Women in the Gospels," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, contributing editor Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 126-41.

⁴⁴ See James A. Borland, "Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991, reprinted 2006), 113-23.

⁴⁵ See Belleville, cited in footnote 25 above.

⁴⁶ Alluding to Max Weber's classic study, "The Routinization of Charisma and Its Consequences." See *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons; tr. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1947), 363-373.

Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14.7-11).

This teaching could give the impression that we should all be scrambling for the last place, which is now the place of honor. Instead, it speaks of a change of heart so that one no longer is concerned for honor. Now one is focused on God and submission to Him, as our Lord Himself was to the Father (Matt. 11.29), which is a change so radical it would require being born again.

We see Jesus applying this lesson specifically to those whom He has appointed as the leaders of His disciples.

And Jesus called them [the Twelve, see v. 41] to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10.42-45).

So in the Gospels we see a particular leadership office, but we also see a revolution in the way such an office is viewed. There is authority, but it is to be exercised by one who is a humble servant with no focus on honor or status.

Women in Ministry in Paul's Epistles

In the New Testament we see women exercising very significant ministries in the family⁴⁷ and in the Church, as we will now see, but they are not described as having positions of headship within church or family. Many, however, think that several women are referred to in the New Testament in ways that do in fact indicate their headship, even apostleship. I will give a quick review of the texts, showing reasons to question this interpretation.

⁴⁷ As in the Old Testament, fathers generally had a primary role in teaching within the family (cf. Eph. 6.4), and women also were teachers within the family. The case of St. Timothy is a striking example of the latter. In 2 Timothy Paul commends Timothy for having followed his teaching, his conduct, his aim in life, his faith, his patience, his love, his steadfastness, and his persecutions and sufferings (3.10-11). But a few verses later, when Paul exhorts Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it” (3.14), the word “whom” is plural (τινων, *tinōn*). The next verse makes it clear Paul is referring not just to his own instruction, but in particular to that which Timothy received in childhood. We know from 2 Timothy 1.5 that Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, had this major role in Timothy's life. Paul is harkening back to their training as a significant part of the grounding Timothy now has in a trying time as Paul is about to pass from the scene.

Paul calls Phoebe a servant (διάκονος, *diakonos*) in Romans 16.1-2. This word is often used in the New Testament of leaders, including Paul and Timothy, but it is also used of those who simply meet the needs of others. That is, in itself διάκονος does not designate a head of a community. It is a very general term whose specific meaning must be determined by the context.

The reference to Phoebe as a προστάτις (*prostatis*, v. 2) could mean she is a ruler or leader (cf. LXX of 1 Chron. 27.31; 29.6; 2 Chron. 8.10). But if it meant leader here Paul would be saying Phoebe is *his* ruler or leader, which is possible, but perhaps not very likely. The word is often used in the sense of benefactor, and this is the likely sense of her place in the community: “In short, Paul’s readers were unlikely to think of Phoebe as other than a figure of significance, whose wealth or influence had been put at the disposal of the church in Cenchreae.”⁴⁸ The businesswoman Lydia, mentioned in Acts 16.13-15, 40, also appears to have been such a patroness.

Junia is referred to in Romans 16.7: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives [or compatriots, συγγενεῖς, *syngeneis*] who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles [ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, *episēmoi en tois apostolois*], and they were in Christ before I was.” Though often cited by supporters of women’s ordination, this is a highly ambiguous text. First, there is debate over whether the name is a man’s name or a woman’s name.⁴⁹ Second, does “prominent among the apostles” mean that they were prominent apostles or that they were prominent in the eyes of the apostles? The grammar suggests the latter.⁵⁰ Third, how is the word “apostle” being used here? If they were apostles in the same way as Paul and the Twelve, it is very odd they are tucked away in the midst of this list of fellow workers, especially since they would be the only other ones in the New Testament associated with the level of authority of Paul and the Twelve. It is far more likely that they would be apostles in the sense that they were missionaries/church planters, similar to Prisca and Aquila, who moved around (Acts 18.2, 18, 26; Rom. 16.3; 1 Cor. 16.19). This would be a very significant ministry which would include instruction, as in the case of Prisca and Aquila, but it would not be an apostolic authority like that of Paul and the Twelve.

Paul describes several women as close associates in his ministry: with her husband Aquila, Prisca is said to be a co-worker [συνεργής, *synergēs*] with Paul (Rom. 16.3); Euodia and Syntyche, “struggled beside me in the work of the gospel” (Phil. 4.3); and Mary, “has worked very hard among you” (Rom. 16.5). These women had significant ministries, and at least in some cases this ministry included teaching:

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly

⁴⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, WBC 38b (Dallas: Word, 1988), 889.

⁴⁹ Wayne Grudem provides a brief overview in *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 2004), 224-26.

⁵⁰ Daniel Wallace and Mike Burer, “Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Rom 16.7,” *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 76-91; Michael Burer, “Reassessing Junia: A Review of Eldon Epp’s *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13/1 (2008): 56-59.

in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18.24-26).

These texts are often said to prove that women held leadership office in the New Testament Church, but the specific nature of their ministry cannot be derived from these references. In the case of Priscilla, where we know teaching was included in her ministry, this does not mean it was not done within an ordered pattern of relationship between husband and wife such as we see elsewhere in the New Testament. There is nothing said about the ministry of any of these women that could not fit quite well in the context of Paul's teaching about male headship in the Church.

Such texts clearly present women as full and equal servants of the Lord, but in none of them is the woman described as exercising a headship office within Christian communities. Further, in situations in which women may have had an active and public role in the Church, that role was exercised in the context of a pattern in the relationship between male and female. In particular, Paul probably refers to women playing an active role in worship by praying and prophesying in Church (1 Cor. 11.3-16).⁵¹ This activity was to be done with a sign of authority on their heads, that is, it was to be done in such a way that there was recognition of male headship (cf. v. 3). In addition, those who prophesied held no pastoral charge and were not ordained to the ministry of oversight like those in a headship position, as we will see. So such teaching and prophesying are very significant ministries within the community, sharing aspects of what ordained leadership involves, but also distinct from the ordained office.

In conclusion, despite the radical changes Christ brought, there is no evidence in the New Testament that a woman served as the head of a Christian community nor that the new life of the Kingdom should include this element. This argument from silence is corroborated by the teaching in the New Testament on headship and authority, to which I now turn, which indicates explicitly that women are not to be in that position.

The New Testament teaching on headship and the distinct roles of men and women is found almost entirely in the writings of St. Paul. Genesis 1-3 is also very important for our topic and it also will be discussed briefly below.

Headship

The word “head” (κεφαλή, *kephalē*) usually refers to the physical head of a human being or an animal.⁵² It is also used metaphorically, and there is great debate about the sense of the word when it is a metaphor. The main options in recent discussion include (1) “source, origin, temporal priority,” (2) “authority, supremacy, leadership,” and (3) “preeminence, foremost, topmost,” and, by synecdoche (the part for the whole), as a

⁵¹ It is possible that Paul does not begin to discuss public worship until verse 17, “But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.” So it could be that the activity described in verses 3-16 took place in private settings; perhaps Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55) is an example of such praying and prophesying. But since the larger context, 1 Corinthians 8–14, is concerned with public worship, this section in 11.3-16 probably is as well.

⁵² Paul uses the word in this sense in Romans 12.20, 1 Corinthians 12.21 and four times in 1 Corinthians 11.4-5. The last passage is the only one relevant for our topic, and it will be discussed below.

representative.⁵³ The evidence for the use of κεφαλή as source is minimal.⁵⁴ Indeed, Danker does not list “source” as an option, in either BDAG⁵⁵ or CGEL.⁵⁶ But since those who promote women's ordination often argue for “source” as the sense of the word in some of Paul's texts we must consider it further.

In the Hellenistic period the physical head was viewed as functioning in relation to the body as both a source and as having the function of control or rule, and these two functions seem interconnected. For the head was not the source of the body itself, but the source of experiences such as pleasure and pain, and it could cause “acts that are contrary to habit.”⁵⁷ So it seems that the idea of source is actually an aspect of the head's control of the body—things sourced in the head control the body. But there is no unambiguous evidence in the first century for “source” as a sense of the word κεφαλή.

Just because, say, Artemidorus (late 2nd century A.D.) maintains that ‘the head is the source of light and life for the body’ does not mean that the writer considered ‘source’ to be a *sense* of the word ‘head’. Our employers are the source of our income, books are the source of our knowledge, and the good well-watered land the source of our food, but no one in their right mind would suggest that ‘source’ is a *sense* of the words ‘employer’, ‘book’, or ‘land’. Such would be a classic case of the confusion between the ‘sense’ of a word and (adjunct) properties of the thing-in-the-world the word denotes.⁵⁸

This understanding of the relation between head and body shows up in Colossians and Ephesians. In Colossians Paul condemns the false teachers as those who are “not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God” (Col. 2.19). Here, and in the parallel passage in Ephesians 4.15-16, the idea is of the head providing that which is necessary for the life of the body (“nourished”) as the head controls and orders the processes of the body (“knit together”). This growth is orchestrated by the head and it is sourced in God. So the head had a function as a source, but the word κεφαλή was not a metaphor for the idea of source.

⁵³ For a helpful survey of the debate see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 812-22. The terms I have used for the three views are taken from Thiselton.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 820.

⁵⁵ Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 541-42. Abbreviated BDAG.

⁵⁶ Frederick William Danker, with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 200. Abbreviated CGEL.

⁵⁷ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 816. “Contrary to what is often implied in older modern biblical studies, the ancient world was aware that the brain (ὁ ἐγκέφαλος [*ho enkephalos*]) constituted a ‘source.’ ‘From the brain and from the brain only arise our pleasures, joys, laughter and jests, as well as our sorrows, pains, griefs...’ but the brain also served as a ‘control’: ‘It makes us mad or delirious, inspires us with dread ... brings sleeplessness ... and acts that are contrary to habit... All come from the brain’ (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου [*apo tou enkephalou*]).” Thiselton, *ibid.*, citing Hippocrates (460-380 BC), *De morbo sacro* in *Hippocrates*, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1952), 2:174, 175. Thiselton also cites Galen (AD 130-200) for these same two ideas.

⁵⁸ Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 144. They note that there is evidence for κεφαλή unambiguously used in the sense of source beginning in the third century AD.

What then is the basic metaphorical nuance of κεφαλή? In BDAG Danker suggests that when used of living beings it refers to “a being of high status.”⁵⁹ A person of higher rank or status will often have authority over another person, so Danker adds in CGEL the sense, “as directing agent within a ranking system.”⁶⁰ Danker goes on to say that the word is used in the New Testament of a father as head of a family, a husband in relation to his wife, of Christ in relation to the Christian community, and of Christ in relation to the universe.⁶¹

Most interpreters agree that the idea of authority is included in its use in Ephesians 1.22 and Colossians 2.10 (cf. 2.15), since Paul is speaking of Christ's triumph over all authorities and powers, with all things subjected under His feet. Here His preeminence is seen in His power and authority over other powers and authorities.

Earlier in Colossians, Jesus is said to be, “the head of the body, the church” (1.18). This statement comes at a transition point in the Christ hymn (vv. 15-20), from Jesus' role and place in relation to creation to His role and place in relation to the reconciliation of all things. The point here is explicitly preeminence: “that in everything he might be preeminent” (πρωτεύων, *prōteuōn*, v. 18), because (ὅτι, *hoti*) “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (v. 19) and also because of His role in the reconciliation (v. 20). The context is focusing on Christ, but to say the Church has as its head the one through whom all things were made and who has now reconciled all things to God makes a profound statement about the Church as the place in which the purposes of creation and new creation now come to fruition. It speaks of a oneness between Christ and the Church. The created order is not said to be His body, though in the context His role as the agent of the existence of creation and church is included. Here the exalted state of the Church is expressed through the image of head and body, with Christ, the head, being preeminent over all things, both world and Church, through His preeminence in creation and redemption. From what is said elsewhere about Christ it is clear that He has authority over all things, but this authority as such does not seem to be a focus in this passage.

1 Corinthians 11.2-16

This background regarding the word κεφαλή and its use in Paul's letters prepares us now to consider the passage containing κεφαλή which is most directly related to our topic. In 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 Paul addresses a practice that has arisen among the Corinthians of women praying and prophesying in a way that causes shame.⁶² He puts the issue in the

⁵⁹ BDAG, 542. Thiselton similarly argues for the sense “Preeminent, Foremost, and Synecdoche for a Representative Role” (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 821).

⁶⁰ CGEL, 200.

⁶¹ BDAG, 542.

⁶² For the details of this complex passage which has many exegetical puzzles see the larger commentaries, such as those by Thiselton and Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), as well as the articles addressing this passage in the context of the issue of women and ministry/ordination by Thomas R. Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991, reprinted 2006), 124-39, and Gordon D. Fee, “Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in

context of the motif of headship, using the word “head” (κεφαλή) nine times, four times with the literal meaning (vv. 4, 5, 7, 10) and five times with a metaphorical meaning (vv. 3-5).

Paul begins by setting his teaching on the relation between man (ἄνθρωπος, *anēr*) and woman (γυνή, *gynē*) in the context of other examples of headship. The word ἄνθρωπος can mean either man or husband, and γυνή can mean either woman or wife. Accordingly, there are two main ways to translate verse 3:

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (ESV)

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” (NASB)

Many commentators think Paul is referring to male/female relations in general, as in the NASB. Ciampa and Rosner, however, note that when ἄνθρωπος and γυνή occur together, “usually husband-and-wife relationships are being discussed.”⁶³ But even if the primary focus here is on issues arising in Corinth between some of the husbands and wives, Paul’s point also fits with the more general pattern of relation between the sexes seen in the New Testament.

There are three different sets of relations described in verse 3:

Christ	–	head of every man	=	divine/human	–	human
man	–	head of woman	=	human	–	human
God	–	head of Christ	=	divine	–	divine /human

Given these three examples of headship, what sort of relation does κεφαλή here represent? Could it be source, as argued by some supporters of an egalitarian view?⁶⁴ A little later in this passage Paul refers to the woman being made from man (v. 8, cf. Gen. 2.21-23), so source might be in mind, but that which is said in verse 3 does not fit with that sense. The idea of source is appropriate for Christ and every man, since He is the agent of creation. But then He is such for every woman as well. The fact that it is “every” man shows the creation of Adam is not in view. So source does not work well for the first set of relations. In the second set of relations, between male and female, source is appropriate if it is an allusion to Genesis, but it is not true for anyone since then, indeed, just the opposite, as Paul notes in verse 12.

In the third set the idea of source is appropriate for God the Father’s relation to Christ, both in Christ’s incarnation and in His eternal sonship as “eternally begotten of the Father.”⁶⁵ In this eternal relation the idea of source is beyond anything we ever experience

Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, contributing editor Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 142-60.

⁶³ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 508.

⁶⁴ For example, Gordon D. Fee, “Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies,” 151, 155.

⁶⁵ The Nicene Creed in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 326, 358, cf. “Begotten of his Father before all worlds,” in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 71.

since there is no before and after, no process of coming into being that we associate with a source. The Father sources the Son in ways beyond our ability to imagine let alone understand. So the third set of relations could be understood in the sense of “source,” but in a unique way. This fact, and the fact that the idea of source does not fit well with the first two sets of relations, means source is not likely in view in this verse.

By contrast, the general sense given by Danker and Thiselton of high status/rank, preeminence, does fit the context well. Since the passage speaks about relations in which honor, glory, and shame can be given and received, κεφαλή denotes relations in which there are differences in rank or status or order of some sort.

This idea of preeminence or primacy fits the three sets of relations in verse 3, though with significant differences between them due to the differences in the kind of beings involved. Christ is preeminent in relation to every man in a way that differs from how ἄνθρωπος is preeminent in relation to γυνή and how God is preeminent in relation to Christ. Christ is both human and divine, so as head of every man He is like a high king over his subjects, but also much more. In this relation there is not only a difference in place within an ordered system but a radical difference in dignity due to the difference in ontology. Humans are not on the same level of being as God, even now that we are in Christ, who is God. We are inferior to God, which is not true of women to men or Christ to God.

In the second set of relations, between man and woman, the idea of headship is within a set of relations between those who are ontologically equal and of equal dignity. Here there is a mutuality that makes the ordering of the relationship something different from that between humans and God.

The third set of relations is more complex, since Christ is on the same ontological level as the Father, but His humanity as such is not so. So is Paul here thinking in terms of the role Christ has in His humanity within the context of creation and redemption? Later in this letter Paul says, “When all things are subjected to him [Christ], then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15.28). Here we see that the Father is the ultimate source of all and the one who is over all. According to this verse the universe itself is a “patriarchy” (from πατήρ, *patēr*, father and ἀρχή, *archē*, beginning).⁶⁶ Paul says that every “family” (πατριά, *patria*, “father unit,” as it were) in heaven and earth is named from the Father (Eph. 3.15).

⁶⁶ The word ἀρχή (and the related verb form ἄρχω, *archō*) can mean either beginning or rule. The words “patriarchy” and “patriarchal” are used by some people specifically in relation to lineage through the father’s line, and others use these words more broadly for a pattern of the father’s general role and authority in the family. The idea that men had absolute control and women had no significant role in ancient societies was popular in earlier scholarship, but has been discredited. See Carol L. Meyers, “Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?,” 8-27. While there was not gender equality (ancient Israel was patrilineal, for example [ibid., 26]), there was a more complex pattern of “heterarchy” in which, “different power structures can exist simultaneously in any given society, with each structure having its own hierarchical arrangements that may cross-cut each other laterally” (ibid., 27). Accordingly, “The term ‘patriarchy,’ as a designation of general male domination and oppression of women, would thus be inappropriate and inaccurate. Identifying female agency challenges the idea, embedded in the patriarchy model, that women were helpless victims of a male-dominant system” (ibid. 22-23). See also Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 193-202. These developments in scholarship are very helpful for our understanding of human societies, though the Bible does not suggest that the universe itself is a heterarchy.

Instead of fatherhood being an idea humans have projected onto God or the cosmos, our experience of fatherhood is a reflection of something about God, which finds expression “in heaven,” as Paul says, that is, even beyond our human sphere.⁶⁷ Our images and symbols reflect His reality, even if that reality utterly transcends all that we can imagine. And, as just noted, Paul says that Christ Himself will be subjected to the Father. So perhaps we have here the relation between Christ and God as described in the Athanasian Creed when it says, “Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His Manhood.”⁶⁸

But there is more going on. The relation between Christ and God within salvation history reflects the eternal relations between the Father and the Son. As noted earlier, the Son is “eternally begotten” of the Father—Father-Son is an eternal relationship. So,

the way God reveals himself in the history of salvation truly and accurately reflects who God is eternally and antecedently in himself. The revelation of the economic Trinity truly indicates the ontological Trinity. The alternative would be quite devastating. It would take the form of modalism, rejected as heretical by the church in the third century. If God's self-revelation in human history was simply a convention designed only for our salvation we could not know him truly. All we could know would be a mode into which he had switched for a particular limited purpose, a form of being other than his own.⁶⁹

So on the level of Christ's divinity as Son of the Father we can see a parallel with the male and female relation, because the ordering of the relation between the Father and the Son is in a context of ontological equality and equal dignity and worth. The relation includes notions of authority and submission with absolutely no sense of superiority and inferiority. It turns out that it is as divine to obey as it is to command, a completely revolutionary revelation. The yielding of the Son to the Father is utterly free, with a complete submission in love and with their wills perfectly aligned.

Such is the ideal for the relation between *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή*, created in God's image. For a fundamental aspect of the image of God is precisely relationship.⁷⁰ Paul mentions the headship of the man in verse 3 and then grounds it in the creation account a few verses later (vv. 7-9).⁷¹ The analogy with God's headship in relation to Christ (v. 3) helps us see that this headship,

is not a punishment on the woman deriving from the fall and is not therefore something which redemption in Christ is designed to erode and to replace.... Since it is grounded ultimately on the eternal relations of the Trinity and is native to man from

⁶⁷ Cf. Robert Letham, “The Man-Woman Debate: Theological Comment,” *Westminster Journal of Theology* 52 (1990): 77.

⁶⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 865.

⁶⁹ Robert Letham, “The Man-Woman Debate,” 68, citing the discussion in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/1: 192-205 = *Church Dogmatics, Volume IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* §57-59 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2009), 185-99. For more on Modalism see footnote 138.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁷¹ Below I will note how these verses seem to weave together the two creation accounts in Genesis 1-2.

creation, sin has not introduced it but spoiled and defaced it, while redemption is not to replace it but to fulfill and to purify it.⁷²

So the relationship between the *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή* is meant to reflect the sort of relationship within the Godhead between those of ontological equality and equal dignity and worth. There are also great differences between the divine relations and the human relations, of course.

God is not a sexual being. Rather, sexuality is the form taken by man's relationality, which latter is a kind of created counterpart to God's self-existent relationality. Again, man as male and female relate to one another as diverse and separate personal entities. God, on the other hand, is one. His intrinsic relations are not those of separate, independent, or self-contained *personae*. We are dealing with an analogy, not an identity.⁷³

As Gregory of Nazianzus says, "The Deity cannot be expressed in words... we sketch Him by His Attributes and so obtain a certain faint and feeble and partial idea concerning Him."⁷⁴ St. John of Damascus adds, "It is impossible to find in creation an image that will illustrate in itself exactly in all details the nature of the Holy Trinity."⁷⁵

Another insight from this analogy is that the divine relationship reveals the nature of the authority included in headship. For "this authority is not to take the form of a boss-employee or master-servant relationship, structures existing in a fallen world. On the contrary, it is grounded in the nature of God and is consequently an authority relation fully compatible with, and the appropriate expression of, full ontological equality. It is to be exercised in loving fellowship."⁷⁶

St. Chrysostom noted these distinctions in his homily on 1 Corinthians 11.3.

For had Paul meant to speak of rule and subjection,... he would not have brought forward the instance of a wife, but rather of a slave and a master. For what if the wife be under subjection to us? It is as a wife, as free, as equal in honor. And the Son also,

⁷² Letham, "The Man-Woman Debate," 74.

⁷³ Ibid., 72, cf. further on 73.

⁷⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 30.17* (The Fourth Theological Oration), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd), 7:315-16.

⁷⁵ John Damascene, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.8, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd), 9:9 [note the pagination for the *Exposition* starts in the second half of the volume]. This statement comes in an important section in which St. John of Damascus is commenting on the relations of the Father and the Son. "... if we say that the Father is the origin of the Son and greater than the Son, we do not suggest any precedence in time or superiority in nature of the Father over the Son... we mean by this, that the Son is begotten of the Father and not the Father of the Son, and that the Father naturally is the cause of the Son: just as we say in the same way not that fire proceedeth from light, but rather light from fire. So then, whenever we hear it said that the Father is the origin of the Son and greater than the Son, let us understand it to mean in respect of causation" (ibid., 8-9). Here John is speaking of the ordered pattern of relations between the Father and the Son in the context of ontological oneness and equal dignity; the sort of view I am attempting to describe in this paper.

⁷⁶ Letham, "The Man-Woman Debate," 73.

though He did become obedient to the Father, it was as the Son of God, it was as God.”⁷⁷

In the Trinity, then, we see an obedience that does not signal difference in rank or worth.⁷⁸ Many moderns view the idea of being equal in being and honor while also in an ordered relation as, literally, nonsense, yet that is what Chrysostom sees in the biblical witness.⁷⁹

Returning to our passage, it seems that by praying and prophesying with uncovered heads the women are implying there is no longer a headship relationship between men and women. So the woman is “to have a symbol of authority on her head” (1 Cor. 11.10). Some argue that this “authority” refers to the authority of the man as the head of woman, while others see it as referring to the woman’s own authority.⁸⁰ In context it seems to include both ideas, that is, it symbolizes the ordered relationship between male and female within which she has authority as a woman to contribute to the community through prayer and prophesy.⁸¹ Indeed, since Paul points to proper patterns for both men and women, “it is not that one sex is restricted and the other is not; it is that both are restricted in appropriate ways.”⁸²

This dual aspect comes out further as the passage progresses. Paul expresses the subordination (*not* inequality or inferiority) of women to men not only in the language of κεφαλή but also by saying “woman is the glory of man” (v. 7)⁸³ and “woman was created for man” (v. 9). But then Paul also makes it clear that with the ordering there is also equality and interdependence of man and woman: “Nevertheless in the Lord neither is woman without man nor man without woman” (v. 11).

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 26.2, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd), 12:150. Chrysostom seems to be assuming that the economic Trinity reveals truths about the ontological Trinity, the point Latham made.

⁷⁸ See Robert Latham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2004), 397-401.

⁷⁹ Elsewhere Chrysostom says that headship includes the man ruling and regulating the woman, but he also describes their equality. Furthermore, he expresses something of the radical change in headship when he explains the nature of this rule, “So let us rule the women; let us surpass them, not by seeking greater honor from them, but by their being more benefited by us.” *Homilies on Thessalonians* 5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd), 13:397.

⁸⁰ For representatives of these views see the resources cited in footnote 62.

⁸¹ Wearing a head covering in church for most people does not represent today what it seems to have done in St Paul’s day. Indeed, to use head covering in this way may not signal what it did for Paul, given our change in culture and the church’s experience since the first century. The passage makes clear, however, that there are principles behind the practice. Perhaps if we lived the pattern of relations in keeping with these principles then a natural expression of the principles would emerge.

⁸² John Nolland, “Women in the Public Life of the Church,” *Crux* 19/3 (1983): 22-23, citation from 22.

⁸³ Richard Hays says, “Here, regrettably, Paul gets himself into a theological quagmire,” since Genesis 1.27 says both male and female were created in the image of God. *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 186. Hays thinks Paul’s argument is not, “consonant with his own fundamental theological vision” and thus, “the argument has no weight at all” (*ibid.*, 190). But in verse 7 Paul does not deny woman is in the image of God, since he only refers to the term “glory” with regard to the woman. Nor does Paul explicitly deny woman shares in the glory of God. Rather, he seems to say that this glory is not separate from her relation to man. Hays notes that Paul may be working here with a tradition based on Genesis 2.7 (*ibid.* 186), but Hays does not develop this thought. In fact, Paul does seem to be joining the unity of male and female in the image of God of Genesis 1.27 with their distinctness and woman’s creation from man in Genesis 2, as the next verses indicate (1 Cor. 11.8-9).

So in verses 3-10 Paul is affirming ordered distinctions, and in verses 11-12 he emphasizes the mutuality. There has been a shift in women's place in discipleship and ministry, but not a doing away with the pattern of relations established in creation. But by adding the reference to mutuality Paul is making clear that the equality seen in creation is also true. If some of the Corinthians are undermining distinctions between the sexes, Paul does not want them to fail to honor women appropriately.⁸⁴

The grounds for this assertion in verse 11 is that woman was from man at creation and now man is from woman, and all is from God (v. 12). This argument is strikingly parallel to that in Romans 9–11 for the interdependence of Jew and Gentile. There is a certain preeminence of the Jew in salvation history as the trunk of the tree onto which Gentiles have been grafted, but by the end the inclusion of the Jews will be dependent on the Gentiles, and all is from God (Rom. 11.30-36). Paul is speaking of interdependence, not interchangeability. Such interdependence actually requires significant (though complementary) differences. Paul does not, however, suggest the Jews are in a headship relation to Gentiles. The different roles between Jew and Gentile are played out within salvation history and were not established at the creation.

Ephesians 5.22-33

The final passage in Paul using the term κεφαλή is found in Ephesians:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Eph. 5.22-33).

Here we see again the idea of Christ as the head of the Church, his body, as we saw earlier in Ephesians. Now this profound mystery is spoken of in connection with the relation between husband and wife in Christ. We seem to have a clear example of Danker's sense of a “directing agent within a ranking system.” But note that the section just before speaks of a mutual submission.

⁸⁴ Thiselton notes that in the larger context, 1 Corinthians 8.1–14.40, “Paul corroborates the *theoretical right of the ‘strong’ or ‘prominent’ to exercise their ‘knowledge’ and ‘freedom,’* but dramatically places *boundaries and qualification around freedom and knowledge by insisting on the priority of love (as in 13:1-13), most especially love which will respect the self-awareness (conscience??) and self-esteem of the ‘weak,’* who must not be permitted to stumble” (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 821, emphasis original).

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5.18-21).

Verse 21, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,” comes as the conclusion of a series of instructions connected with the command in verse 18 to be filled with the Spirit. This verse also introduces the next section (5.22–6.9), dealing with wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters. So verse 21 is transitional.

The word Paul uses for “submit” (ὑποτάσσω, *hypotassō*) means to, “cause to be in compliance with requirements for order,” which is often in the context of a “human authority figure or system.”⁸⁵ In the larger context Paul’s call for wives to submit themselves to their husbands is parallel to his admonition to children to obey (ὑπακούω, *hypakouō*) their parents (Eph. 6.1) and to slaves to obey (ὑπακούω, *hypakouō*) their masters (Eph. 6.5). So this mutual submission is in the context of ordered patterns of relationships.

An ordered pattern is clearly so in the case of children, since they do not have authority over their parents. The same is true of slaves. Paul is not saying that children and slaves now with the coming of Christ have such authority. Given the structure of Paul’s argument, there is no reason to separate out wives and say that Paul is teaching that they now have a form of authority over their husbands, albeit one exercised in mutual submission.

How these patterns work out differs for each set of relations. As just noted, St. Paul says the wives are to be *subject* to their husbands, but he says that children and slaves are to *obey* their parents and masters. This submission reflects the equality and partnership of the husband and wife, in contrast to the simple obedience that characterizes the relations of slave and master, children and parents. As H. C. G. Moule puts it, “The wife ‘submits herself’ as to a guiding *friend*; the child, and the servant, recognize in parent and master a lawful *commander*.”⁸⁶

Thus there is a “particular quality” to the submission depending on the nature of the relationship.

There is a particular quality in the submission of a wife to her husband, of a child to his or her parents, and of a husband to his wife. They are all to mutually submit, but the quality of that submission is determined by who you are. . . . A husband’s submission is one of loving care; a wife’s submission is one in which she recognizes the sense in which she was created for her husband. That is, mutual submission does occur in the context of creationally differentiated roles.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ CGEL, 367.

⁸⁶ *Studies in Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977, original 1893), 131.

⁸⁷ John Nolland, “Women in the Public Life of the Church,” 22.

But that is not the whole story. While Paul teaches that one group of people is to be submitted to another, it must be emphasized that in all three cases the relationships are radically altered in Christ, as we saw in discussing Galatians 3.28. Authority and subordination are now to be lived out in a context of mutual love and respect.

Authority in the Church is not the exercise of power to serve one's self-will. It requires self-sacrifice for the good of the beloved (cf. Mark 10.42-5; 1 Pet. 5.1-3; Heb. 13.17). The eschatological character of the relationship between wives and husbands in particular is seen in the analogy of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5.22-33). The Church is subordinate to Christ, but she is submitted to One whom she loves and who loves her self-sacrificially.

Thus, Paul does call us here to mutual submission in a very deep sense. As John Calvin said powerfully: "God has so bound us to each other, that no man ought to avoid subjection. And where love reigns, there is a mutual servitude. I do not except even kings and governors, for they rule that they may serve. Therefore it is very right that he should exhort all to be subject to each other."⁸⁸ Calvin's point is profoundly true, but he recognizes that such service is exercised within the patterns of authority. The king in serving his subjects does not become a subject, nor vice versa. Rather, he remains king and his subjects remain subjects, but their relationship has been profoundly changed in Christ.

So the mutual submission is the laying down of life in service to one another, which radically transforms the relationships as they are lived out within various forms of patterns.

As already noted, those promoting the ordination of women often assert that Paul himself did not understand the significance of statements like Galatians 3.28, and in teaching male headship slipped back into the patriarchal assumptions of his culture. But in Ephesians 5.21–6.9 we again see evidence that Paul saw no such contradiction between the two ideas, but rather their deep complementarity.

The same teaching is found in 1 Peter as well.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a

⁸⁸ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, tr. by T. H. L. Parker (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965), 204; quoted by C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans, Vol. 2*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 661. Some scholars, such as Cranfield (*ibid.*, 660-663), suggest that "mutual honor" is in fact the meaning of *hypotassō* in Ephesians 5.21, so that this text is making the same command to mutual honor as Romans 12.10 and Philippians 2.3-4. As we have seen, Ephesians 5.21 does include a call to mutual honor, but within a context that includes various forms of submission to authority (cf. 5.22–6.9). The word *hypotassō* (not used in Rom. 12.10 and Phil. 2.3-4), includes an element of submission, though with different nuances depending on the context. Since, however, Christ has stripped the ordered relationship of rank or status as usually understood, the expression "submission to authority" takes on a very different flavor.

gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. (1 Peter 3.1-8).

Again we see that wives are to submit to their husbands, the same word Paul uses in Ephesians (ὑποτάσσω, *hypotassō*), and the husbands are to honor their wives. The mutual dignity of both husband and wife is captured beautifully in verse 7 in the image “co-heirs of the grace of life” (συγκληρονόμοις χάριτος ζωῆς, *synklēronomois charitos zōēs*), obscured in the ESV's, “heirs with you of the grace of life.”

The combination of ordered relationship on the one hand, and mutuality on the other is indeed a constant biblical theme. 1 Peter 5.5, for example, begins with a command to one group to submit to another: “Likewise you that are younger be subject to the elders.” But it ends with a call to mutual humility: “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble’.”⁸⁹

1 Corinthians 14.33b-40

Having now looked at Paul's use of the term κεφαλή and seen some of its implications both in public worship (1 Cor. 11) and in the home (Eph. 5) we move on to a passage that does not use the term κεφαλή, but which fits with what we have seen thus far about the pattern of relations between male and female.

In 1 Corinthians 14.33b-40 Paul gives instruction that the women should keep silence in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak (v. 34), and he says that this is true, “in all congregations of God's people.” This prohibition sounds absolute, but three chapters earlier Paul had allowed women to prophesy (11.5). It appears, therefore, that Paul is referring in chapter 14 to some particular form of speech, rather than an absolute prohibition of all speech. What might he have in mind? The topic immediately preceding (vv. 29-33) includes the evaluation of prophecies in church. So it is possible that Paul now continues his teaching on that subject, stating that women are prohibited from passing judgment on prophetic utterances (v. 29).⁹⁰ This instruction would cohere with the theme of headship in chapter 11 if passing judgment is a form of exercising headship. In that case, passing judgment on a prophecy (ch. 14) would not be permitted, but praying and prophesying (ch. 11) are not functions of headship and therefore are permissible for women.

⁸⁹ These two themes continue in the writings of the later Fathers. See, for example, the sustained discussion in *1 Clement*.

⁹⁰ “... the disruptive **sifting** of prophetic speech (as in v. 29), which might involve (1) repetitive interruption with questioning; and (2) the possibility of wives cross-examining their husbands, especially if, as is developed in the *Didache*, issues of contextual lifestyle are part of the sifting,” Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1156 (italics and bold original), cf. 1158.

But since Paul does not clearly connect his prohibition to the evaluation of prophecies, it may be that he has some other form of speech in mind. From these verses themselves we learn that these women are asking questions in a way that is shameful (v. 35). So it may be that, “the problem was that they were asking questions of other men during the church meeting rather than waiting to ask their own husbands at home.”⁹¹ In the ancient world, “Personal interaction between a married woman and other men was considered scandalous or, in Paul’s words, disgraceful.”⁹²

Whatever the particular form of speech, these women are behaving in a way that exemplifies the curse after the Fall (Gen. 3.16), instead of the oneness, harmony, and ordered relationship established in creation and restored in Christ.⁹³

Paul strongly insists upon obedience in this matter: “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (vv. 37-38). This declaration refers to the whole section on prophecy, but includes the material on women in verses 33b-36. Here we see Paul exercising his own headship; his apostolic authority trumps any claims to spiritual discernment among the Corinthians.⁹⁴

Some scholars argue that these verses are not authentic and thus not binding, partly because a few ancient manuscripts put them after verse 40.⁹⁵ There is, however, no manuscript support for omitting these verses altogether,⁹⁶ and so they should be taken as canonical and therefore authoritative.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Ciampa and Rossner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 723.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 728. They cite numerous texts to illustrate this point (725-28).

⁹³ Chrysostom sees in the reference to submission in verse 34 an allusion to “your husband ... shall rule over you” in Genesis 3.16 in *Homilies on 1 Corinthians 37.1* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd), 12:222. These themes in Genesis will be discussed briefly further below.

⁹⁴ Though his teaching only has this authority if it is expressive of the gospel (Gal. 1.8). All claims to speak for God have to be tested. The problem of deception and the need for discernment is found throughout the Bible, from the Garden on.

⁹⁵ For the manuscript question see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 699-700 and the response by D. A. Carson, “‘Silent in the Churches’: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991, reprinted 2006), 140-53, esp. 141-45.

⁹⁶ Their placement after verse 40 occurs in only a few Western witnesses. The United Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament* gives the placement of these verses in their current position a “B” rating, meaning the editors consider this reading “almost certain” (the second highest level of certainty out of four levels).

⁹⁷ That these verses are canonical and their opposition to female headship cannot be dodged is admitted by some scholarly supporters of women’s ordination, for example Richard Hays, *First Corinthians*, 248. For Hays these verses are an example of the “many points of internal tension” within the Bible which call for us “to make *theologically informed* judgments about how the different text speak to our situation” (*ibid.*, emphasis original). As noted earlier, Hays thinks Paul’s argument regarding women is not, “consonant with his own fundamental theological vision” and thus, “the argument has no weight at all” (*ibid.*, 190). So Hays does not dodge the text, but rather tries to neutralize it by showing that Paul’s teaching at this point is not authoritative for us.

These verses are also suspect because the prohibition is absolute and thus they seem to contradict what Paul says in 11.5, 13.⁹⁸ The absoluteness could be due to Paul expecting the Corinthians to know the activity to which he is referring. Or the absoluteness could be an example of a feature of Paul's style, which requires us to put together all of his teaching on a subject to understand his thought. A number of times in Scripture an absolute statement is modified or nuanced elsewhere, often by the same author. St. John's writings contain numerous examples (for example, compare John 1.11 with 1.12; 1 John 3.9 with 1.6, 8, 10). A further example in Paul would be his statement in Galatians 4.7 ("you are no longer a servant but a son") and his language of servanthood elsewhere (for example, Rom. 1.1; 6.22; on this theme also compare John 13.13 and 15.15).

Paul backs up his point by reference to the tradition of the churches (vv. 33, 36), the law (v. 34), his own authority (v. 37), and the command of the Lord (v. 37). His threat that anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized (v. 38) means that they will be banished from the community, or perhaps even face God's eschatological judgment.⁹⁹ There are few if any other instances in Scripture with such a strong appeal to authority and with such strong sanctions, suggesting this topic is not as secondary or unimportant as some think.¹⁰⁰

Oversight in the Pastoral Epistles

We come now to the passages more directly relevant for the discussion of women's ordination. The significance of St. Paul's teaching on headship that we have surveyed for ordained ministry in the Church is suggested by several passages in the Pastoral Epistles.

The Pastorals are especially significant for us because what Paul describes as leadership is essentially what Anglicans (among others) understand the ordained ministry to be. Here Paul draws a direct analogy between oversight in the Church and the role of husband and father in the family (1 Tim. 3.2-5). The leader of the church is indeed, in some respects, like a father to that community.

In 1 Timothy 2.9-15 Paul gives one of his most specific teachings relevant to the role of women in ordained leadership. He says, "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet" (vv. 11-12). "Quietly" (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ, *en hēsychia*) is rendered "in silence" in some translations (for example, the KJV, RSV, and the NRSV). However, the connection in verse 11 with submissiveness (ὑποταγή, *hypotagē*) suggests the focus is on quietness of spirit, as does the use of the same term a few verses earlier when Paul says prayers should be offered for kings and those in authority, "that we may lead a peaceful and quiet (ἡσύχιον, *hēsychion*) life" (1 Tim. 2.2).

This text has been interpreted as prohibiting women from all teaching in church, or even outside of church. Such an interpretation is not justified. Since Paul allows women to

⁹⁸ For the supposed contradiction in Paul's thought see Fee, *First Corinthians*, 706, and Carson's response, "Silent in the Churches," 144.

⁹⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 734.

¹⁰⁰ Along with the points raised in the present article see my reflections in "Why All the Fuss?," *The Evangelical Catholic* 13.7 (April 1990): 1-7.

pray and prophesy in Church, as we have seen, this command is not an absolute prohibition against women speaking in church, or even, necessarily, teaching, since prophecy includes elements of admonition and instruction. Indeed, according to Colossians 3.17 (see also Heb. 5.12) all Christians are to exhort and encourage one another. We have already seen Paul commend Priscilla, whose ministry, according to Acts, included teaching, albeit in connection with her husband and in a private setting.

In 1 Timothy 2.12 Paul is not referring to all teaching, but to teaching which is an exercise of authority such as he connects with the office of overseer later in this letter (1 Tim. 3.2). There is much debate, however, over the meaning of the word ἀθθεντέω (*authentēō*), translated in the ESV as “exercise authority.” Some scholars, especially those in favor of ordaining women, argue that this word refers to a negative activity of domineering. So a paraphrase of verse 12 would be, “I am not permitting women to teach in such a way as to misuse authority in a domineering way [over men].”¹⁰¹

But a thorough analysis of all the instances of this word leads to the conclusion that, “we have no instances of a pejorative use of the verb before the fourth century AD. The data available, however, provide clear indication that the widely understood meanings of ἀθθεντέω were based on the idea of the possession or exercise of authority.”¹⁰²

Accordingly, it is appropriate that the meaning given to ἀθθεντέω in BDAG is, “to assume a stance of independent authority, *give orders to, dictate to,*”¹⁰³ and in CGEL: “‘function in a directive manner’...*exercise authority over.*”¹⁰⁴

The syntax of the sentence also points in the same direction. When two infinitives are in the particular construction found here they both refer to something positive or both to something negative. Since teaching is something positive in Paul then ἀθθεντέω must also be something positive.¹⁰⁵ So in this passage ἀθθεντέω clarifies the sort of teaching Paul has in mind, namely, an exercise of authority. This sort of teaching fits with the role of the overseer, who is to manage the church in a way analogous to the management of his household (1 Tim. 3.5).

St. John Chrysostom, in a passage commenting on the ministry of a woman named Mary whom Paul mentions in Romans 16.6, interprets 1 Timothy 2.11 along these same lines. He notes the witness of the New Testament to women ministering, including teaching, but also the restriction in terms of the exercise of authority over the community.

¹⁰¹ Ian Paul, *Women and Authority: The Key Biblical Texts*, Biblical Series B 59 (Ridley Hall, Cambridge, Eng.: Grove Books, 2011), 23.

¹⁰² Henry Scott Balwin, “An Important Word: *Ἀθθεντέω* in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 49. The first edition (1995) included a comprehensive list of ancient passages containing this word (pages 269-305).

¹⁰³ BDAG, 150.

¹⁰⁴ CGEL, 61.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew C. Perriman, “What Eve Did, What Women Shouldn’t Do: The Meaning of *authentēō* in 1 Timothy 2:12,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44.1 (1993): 129-42; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence: *The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12*,” in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 53-84.

In what sense then does he say, “I suffer not a woman to teach?” He means to hinder her from publicly coming forward, and [teaching] from the seat on the bema,¹⁰⁶ not from the word of teaching [i.e., not hindering her from all teaching]. Since if this were the case, how would he have said to the woman that had an unbelieving husband, “How knowest thou, O woman, if thou shalt save thy husband?” [1 Cor. 7.16] Or how came he to suffer her to admonish children, when he says, but “she shall be saved by child-bearing if they continue in faith, and charity, and holiness, with sobriety?” [1 Tim. 2.15] How came Priscilla to instruct even Apollos? It was not then to cut in sunder private conversing for advantage that he said this [i.e., 1 Tim. 2.12], but [from] that [teaching which was] before all, and which it was the teacher’s duty to give in the public assembly; or again, in case the husband be believing and thoroughly furnished, able also to instruct her. When she is the wiser, then he does not forbid her teaching and improving him.¹⁰⁷ And he does not say [regarding Mary], who taught much, but “who bestowed much labor,” [Rom. 16.6] because along with teaching she performs other ministries besides, those in the way of dangers, in the way of money, in the way of travels. For the women of those days were more spirited than lions, sharing with the Apostles their labors for the Gospel’s sake.¹⁰⁸

Thus, as Chrysostom notes, Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy 2.11-12 is not out of keeping with his teaching elsewhere that women should minister, albeit within the ordered pattern.

Among those affirming women’s ordination it is common to argue that there was a false teaching in Ephesus that had taken hold of the women in particular, which has caused Paul to restrict these particular women in ways he does not restrict women elsewhere. The false teaching does indeed seem to have had a particular impact on some of the women,¹⁰⁹ but Paul’s appeal is to principles like those found in his other letters, not an ad hoc response to the specific situation. So this passage should not be dismissed as a unique

¹⁰⁶ The bema was the raised place from which the clergy officiated. In Acts 12.21 βῆμα (*bēma*) refers to a speaker’s platform, and in several texts (e.g. Matt. 27.19; Acts 18.12) it is a judgment seat (also used of God’s judgment seat at the final judgment, 2 Cor. 5.10; Rom. 14.10). See BDAG, 175. The idea is similar to the “seat” (καθέδρα, *kathedra*) in Matthew 23.2-3: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.” Chrysostom has in mind such authoritative teaching and guidance, including matters of judgment—the sort of activity, for example, in which we see Paul engaged in all of his letters.

¹⁰⁷ This sentence is particularly significant for understanding the practical implications of male headship. Women teaching, even in a marriage relationship, does not contradict Paul’s teaching according to St. Chrysostom.

¹⁰⁸ *Homilies on Romans* 31, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd), 11:554. Augmented for clarity.

¹⁰⁹ The larger commentaries discuss the setting of 1 Timothy, and see also the helpful overview in Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 408-22. Some supporters of women’s ordination argue that Ephesus was unusually feminist due to the Artemis cult, and thus Paul is not speaking against women in leadership but rather against them, “holding a monopoly on religious power” (Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 93). This view of Ephesus is examined and rejected by S. M. Baugh in “A Foreign World: *Ephesus in the First Century*,” in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 13-38.

case which is out of keeping with the New Testament norm and therefore not applicable to us.¹¹⁰

Paul goes on to ground his command in the accounts of both Creation and the Fall. It is often argued that women should be given headship roles because female subordination is a product of the Fall. In Genesis 3.16 Eve is told by God that because she ate of the fruit of the tree, “your husband . . . will be your master,” and since this curse has been overturned by Christ, so should the submission of the wife to her husband. Certainly the effects of the Fall are overcome in Christ, including the fallen ways men and women relate to each other. Genesis 3.16 speaks of man after the Fall as being master of the woman and the woman as having a “desire” for their husband, which in context refers to a desire to rule over the man.¹¹¹

But is male headship itself a product of the Fall? Our passage suggests this is not the case, since in 1 Timothy 2.13-14 Paul grounds his command not just in the Fall, but also in Creation: “For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.” Paul emphasizes the fact that Adam was formed first, implying this provides grounds for (“for,” γάρ, *gar*) the command that women should not exercise authority over the community, that is, exercise headship.

Regarding the Fall, Paul is not saying that women are by nature more easily deceived than men and thus should not teach. If that were Paul’s view it would be very strange for him to speak of older women teaching younger women (Titus 2.3); this would promote the deceivable teaching the deceivable! Nor is he saying the Fall was entirely Eve’s fault. Just the opposite was true, for she was deceived by the master Deceiver, but it is not said that Adam was subjected to this direct assault. Elsewhere Paul places the blame on Adam (Rom. 5.12-21: “sin entered the world through one man . . .”).¹¹² Adam is the head of the human race, a major aspect of Paul’s typology. “Christ stands for man or humankind in the new order, just as Adam is ‘head’ of the race without the gospel.”¹¹³

It may be that Eve was deceived when she acted out of keeping with Adam’s headship, as may be implied in verse 13. In any case, Adam was the one with authority and responsibility for leadership. He should have been able to discern the truth, especially

¹¹⁰ See for example Gordon Fee’s statement, “It simply cannot be demonstrated that Paul intended 1 Timothy 2.11-12 as a rule in all churches at all times. In fact the occasion and purpose of 1 Timothy as a whole, and these verses in particular, suggest otherwise.” “Issues in Evangelical hermeneutics, Part III: The Great Watershed—Intentionality & Particularity/Eternity: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as a Test Case,” *Crux* 26/4 (December 1990): 35. Bruce Waltke provides an effective response in “1 Timothy 2:8-15: Unique or Normative?” *Crux* 28/1 (March 1992): 22-27. Among Waltke’s five points he notes, for example, that the false teachers at Ephesus were men, so why would Paul silence the women? Furthermore, “is it plausible to suppose that Paul would silence all the women at Ephesus to rescue some from the false teachers?” (23).

¹¹¹ Cf. Bruce Waltke, “Relationship of the Sexes,” 16, citing and extending the work by Susah Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 67-69. As evidence for this interpretation of “desire” he calls attention in particular to the similarity of chiasmic parallelism between Genesis 3.16 and 4.7b.

¹¹² Contrast the view in some other Jewish sources, such as Sirach: “From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die” (25.24).

¹¹³ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 816. Along with Romans 5.12-21 he cites 1 Corinthians 15.21-24.

since he was not deceived (v. 14). His problem was not deception and the need for discernment, but open-eyed disobedience.

While some details in this passage are difficult to understand,¹¹⁴ the principles behind his teaching in 1 Timothy 2 correspond to those we have already seen elsewhere in his writings.

Offices in the Pastorals

We now come to the texts that speak most directly to the question of ordination. The pattern of St. Paul's teaching on men and women that we have seen up to this point coheres with his explicit discussion of offices in the Church. 1 Timothy 3.1-13 and Titus 1.5-9 speak of the overseer (ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*)/presbyter (πρεσβύτερος, *presbyteros*)¹¹⁵ and the deacon (διάκονος, *diakonos*) as being the husband of one wife. Paul clearly does not have women in mind in these passages since in both passages he refers to them with the word ἀνὴρ (*anēr*), which can only refer to a male, here, "husband."¹¹⁶

It seems likely, however, that 1 Timothy 3.11, which comes in the midst of speaking of the male deacons, does speak of deaconesses or women deacons. The word used here, γυνή (*gynē*), as we have seen earlier, can mean either woman or wife. It would be strange to refer to the wives of deacons but not those of the overseers. It seems likely that this passage refers not to the wives of the deacons, but to a distinct order of ministers within the Church, since the passage flows: Presbyters must be ... Likewise, deacons must be ... Likewise women [deacons] must be (vv. 2, 8, 11). Note also that what is said of these women is parallel to what is said about the deacons in verse 8. So once again we see a very significant ministry role for women in the New Testament.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ For example, "Salvation for the woman will be in the bearing of children . . ." (v. 15), is puzzling, but seems to recall Genesis 3.16; now in the sphere of redemption, not curse. This does not mean that barren or celibate women cannot be saved. After all, Paul thought celibacy a preferable state (1 Cor. 7.8)! This specific emphasis may reflect aberrations in the historical context as noted above, since some were forbidding marriage (cf. 4.3). Thus Paul may be affirming their living out their salvation in particular in their distinct role of child-bearing (a perspective out of keeping with some current cultural views). Childbearing would be a synecdoche (a part standing for the whole) for the good works of verse 10.

¹¹⁵ The ἐπίσκοπος is also called an elder or "presbyter" (πρεσβύτερος, *presbyteros*) in Titus 1.5. This lack of precision in the terms overseer/bishop (ἐπίσκοπος) and presbyter/priest (πρεσβύτερος) shows a fluidity in terminology in the earliest period. While the matter is debated, the historic Anglican position is defensible, namely, that, since the time of the New Testament, three distinct orders of ordained ministers have been characteristic of the Church (*The Book of Common Prayer* [1979], 510). In any case, this variety in the terms used does not affect the main point of this paper, that the authority of oversight in the community, however labeled, and however divided between bishops and priests, is to be exercised by men.

¹¹⁶ Contrast 2 Timothy 2.2, "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Other translations have instead of "faithful men," something like "faithful people" (NET). The word "men" in this text is the plural of ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*), the more generic term which could refer to a mixed group of men and women. So in 2 Timothy Paul may not be referring to just the ordained leadership, but also include others as well, including women, whom we have seen Paul does think should be teaching, even if not in the specifically ordained capacity.

¹¹⁷ For a short summary of the evidence for women deacons in the Church, see H. J. M. Turner, *Ordination and Vocation* (Worthing: Churchman, 1990), 79-85, and more extensively Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*. Even the conservative Roman Catholic Louis Bouyer has said that "The

Such a role or office would not, however, include the sort of authority associated with headship, as we see when we compare what is said about the different orders. The responsibility of the overseer or presbyter includes teaching and refutation (1 Tim. 3.2; Titus 1.6), which is not said of the deacons. Notice that Paul met with the elders/presbyters of Ephesus, not the deacons, and tells them that, “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20.17). Here is a clear statement of the responsibility for the oversight of the communities, and it is addressed to presbyters, not deacons.

This oversight is exercised especially in preaching and teaching: “Let the presbyters who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5.17). As we have already seen, the overseers and presbyters were not the only ones who taught, nor perhaps preached, in the early Church. But their teaching and preaching was a primary means of exercising their authority, and therefore presumably carried a weight unlike that of other teachers and preachers.¹¹⁸ According to our texts, women were not overseers nor presbyters, and this fact coheres with the material we have reviewed about the distinctions between men and women.¹¹⁹

The role of these presbyters is analogous to their role in their families (1 Tim. 3.4-5; Titus 1.6), which is said to be a matter of managing, ruling, and governing (see also Heb. 13.17; 1 Pet. 5.2).¹²⁰ That is, the leader in the church family has a role similar to that of a father in a family.¹²¹ Paul saw his own role as that of a father over the churches he had

attempts already made in the Early Church to find a real distinction between the male and female diaconate were unfruitful” (quoted in Turner, 79).

¹¹⁸ See the comments by St. Chrysostom on 1 Timothy 2.11, given above. Donald Robinson, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney (1982-1993), says, “Ordination to the priesthood in our Anglican understanding is the authorisation by the church of someone to have the cure and charge of a congregation, especially in relation to authority to fulfil the ministry of bringing the whole congregation under the obedience of God’s word for its salvation.” Donald Robinson, “Lambeth 1988: Authority, Unity, and the Ordination of Women,” in *Donald Robinson: Selected Works, Volume 2 – Preaching God’s Word*, Peter G. Bolt and Mark D. Thompson, eds. (Camperdown, Australia: Australian Church Record/Moore College, 2008), 461.

¹¹⁹ After reviewing the description of Timothy’s responsibilities described in 1 Timothy (1 Tim. 1.14-15; 2.1-2; 4.6; and 6.3), Donald Robinson notes, “It is in this context of oversight and responsibility for the congregation as a whole, and in relation to the controlling ministry of teaching, that Paul says ‘I permit no woman to teach’ (1 Tim. 2:12).” After describing references to various ministries of women in the New Testament, Robinson continues, “We need not doubt that a whole range of gifts and graces were given to, and exercised by, women. But there is no sign of the recognition of women as overseers or bishops of the church of God.” Donald Robinson, “Ordination for What?,” in *Donald Robinson: Selected Works, Volume 2 – Preaching God’s Word*, Peter G. Bolt and Mark D. Thompson, eds. (Camperdown, Australia: Australian Church Record/Moore College, 2008), 434.

¹²⁰ See Vern Sheridan Poythress, “The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church, in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991, reprinted 2006), 233-47.

¹²¹ The most common words for family in both Hebrew and Greek are related to the words for father, *bêt-’āb* (“father’s house”) and *πατριά (patria)*, from *πατήρ (patēr)*, father. As noted earlier, according to Paul, there are families, “father-units,” as it were, not only on earth but in heaven (Eph. 3.15), all of them named from God the Father. In other words, the pattern of families goes far beyond the human race. For the difference in the Old Testament between “tribe,” “clan,” and “family” see Wright, “Family,” 2:761-62.

founded, and he models the role and responsibility of a father in his love, care, guidance and oversight.¹²² His teaching was not just through his words, but his way of life.

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4.14-17).

Later in this same letter he adds, “be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11.1). The leader is to exemplify the ways of God, the pattern of life of the family, which explains at least in part why most of the qualifications for office listed in the Pastorals are matters of character and lifestyle (1 Tim. 3.1-13; Titus 1.5-9).¹²³

Part of his role as an apostle is to make sure there are elders/overseers to provide such leadership on the local level. So we see him, with Barnabas, appointing elders for the churches established on his first missionary journey (Acts 14.23), and now in the Pastoral Epistles we see him guiding Timothy and Titus in their own exercise of oversight over the congregations in the regions of Ephesus and Crete, including appointing elders (Titus 1.5), and overseeing them. Thus Timothy and Titus function in ways very similar to the office of bishop that emerges very soon, at least in some regions, as we see in *I Clement* and the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who died around AD 110.¹²⁴

Thus, the New Testament presents a consistent teaching about an ordered pattern of relations between men and women in the context of oneness and equal dignity. For all of the new respect and responsibility women have in the Christian community, the New Testament gives no indication that this included the exercise of headship within the community, and in fact it clearly indicates that it did not.

Conclusion Regarding the Ordination of Women

How does this conclusion apply to the question of the ordination of women? The Catechism and the description of orders in *The Book of Common Prayer* both make clear that those ordained to the episcopate and the presbyterate in the Anglican tradition are given authority to teach and the responsibility for oversight of the Church.¹²⁵ Thus they

¹²² While Paul gave instruction and admonition both to churches he founded and those he did not found, he only uses paternal and maternal imagery when writing to those he founded. See P. Beasley-Murray, “Pastor, Paul as” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 654-58.

¹²³ If Paul’s commissioning Timothy and Titus is related to later developments of apostolic succession through the episcopacy we can see this arrangement is fundamentally a family matter, related to the lineage and ways of the family.

¹²⁴ Cf. Arthur Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), 76-77.

¹²⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 855-56; 510. The ordination services flesh out this understanding (511-36). The description of the ministry of the deacon (*ibid.*, 856) and the ordination service for the diaconate (537-47) do not include language of oversight. So also *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 529-59, though the Catechism in this version does not include a section on these offices. See Donald

are presbyters/overseers in the New Testament sense, and therefore it is not right in the light of the Biblical revelation for women to be ordained to these positions. Both offices are positions of headship as the New Testament understands it, and are thus restricted to men.¹²⁶ The diaconate, on the other hand, does not include these responsibilities and thus it can be argued that women deacons would be within the pattern described in the Bible. Indeed, as I have noted, the Bible probably refers to women deacons, or deaconesses, in 1 Timothy 3.11.

Ordination, Church Order, and the Gospel

These positions of ordained leadership are important roles in the community and carry great responsibility (cf. 1 Thes. 5.12; 1 Tim. 5.17; Heb. 13.17).¹²⁷ The first century Church was an ordered community, not a free-for-all, so those ordained, that is, set in order by God to act in God's name in an authoritative manner, play an important role in the community.¹²⁸ Church order, including ordination, is sometimes viewed as secondary to the Gospel. But the Gospel is not fundamentally an intellectual system of thought and/or ethics. It is about a specific individual who is the God-Man, who became incarnate

Robinson, "What Theology of Order and Ministry Do the Anglican Formularies Teach?" in *Donald Robinson: Selected Works, Volume 2 – Preaching God's Word*, Peter G. Bolt and Mark D. Thompson, eds. (Camperdown, Australia: Australian Church Record/Moore College, 2008), 405-13; and "Ordination for What?," *ibid.*, 414-37.

¹²⁶ Additionally, some view the priest as an icon of Christ, and argue that the priest must be a male because Jesus was a male. Such a view of the priest is the subject of debate within the Anglican communion, but even if one rejects this view of the priesthood, there is clearly a symbolic message conveyed by the priest presiding at the Meal that corresponds with his headship role. This is a point grasped by advocates of women's ordination, who argue that it is important for women and for the community to see a woman functioning as president of the assembly. To put it another way, who sits at the head of the table says much about a family and community and its life together. If the father is to be the head of the family, then a woman presiding at the family meal symbolizes a single-parent family, at least in the minds of some. For a helpful brief overview of the priest as icon from an Eastern Orthodox position see Ware, "Man, Woman, and the Priesthood of Christ," 79-83.

¹²⁷ Early Christian texts that spell out this responsibility especially well include St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration II, "In Defense of His Flight to Pontus," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd) 7:204-227; St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd) 9:33-83; and St. Gregory the Great, *The Book of the Pastoral Rule*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd) 12:1-72. See also the charge to priests in the classic Anglican Ordinal in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 539-541.

¹²⁸ See the quote from von Allmen in footnote 42 above for some aspects of this ministry. For an Anglican defense of this view of ordination see William Law, *The Letters to the Bishop of Bangor*, in *The Works of William Law, Volume One* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001; original 1892—the Letters themselves were originally published 1717-1719). Law (1686-1761) defended the authority of the ordained ministry against the teaching of Bishop Benjamin Hoadly, who preached a sermon before the King in 1717 (on John 18.36, "my kingdom is not of this world") proclaiming, "that the Gospels afford no warrant for any visible Church authority" (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1958], 124). Letter Two is especially relevant. For example, after giving evidence through examples and illustrations, Law sums up: "It appears from many express Facts, and indeed, from the whole Series of God's Providence, that it is not only consistent with his Attributes, but also agreeable to his ordinary Methods of dealing with Mankind, that he should substitute Men to act in his Name, and be *authoritatively* employed in conferring his Graces and Favours upon Mankind. It appears that your Lordship's Argument against the authoritative Administrations of the Christian Clergy, does not only contradict those Facts, and condemn the ordinary Method of God's Dispensations; but likewise proves the Sacraments, and every positive Institution of Christianity, to be ineffectual, and as mere *Dreams and Trifles*, as the several *Offices and Orders* of the Clergy" (41, emphasis original).

and did certain things that changed the whole universe. And the Gospel is about a particular People who are the nucleus of God's restoration and recreation project that is cosmic in scope. All of theology and ethics are attempts to speak about this man and this community, the Body of Christ, and what they reveal about God and life.¹²⁹ Church order is, "a development which grew in the Gospel and through the Gospel, and which expresses the Gospel and can be belittled only at the expense of the Gospel."¹³⁰ The Gospel includes the formation of a People in this world that is concrete and visible, and this People includes an ordered leadership.¹³¹ An anti-clericalism that rejects the validity of an ordered leadership is not supported by the Bible.

Ordination in the Context of Ministry

But these leaders are not viewed in the New Testament as those who do "the ministry," the way we often have in mind. They give important oversight and instruction to the community, but the work of ministry is to be done by everyone, each having their gift(s) and roles, which are worthy of great honor (1 Cor. 12) and even submission on some level (1 Cor. 16.16). The Church is often guilty of clericalism, that is, of seeing ordained ministers as those with the real ministries. Neither clericalism nor anti-clericalism does justice to the Scriptural vision.

Headship in the Context of Discipleship and Theology

Furthermore, the authority of headship has sometimes been viewed in terms of domination and power rather than servanthood, love, and respect.¹³² Sometimes power

¹²⁹ "The New Testament is therefore neither a collection of thoughtful essays nor an attempt to construct a system of ethics. It bears witness to a unique history, and it discovers the truth in the history. The historian is compelled to state that both the unity and the uniqueness of this claim are historical facts. And, secondly, he must state quite explicitly what is here involved. The challenge presented to human thought by the New Testament is not created by the accidental emergence of a new way of thinking about these problems, which appeared first in one man, and then in the organized body of his followers. The challenge lies in the history and not in the thought detached from the history, since the history is an integral element in the new method of thought, and in fact constitutes its surprise and its scandal. The question, 'What manner of man is this?' which is so obvious throughout the synoptic gospels, is no mere literary trick of their editors. It is put, quite as provocatively, everywhere in the New Testament. The fourth gospel persuades and entices the reader to venture a judgement upon the history. St. Paul placards before the eyes of the world, and with the most provocative intention, Christ crucified. And precisely the same compelling provocation is found throughout that material in which it has seemed possible to see the Jesus of history himself." Edwyn Hoskyns and Noel Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 181.

¹³⁰ Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 57. Ramsey's whole book is a defense and exposition of this statement. See especially chapter 5, "The Gospel and Church Order," and chapter 6, "The Gospel and the Episcopacy."

¹³¹ "It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard." Article 23 of the Anglican *Articles of Religion* in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 872; *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 607. In addition to the articles by Donald Robinson cited above, for a discussion of this Anglican view of office in the Church, including biblical warrant and historical development, see Edward Harold Browne, *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion: Historical and Doctrinal* (New York: H. B. Durand, 1865, reprinted by Classical Anglican Press, 1998), 549-76.

¹³² The sacrificial nature of authority is expressed very well in the traditional Anglican Ordinal: "Have always therefore printed in your remembrance," the bishop tells the ordinand, "how great a treasure is

and authority are valued more than humility and holiness. Sometimes biblical teaching about subordination has been used to justify misogyny and exploitation.

If we properly valued holiness there would be no danger of thinking that submission means inferiority. The greatest of saints is a woman, the one who said, “Let it be unto me according to your word” (Luke 1.38).¹³³ She thereby set the example for all of us. The humility of handmaid is not inferior in the least to the authority of headship. Both to command and to obey are divine acts, as we see in the relation of the Father and the Son as revealed in the New Testament.

It was precisely *because* Jesus was in the form of God that He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant (an interpretation not expressed in most translations of Phil. 2.6).¹³⁴ I suspect that this declaration that God is both almighty and humble, is both all-powerful and a servant, sets apart the Biblical revelation from all other religions. It is the reason we may serve in whatever role God has given us, whether in headship or submission, without the normal sense these have in the world of inequality, domination, and superiority-inferiority.

Obedience, then, is as divine as Will, Service as divine as Rule. How? Because they are one in their nature; they are both a doing of the truth. The love in them is the same. The Fatherhood and the Sonship are one, save that the Fatherhood looks down lovingly, and the Sonship looks up lovingly. Love is all. And God is all in all.¹³⁵

committed to your charge. For they are the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood. The Church and Congregation whom you must serve, is his Spouse, and his Body. And if it shall happen that the same Church, or any member thereof, do take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue” (*The Book of Common Prayer* [1928], 540). The rest of the charge calls the ordinand to specific forms of self-sacrifice for the good of his people.

¹³³ In fact, E. L. Mascall argued, “from one point of view . . . the Incarnation exalts the female sex above the male.” It was “*male human nature* that the Son of God united to his divine person; it was a *female human person* who was chosen to be his mother. . . . In no woman has *human nature* been raised to the dignity which it possesses in Jesus of Nazareth, but to no male *human person* has there been given a dignity comparable to that which Mary enjoys as the Mother of God.” “Women and the Priesthood of the Church” in *Why Not? Priesthood and Ministry of Women: A Theological Study*, ed. Michael Bruce and G. E. Duffield (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1972), 113. When this point about the Virgin Mary was made to a woman priest friend of mine her response was, “We don’t want handmaid. We want headship.”

¹³⁴ A number of commentaries argue for the interpretation I have given. For example, Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC 43 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 85; and Peter T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 216.

¹³⁵ George MacDonald, “The Child in the Midst,” in *Unspoken Sermons, Series One* (Eureka, CA: J. Joseph Flynn Rare Books in association with Sunrise Books, 1989, original 1867), 19-20. Cf. C. S. Lewis’ comment, “Equality is a quantitative term and therefore love often knows nothing of it. Authority exercised with humility and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live.” “Membership,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 38. Further, cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/1: 193 = *Church Dogmatics, Volume IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* §57-59 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2009), 187: “If, then, God is in Christ, if what the man Jesus does is God’s own work, this aspect of the self-emptying and self-humbling of Jesus Christ as an act of obedience cannot be alien to God. But in this case we have to see here the other and inner side of the mystery of the divine nature of Christ and therefore of the nature of the one true God—that He himself is also able and free to render obedience.”

We already have a hint of this truth in the Old Testament. For example, those who advocate the ordination of women make much of the fact that Eve is said to be a “helper” (עֲזָרָה, *‘ezer*) for man (Gen. 2.18, 20) and that this word is used elsewhere of God Himself (15 times of God’s help, including Gen. 49.25; Exod. 18.4; Deut. 33.7, 26, 29). They say that this shows that this text does not teach submission. Genesis 2 indeed does not teach submission in the sense that it has had from the Fall to today in the world, and too often in the Church. And the fact that the woman is a, “a helper fit for him,” (Gen. 2.18) or perhaps better, “corresponding to him,” emphasizes their equality. But there is more going on here. The use of עֲזָרָה for God hints at the profound insight that God Himself is submissive to us, in the sense that He serves us in a way that honors Himself and us.¹³⁶ In John’s Gospel Jesus says He only does what He sees the Father doing (John 5.19), and then He washes His disciples’ feet (John 13.1-17). The Father revealed by the Son is a God who washes feet. “The humiliation, lowliness, and obedience of Christ are essential in our conception of God.”¹³⁷ Such a vision should have a profound impact our view of both authority and submission. There is an ordering in the Creation account, but what we usually mean by authority and submission have more to do with the negative effects of the Fall described in Genesis 3 than the ordered relationship in Genesis 2.

The life of the Godhead includes both ontological oneness, equality of honor and worth, and yet an ordering of relationship that includes obedience of the Son to the Father. We must live the life of the Godhead, among Whom we see equality and submission, as already noted (especially in the discussion on 1 Corinthians 11.3). We see this in our Lord, who says both, “The Father and I are one” and “The Father is greater than I” (John 10.30; 14.28). Some in the ancient Church, like Arius, viewed the Son as ontologically inferior to the Father, which is not the message of such texts. Nevertheless, it is possible, even necessary, to see a distinction in the relations between the Father and the Son or else one falls into Modalism.¹³⁸

The view more congruent with the Scriptures and affirmed by the great tradition of the Church is the affirmation of both the ontological oneness of the Father and the Son and also a form of relationship, an ordering (τάξις, *taxis*) of relationship, between the Father and Son which finds a partial analogy in the relations between male and female.¹³⁹ There

¹³⁶ Cf. Raymond Ortlund, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: *Genesis* 1-3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991, reprinted 2006), 104.

¹³⁷ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 397, in a section discussing views held by Karl Barth.

¹³⁸ Modalism is, “the blurring or eclipsing of the eternal personal distinctions. This can come about either by treating God’s self-revelation as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as merely successive modes by which the one unipersonal God revealed himself ... or, alternatively, by a reluctance to recognize that God’s revelation in human history tells us anything about who he is eternally.” Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 3. Some advocates of women’s ordination think it is impossible to have any kind of subordination if there is ontological oneness. “A necessary and eternal subordination of the Son in role and authority in the immanent Trinity implies the ontological subordination of the Son.” Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), 211-12. Giles therefore thinks any form of ordering within the Godhead falls under the Church Fathers’ condemnation of subordinationism. For a significant critique of Giles at several points of theology, history, and hermeneutics see Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 489-96.

¹³⁹ “The classic doctrine of the Trinity affirms that the three persons are of one identical essence and are coequal eternally. The three mutually indwell one another, yet are irreducibly distinct. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, and so on. Moreover, there is an order (*taxis*) among them. This is not an

is oneness of being and dignity but distinctions in roles in relationship. Thus the eternal relations can help us have some understanding our human relations, rather than our thoughts about the eternal relations representing simply our projection of our human relations. Paul makes this point clear in his reflections on the relations between husbands and wives in the light of Christ's relationship to the Church (Eph. 5.22-33).¹⁴⁰

Scripture makes it clear that one of the principal ways in which we embody and reflect the life of the Trinity is in the relations between male and female. The man and the woman together are the image of God (Gen. 1.27), yet both unity and subordination are already present in the creation story of the representative man and woman. The fact that the relation of husband and wife are caught up in the mystery of Christ and the Church shows that these human relationships are part of a much deeper mystery. The presence of families (πατριαί, *partiai*, "father units") in heaven as well as on earth (Eph. 3.15) points in the same direction, as we saw earlier.¹⁴¹

In any case, the relation between the male and the female before the Fall is a model for our own relations, and includes both profound unity and a form of ordering. The woman is a helper "corresponding to" (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, *kənegdô*, Gen. 2.18) the man, meaning one who is "equal and adequate to himself."¹⁴² In verse 23 we hear the first human words, a poem by the man celebrating the creation of the woman: "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman.'" When Adam says she is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" he expresses both his unity with her, their equality, and also his headship, as Paul notes (1 Cor. 11.8). When he then names her woman he exercises a form of authority over her.¹⁴³ He had earlier exercised such a role over the animals (Gen. 2.19-20), but they did not correspond to him. Adam names her as he had all the living creatures, but she is one who is not like the creatures. Adam's naming the woman indicates that an ordered relationship is created before the Fall, but this ordering is in the context of ontological equality, relational oneness, and equal dignity.

Along these lines, one Old Testament scholar, Raymond Ortlund, notes examples in this text of what he calls the, "paradoxical truths of male-female equality and male headship." First, that the woman is "a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2.18, 20) means that she is equal in her suitability and under his headship as being his helper. Second, the woman is said to be from man and for man, not the other way around, nor are both said to be from the ground without any distinction made between them. Third, the man and woman are one flesh, but it is the man who leaves his parents and forms the new household (v. 24); that is, initiating a new household is the responsibility of the head.¹⁴⁴

order of rank, as the Arians and Eunomians argued, in which the three are arranged in some form of hierarchy. It is more akin to a suitable disposition, a well-arranged constitution." Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 491.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 398.

¹⁴¹ Indeed, perhaps Paul's enigmatic reference to women needing to wear a sign of authority on their heads because of the angels (1 Cor. 11.10) comes from insight Paul had into the heavenly realm, which contributed to his insistence on these matters.

¹⁴² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an appendix containing Biblical Aramaic* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), 617.

¹⁴³ Cf. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ*, 15-28; Bruce Waltke, "Relationship of the Sexes," 14.

¹⁴⁴ Raymond Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship," 100-103.

Such an ordered relationship does not contradict their both being made in God's image and having dominion together over creation (Gen. 1.26-31). But this ordered relationship is, "inverted in the fall narrative of Genesis 3. The serpent assumes the role of God in relation to the woman and the woman assumes the role of the man and becomes the initiator in that relationship. The judgment of God imposed in 3.14-19 involves a re-establishment of his created order. However, because of sin those relationships will now be painful."¹⁴⁵

So we can see that very significant truths about God, human nature, and patterns of life and discipleship are involved in the issues related to headship. One further point of theology that is involved in these issues should be mentioned in passing. The concept of headship is fundamental for understanding the biblical teaching about salvation (see, for example, Rom. 5.12-21). As noted earlier, the fact that man can be the head, and thus the representative of the woman, is part of the larger pattern of the First Man, Adam, being the head of the whole human race. Because he is the head, when he fell we all were affected. Likewise, Jesus is the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15.45), the Head of the new creation, in whom we die and rise to new life. Because He is head and therefore representative He can atone for our sins on the Cross and rise again for us all, creating in Himself one New Man (Eph. 2.14), as part of the much larger cosmic goal of summing up the whole created order under Christ as under one head (Eph. 1.10) and putting all things in subjection under Him and in Him under the Father (1 Cor. 15.24-28).¹⁴⁶

A Countercultural Vision

The passages that teach the subordination of women in family and Church do not contradict the rest of the witness of the New Testament. There is no contradiction between "egalitarian" passages like Galatians 3.28 and Ephesians 5.21 and "hierarchical" passages like 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 and 1 Timothy 2.9-15. The biblical ideal is richer and deeper than either simply equality or hierarchy, and it is thus both more difficult and more life-giving. We must hold these texts together to discover this biblical ideal, and challenge the simplified reading of Scripture that reduces its rich message to pure egalitarianism or hierarchialism.

Since the Church is an otherworldly, eschatological reality, we can only learn the nature of this unity and subordination from the revelation of God, not our fallen human nature. Today, we are in danger of replacing a worldly form of hierarchy with a worldly form of equality, neither of which is of the Kingdom. The very language of King and Kingdom speaks of hierarchy, authority and an ordered pattern of relationships, but Jesus made it

¹⁴⁵ *The Report of the Sydney Doctrine Commission on the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood* (London: The Association for the Apostolic Ministry, nd), 4-5.

¹⁴⁶ Thus headship is an essential reality that is necessary for understanding Jesus' person and work. I prefer to use gender-neutral language for humans, but it is unwise to do away entirely with the generic use of the masculine in English. If the word "man" can no longer refer to a group of men and women, we distance ourselves not only from biblical language but also make it harder to grasp essential truths about our humanity, our salvation, and reality itself. Interestingly, this point is illustrated in Galatians 3.28, for in the very context of saying there is no male and female, Paul says, "you are all sons of God" (v. 26). Perhaps he uses the term "sons" here partly due to our identity now through our incorporation, male and female, into the one Son of God. But more specifically, the context suggests he uses it because of the role of the son in that culture as heir (Gal. 3.29-4.7), a status in which women now equally share with men.

clear that the nature of this King and Kingdom turns upside down the values and ways found in the world. The way we order our lives together is to flow from and reflect the very community of the Godhead. If we do not accept headship, biblically understood, we run the danger of having a false view of both God and reality. These are not secondary issues!

Indeed, by holding the texts of Scripture together we are forced to define hierarchy, equality, and mutuality in ways foreign to our culture and to many of the practices and assumptions we have inherited in the Church.¹⁴⁷ In fact, the terms “hierarchy” and “subordination” may be impossible to rehabilitate to convey the biblical teaching. Some of our language and our practices will need to change as we seek to embody this foreign ideal in ways that are countercultural, and may be at times confusing, difficult, and painful.

Practical Implications

Thus, even if there is a coherent vision in the Bible along the lines outlined in this article, there is still the question of how to live in the light of it.

Some people accept something like the position I have outlined in this paper as representing what the Bible teaches, but think women's ordination can fit within this vision. They say women can be ordained as presbyters as long as they do not serve as heads of a community, e.g., as rector of a parish or as a bishop. Now certainly the office of bishop is one of headship, but ordination to the presbyterate confers the authority and responsibility of a presbyter, even if one is a curate or an associate rather than a rector. Thus, even in this view of ordination it is very hard to see how women should be ordained as either bishops or presbyters.¹⁴⁸

Other people argue that women (and indeed non-ordained men) ought to be able to preside over the Eucharist because headship refers to teaching and oversight, not presiding at the Eucharist. But while the priest or bishop has been set aside to exercise a headship of authority and responsibility, whatever form that may take in his particular ministry, it is at the Eucharist that his authority is focused most clearly. For here at the Holy Communion is the time for the authoritative preaching and, in the eating and drinking, the authoritative proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor. 11.26). The word Paul uses here for proclaim (*καταγγέλλω*, *katangellō*) usually refers in the New Testament to preaching, but here it refers to the eating and drinking. Hence the idea that the Eucharist is a visible word. Both the preaching and the celebration are an

¹⁴⁷ The acceptance of women's ordination is not in itself a rejection of hierarchy or even clericalism, even in its worst forms. Indeed, some advocates seem to want to retain them, but now include women as a matter of equal rights to promotion in the corporation. Such a view compounds error. Thankfully it seems that a number of the proponents of women's ordination share the view in this paper regarding the fundamental place of servanthood and humility in all of life, let alone the exercise of any ministry or authority.

¹⁴⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 510, 531. There is also the problem of determining where to draw the line. Some have argued that a woman can serve as a bishop because she will still be under male headship, that of an Archbishop or Presiding Bishop, or further that a woman can serve as Archbishop or Presiding Bishop, because she will still be under the male headship of Christ Himself. But Paul's point is not simply about being under headship, but the headship role and responsibilities of those in authority in the Church.

exercise of authority in the Church. Here the family is gathered and one representing the role of the father of the family should preside at the meal.¹⁴⁹

What then would be the practical application of the view presented in this paper? I do not think the points developed in this paper suggest there is a need to change the structure of the three-fold ministry, though the reinstatement of the order of deaconess is very desirable. The challenge is in how to live out the life of the Triune God within these structures, both in the Church and in the family. We were created male and female in order to give expression to a pattern of relationship that includes unity and love as well as an ordering that involves no rank or status, no superior-inferior. So the first practical point has to do with prayer, since there is no way to even see such a Kingdom let alone live its life apart from union with the Father in the Son through the Spirit within the Body. Each married couple will express this ordered pattern of life in unique ways, to some extent, given their personalities, circumstances and many other factors. They can do so as both of them, husband and wife, focus on the living Presence of Christ within them and between them, guiding them and empowering them. The guidance comes as they have hearts that are open to Christ's living Presence and His love, and as they seek ways to serve one another and make each other prosper.

A similar connection to the Lord in prayer and a sharing in the mutually submissive life of the Trinity is necessary in order to embody the Triune Life as the Church as well. It is not that we need new structures but that we live the life of the Spirit that makes these structures expressions of the love flowing between the Father and the Son. It is beyond the scope of this paper (and my wisdom) to suggest anything in detail, but I offer tentatively four general thoughts for consideration.

- (1) I suggest it would be helpful to recognize both the particular dignity of the ordained ministry, including the specific role and responsibility of those who are ordained, and its limited scope, and also recognize the correlary, that "ministry" involves all Christians, not just the ordained.
- (2) Given the radical revelation of God in Christ it seems that the centrality of self-sacrificial service and humility in all ministry, not least that of the ordained, should be promoted. Honoring one another while also affirming patterns and orders, but without notions of superior-inferior, is not easy. This is perhaps the most important point and also the most difficult, given our continual wrestling with the world, the flesh, and the devil.
- (3) Given the giftedness of all Christians and the way the Body must work in harmony it seems that the exercise of leadership should follow collegial models rather than authoritarian models that are rigidly hierarchical.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ A third position, held almost solely by conservative Evangelicals, argues that headship applies in the home but not in the Church. Besides being unworkable, this contradicts 1 Timothy 2.8-15, in which the words "men" and "women" in the two opening verses cover everyone in the congregation, including single women. Cf. R. T. Beckwith in *Why Not? Priesthood and Ministry of Women: A Theological Study*, ed. Michael Bruce and G. E. Duffield (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1972), 136.

¹⁵⁰ In the seminary where I have taught for most of my career the Dean/President is clearly the one with chief authority and responsibility for the school, answerable to the Board of Trustees. I have seen some Dean/Presidents exercise this authority in very collegial ways, enabling the community to embody something of the ideal I am describing of combining ordered relations with equal dignity, respect, and contribution of gifts and abilities.

- (4) Given the extensive roles that women fulfill in the Bible I suggest the Church should find ways to promote women today in all forms of ministry, apart from the specific offices of bishop and presbyter/priest.

Hermeneutical Challenges

Having now presented my views on our topic I will step back and very briefly look at the major foundational issue affecting any such study. Hermeneutics is the discipline that includes, “asking critically what exactly we are doing when we read, understand, or apply texts. Hermeneutics explores the conditions and criteria that operate to try to ensure responsible, valid, fruitful, or appropriate interpretation.”¹⁵¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this issue,¹⁵² but I want to offer a very general comparison between the hermeneutical approach I have tried to take in this paper and the view that there is a trajectory in Scripture that supports women's ordination.

Within the Bible there is indeed a progression of revelation that shows some earlier ideas or practices modified, or even eliminated, as time goes on. The greatest shift, of course, is between the Old Testament and the New, as these very terms suggest. In Christ all is transformed, and some of the earlier ways of living out the life of God's People fall away, such as the food laws. The hotly contested debate in the New Testament over the question of circumcision is another major example. So the view that Christ has brought a new vision regarding women's roles makes sense, and indeed I have affirmed it in this article. But not all change is progress. We need to discern which forms of growth are in keeping with the genetic code, even if the oak may look quite different from the acorn, and distinguish them from forms of growth that are aberrant mutations.¹⁵³

As I have noted earlier, to promote the ordination of women a number of scholars have argued that Christ brought a radically new pattern of relationship between men and women, not just new ways of relating within the old pattern established in creation.¹⁵⁴ According to this view, these breakthrough passages are foundational and relativize passages which represent old ways of relating. The new creation has been inaugurated so our orientation is now the future, not the past.

¹⁵¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 4, cited in Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell, ed., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 10.

¹⁵² Porter and Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, offers a helpful introduction to this complex field of study.

¹⁵³ Some of the variety of ways that are used for such discernment can be found in most guides to the interpretation of the Bible, and also see Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*, 1-28; I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology, with Essays by Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Stanley E. Porter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, Counterpoints Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women*. Swartley's inclusion of the issue of Sabbath brings up the other pattern for human life that is established in the creation. The spectrum of views on the Sabbath parallels that regarding the male and female relations, from keeping the Sabbath literally (on Saturday) to seeing it as now done away with, becoming a metaphor of the new Age, with many options in between. See *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, ed. Christopher John Donato (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011).

¹⁵⁴ See Gordon Fee's carefully nuanced discussion in “Male and Female in the New Creation,” 177-85.

For some, like William Webb, there is a “redemptive trajectory” to Scripture, and he views the new creation is one criterion out of 18 for trying to determine the guidance Scripture gives us as we sort out which components within Scripture are cultural and which are transcultural.¹⁵⁵ His study comes to the conclusion that Scripture would point to either a “complementary egalitarian” position (his own view) or an “ultra-soft patriarchy,” which views, he says, are very close to one another.¹⁵⁶

For others, like Kevin Giles, the new creation plays a more central role. “The Bible does not hold that the ideal lies in the past in an idyllic Eden. This ideal is in the future, in the age to come,” to the extent that, “the apostle Paul can even annul *in some way* the creation givens of sex.”¹⁵⁷ Given the primacy of such an eschatological future Giles concludes,

So I have posited the rule for a correct theological reading of Scripture on the man-woman relationship: *All texts that imply the equality of the sexes speak of God's ultimate eschatological ideal; all texts that speak of the subordination of women are culturally limited, time bound, practical advice to women living in a culture that took for granted the subordination of women. They do not apply in our age.*¹⁵⁸

A primary stimulus for Giles to reconsider the biblical teaching is our contemporary culture.

It almost seems that through the change in culture God is screaming out to us, “I have set women free in this period of history. I am the God who liberates and lifts up the downtrodden. I want you to read the Scripture afresh and discover that equality of consideration is my revealed will. I have made women and men alike in my image and likeness, and I have given them authority in my world. Change your ways. If your theology devalues women, it does not reflect my mind.”¹⁵⁹

For Giles any ordering includes a devaluing.¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, the vision I have presented of an ordering that does not include rank or status is, literally, nonsense.

It appears, then, that certain values of modern Western culture embody the eschatological ideals of the future to which the Bible points. Now, there is no doubt that culture can convey God's truth,¹⁶¹ and that we are all influenced by our culture, and that, “it is highly

¹⁵⁵ Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*. His discussion of “Criterion 8: Basis in New Creation” is found on pages 145-52. While he has some helpful insights, see the extensive critique of Webb in Reaoch, *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate*. Reaoch also includes some critique of Giles as well.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁵⁷ Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordination: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 177 (emphasis original).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 268 (emphasis original).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 202. Similarly John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 51-73 and *passim*.

¹⁶⁰ See footnote 138 above.

¹⁶¹ Though we can only discern the truth in culture by its congruence with Christ, who is the Truth.

doubtful that God wants us to play ‘First-Century Semites.’”¹⁶² But Kevin Vanhoozer raises the crucial question for such enterprises:

Can one decide what counts as redemptive movement without pretending to stand at the end of the process, without claiming to know what kind of eschatological world the Spirit is creating? Can one go beyond Scripture via the redemptive trajectory approach and at the same time prevent one's own view of the trajectory from lording it over the text?¹⁶³

Interestingly, the values affirmed for women by Giles are ones which I think Paul and the rest of the New Testament would affirm. So these values are not the issue, but rather the question is what these values look like in God's inaugurated Kingdom. Is the eschatological Kingdom really as non-ordered as Giles suggests?¹⁶⁴

There has indeed been a breakthrough in Christ, but it is not the elimination of the ordered relationship between male and female. Rather, it is the revelation in the Son of the true nature of a headship relation. This revelation in turn helps us return to Genesis 1-2 and see more clearly the nature of the relation between male and female, created in the image of God. We can see all forms of misogyny as expressions of the curse in Genesis 3, not the ordered relationship in Genesis 2. The man and woman in union and harmony were together to have dominion over the earth, but instead of together exercising dominion over the earth they turned upon each other and tried to dominate one another. This is our common experience, but we can say, “from the beginning it was not so” (cf. Matt. 19.8). So the pattern in creation is not replaced with something different in the eschaton, but rather we can look forward to a purification and deepening of the creation ideal. Male headship, “is not a past phenomenon which we have a duty and privilege to eradicate. Instead, it belongs to the future... It is to be embodied increasingly and progressively in this present age. The church is to work on it in holiness, righteousness, and love. It will be perfected at the parousia.”¹⁶⁵

What might be an alternative to this attempt that we see in Giles, amongst others, to focus on the eschaton? Vanhoozer says that his own preference is for a, “Christological trajectory, of a movement that leads to the wisdom of God summed up in Jesus Christ, not to something beyond it, even when that something is associated with the Spirit.”¹⁶⁶ For him this requires an attention to the canon. “Doctrine directs the church to speak and act in new situations (e.g., ‘beyond the Bible’) biblically by cultivating what I will call ‘the mind of the canon.’” Expositors of Scripture, “must learn to read particular texts in

¹⁶² Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women*, 17.

¹⁶³ “Into the Great ‘Beyond’: A Theologian’s Response to the Marshall Plan,” in I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology, with Essays by Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Stanley E. Porter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 91.

¹⁶⁴ “Equality is not the deepest thing, you know.” C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 148, quoted by Peter Kreeft, “Fourteen Questions about Heaven: 2. Will we all be equal in heaven?” at <http://catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0462.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Letham, “The Man-Woman Debate,” 74.

¹⁶⁶ Vanhoozer, “Into the Great Beyond,” 91.

the context of the whole of Scripture, and in relation to the center of Scripture, the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶⁷

This ideal is very similar to the approach I have tried to follow.¹⁶⁸ In this paper I have tried to show that the various passages in the Bible related to women's ordination can be seen as fitting together in a coherent whole, and that the actual nature of the relations as lived within the patterns of relationship are life-giving and beautiful expressions of the life of the Servant-King, including His relation to His Father. The church has often failed to live out this vision very well, but this is the apostolic tradition which the church has received and to which it should remain faithful.¹⁶⁹

Living Into the Glorious Antinomy

So for me the challenge is how to embody such a countercultural vision grounded in the Godhead itself that combines elements that look to us quite incompatible. It is as if we are living on a two-dimensional plane and the biblical revelation is describing a three-dimensional figure. Scripture speaks of a cone, as it were, and all we can hear within the limitations of our two dimensions is triangles and circles.¹⁷⁰ There are a number of such antinomies in Scripture,¹⁷¹ and it is difficult to hold on to both parts of an antinomy. Paul K. Jewett noted that Karl Barth's, “theology of male and female contains an antinomy: The woman is man's partner in life, equal to him in every way; yet she is subordinate to him in an irrevocable way.”¹⁷² Jewett says “the older theological tradition” did not have such an antinomy; it simply viewed the woman as inferior.¹⁷³ He calls the older view the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 93. Vanhoozer also notes the role of the larger Christian community, past and present (especially cross-culturally). “Perhaps the most effective way of guarding oneself from hermeneutical idolatry—the omnipresent danger of making a god of one's own interpretations—is to be aware of how other saints demonstrate canon sense. Christians have been staging the theodrama in their respective contexts for centuries.” “A Drama-of-Redemption Model: Always Performing?,” in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 181. I think the role of tradition is particularly significant, along the lines presented by Kallistos Ware, “Man, Woman, and the Priesthood of Christ,” 68-90.

¹⁶⁸ Vanhoozer's own procedure for doing what he describes is not very precise. See his presentation and the responses to it in *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*.

¹⁶⁹ “Adherence to the authority of Scripture in the governance of the church involves adherence to the apostolic *paradosis* or tradition as a whole, whether in relation to belief or practice. The church cannot claim to be ‘apostolic’ otherwise. Since the apostle himself has no claim on our ‘obedience’ or ‘imitation’ except insofar as he acts ‘by the will of God’, or with ‘Christ speaking in him’, or according to ‘the mind of Christ’ or ‘the command of the Lord’—except indeed as his word is the word of God—adherence to the apostolic tradition as witnessed by the scripture is the test of loyalty to Christ himself.” Donald Robinson, “Lambeth 1988: Authority, Unity, and the Ordination of Women,” 463.

¹⁷⁰ Cutting a cone horizontally gives the shape of a circle and cutting it vertically gives the shape of a triangle. The triangles and circles illustration is from Hugh Ross, *Beyond the Cosmos: The Extra-Dimensionality of God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), 55. Ross is indebted to Edwin A. Abbot (1839-1926), an Anglican clergyman, theologian, mathematician, and Shakespeare scholar. Abbot wrote a classic little book using this idea of a two dimensional world to reflect on the idea of higher dimensions and also as a social commentary on society in his own day. His book, *Flatland*, is in print and also available in its second edition form [1884] on-line at http://www.totse.com/en/ego/science_fiction/flatland.html.

¹⁷¹ See my article “The Moon of our Darkness” for a few examples.

¹⁷² Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 111.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 111-12.

Jewish view and the “revolutionary new approach” the Christian view.¹⁷⁴ Jewett exemplifies how difficult it is to maintain the antinomy, for he goes on to say, “Because these two perspectives—the Jewish and the Christian—are incompatible, there is no satisfying way to harmonize the Pauline argument for female subordination with the larger Christian vision of which the great apostle to the Gentiles was himself the primary architect.”¹⁷⁵

But if the discussion in this article is accurate then Jewett's understanding of the antinomy is not correct, since he equates subordination with inferiority. Given our experience in this world this view is understandable, but I have tried to show that it is not the vision of the New Testament. Nevertheless, there is an antinomy, as Barth recognized, and we should, I think, seek for a “satisfying way to harmonize” these points of antinomy given in Scripture.

While it is possible to understand the shape of an antinomy, it seems that an antinomy will be harmonized less on the level of thought than on the level of concrete embodiment, perhaps similar to what Vanhoozer refers to as taking part in the theodrama scripted by Scripture.¹⁷⁶ In this regard the saints are the best commentaries on Scripture, exemplifying a myriad of ways in which the life of Christ is manifested in this world, as they live out the tension of the already inaugurated Kingdom of God that is not yet experienced fully.

Accordingly, I think the way forward is to hold on to both the triangles and the circles in Scripture and seek God's wisdom for how to live. These patterns are very beautiful and life-giving when lived well. But we see from Paul's letters, and throughout history up to the present moment, how difficult it is to catch the vision, let alone live it.¹⁷⁷ Since the Kingdom is to some extent counter to every human culture, it will always be difficult to catch the vision and live it, though the difficulties may change from culture to culture, or from era to era within a given culture. But if we lose hold of either the triangles or the circles we will not have a chance to perform this dance in our time and place (to mix a couple of metaphors).¹⁷⁸

C. S. Lewis uses this image of a ballroom dance in his article against women's ordination.¹⁷⁹ His brief comments touch on many key aspects of the subject and bear careful reading since they are very condensed. One of his main points is the contrast

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 112.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 112-13.

¹⁷⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “A Drama-of-Redemption Model: Always Performing?,” 151-99.

¹⁷⁷ We human beings are fulfilling God's command to have dominion (Gen. 1.26-31), after a fashion, but in our fallen condition, centered on ourselves and controlled by selfish passions, we often lack the humility and God-centeredness to live as we should, and we engage in warfare against one another (cf. Jam. 4.1-10). The Cross reveals God's own humble heart of love and service, and its redemption cuts through this bondage, and the patterns of conflict it produces. “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6.14).

¹⁷⁸ The image of ballroom dancing captures something of an ordered pattern with unity and equal dignity. The man's leading does not demean the woman, but sets them both free to create something beautiful together that delights them both and which could not be accomplished without one another.

¹⁷⁹ “Priestesses in the Church?” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 234-39.

between a common sense view of the question and a Christian view. What he says correlates with the point just made about antinomies in Scripture.

The Church claims to be the bearer of a revelation. If that claim is false then we want not to make priestesses but to abolish priests. If it is true, then we should expect to find in the Church an element which unbelievers will call irrational and which believers will call supra-rational. There ought to be something in it opaque to our reason though not contrary to it—as the facts of sex and sense on the natural level are opaque. And that is the real issue. The Church of England can remain a church only if she retains this opaque element. If we abandon that, if we retain only what can be justified by standards of prudence and convenience at the bar of enlightened common sense, then we exchange revelation for that old wraith Natural Religion.”¹⁸⁰

These are very sobering comments. Is the matter that serious? If, as St. Jerome could say at one point, “The whole world groaned, and was astonished to find itself Arian,”¹⁸¹ perhaps embracing wrong beliefs can be more an illness for a season than extinction. But either way, is the ordination of women so serious an issue? Certainly there are people on both sides of the women's ordination issue who believe the church must retain Christianity's opaque elements.

So how do the issues related to women's ordination correspond to the opaqueness of the revelation to which Lewis refers? The main argument of this article is that these issues are indeed part of the revelation, and the way towards health will be through embracing this countercultural but coherent biblical vision in life-giving ways, beyond a false egalitarianism and a false hierarchialism. As with all aspects of life in Christ, such a life is beyond our ability in ourselves.¹⁸² It is not without reason that our Lord has us pray daily to God our Father, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

The dance between male and female is one part of this life which God gives, and the Scripture reveals something of its pattern in God's kingdom. The revelation of the New Testament on these matters gives us reasons for questioning the ordination of women.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 238.

¹⁸¹ Jerome, *The Dialogue against the Luciferians*, 19, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, nd), 6:329.

¹⁸² Indeed, we are dependent upon God for absolutely every aspect of life. The breath you are taking this moment is a personal gift to you from God. All of our life is sourced and sustained by God.