

The Service of Women in and for the Church
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When God made us in his image both male and female he established the foundation for marriage and the family. What is implicit in God's creation is made explicit in his law. When the first chapters of Genesis are regarded as religious myth and not the defining history of the human race the foundation for divine law governing men, women, children, marriage, and family is destroyed. The written law becomes arbitrary rules that don't make much sense. Once the rationale is gone, the law becomes a list of do's and don'ts that cannot be understood or easily applied.

Once God's law has been reduced to a list of rules there is no way to alter or eliminate a rule without causing confusion and offense. If women aren't required to wear hats in church anymore, why shouldn't they be permitted to preach? Why is one rule more sacred than the other? The same Bible addresses both. Some churches require women to cover their heads in church. They are very strict. Some churches permit women to leave their heads uncovered but do not permit them to vote. They are strict. Some churches permit their women to vote but do not permit them to preach. They are kind of strict. Some churches permit their women to preach but still remain guilty of sexism because they are liberal and liberals must always be inventing pretensions to guilt to take the place of the real sins that they refuse to admit.

So, where do you stand? Are you very strict? Strict? Kind of strict? Or liberal? How many rules do you have and how strictly do you enforce them?

There must be a better way to approach this. And there is. We begin by dispensing with all rules and resolving to determine what the service of women in and for the church is by taking to heart what God did and said when he created us in his image male and female.

In the beginning God made us in his image. Moses writes, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Genesis 1, 27 God did not create an androgynous human being. Essential to being created in God's image is being created either male or female. In his essay, "It is Not Given to Women to Teach: A Lex in Search of a Ratio," Bill Weinrich points out that our maleness and femaleness are not accidental properties of our humanity but constitutive aspects of being human. As Weinrich puts it: "There is no humanity, no personhood,

apart from male humanity, male personhood and female humanity, female personhood.”
(1)

What God wants men and women to do and to refrain from doing does not proceed out of his arbitrary will disconnected from what he made man and woman to be when he created us in his image. In fact, it is always to Creation that we must turn if we are to understand what it means to be male and female.

This is how Jesus approaches the subject. In defending the sanctity of marriage and condemning divorce, Jesus did not consult a list of rules gleaned from a body of principles established by deductions and extrapolations from the law. He appealed to creation. When the Pharisees pressed him for his position on divorce, St. Matthew records Jesus' response:

And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”
Matthew 19, 4-6

This is also how the Apostle Paul approaches the subject. St. Paul condemns both homosexual lusts (what today is called “orientation”) and homosexual activity by appealing to creation. He writes:

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. Romans 1, 26-27

What is natural? What is unnatural? Natural is that which accords with what God created us to be. God made them male and female. What is unnatural is that which perverts or distorts what God created us to be.

God as Creator is God as Lawgiver, Savior, and Judge. If God is not Creator, he has no authority to establish law. He has no authority to deliver from the law's judgment. He has no authority to judge. Indeed, he is not really God at all.

The notion that the human species evolved from a primary organism has become established dogma throughout the educated classes in the West. This has effectively disconnected religion from creation. Naïve Christians assume that if we insist that God directed the evolution of man we can acquiesce to rendering as mythical the history of Genesis. But the history of Creation is the foundation upon which we must rely if we are to understand what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. The argument that it does not matter how God created us as long as we know that he created us is a false argument. It matters very much how God created us. There is a wealth of vital instruction for us in the details of Creation.

Consider the specifics of the creation of woman recorded for us by Moses in the second chapter of Genesis. Moses recounts how God made Adam out of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul. He recounts how God gave Adam the command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. First God formed Adam from the dust of the ground. Then God gave him the responsibility of caring for the Garden of Eden. Then God commanded him not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden. Then God gave Adam lordship over the animals as evidenced by him naming them. Only then did God create woman. Moses writes:

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2, 21-24

The divine command not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden came to Eve through Adam. The divine command to care for the Garden of Eden came to Eve through Adam. Eve's flesh and bones came from Adam. She was called woman because she was taken out of man.

The chronological order of Creation establishes the order for the right relationship between man and woman from the beginning to the end of time. God speaks to the woman through the man. The man spoke for God. God chose to speak to the woman through the man. When the man disobeyed God it was because he listened to the voice of his wife. God had not given to Eve the authority to speak on his behalf to the man. By listening to her voice and obeying her Adam acquiesced to her assuming the

pastoral office. He made her his pastor. He ordained her. The ordination of a woman was the original sin.

This is what God said. He said,

“Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.”
(Genesis 3, 17)

God made Adam Eve’s pastor. He did not make Eve Adam’s pastor. This much is clear. Why? Why did God give preaching to a man to do and not to a woman to do? Asking the “why” question can be a dangerous activity in the theological task. God doesn’t need to explain himself to us. But there is something implicit that we would do well to make explicit. By implicit, I mean self evident. What was it? What do we learn from the creation itself that teaches us it was wrong for Eve to serve as Adam’s pastor and that it remains wrong as long as men are men and women are women?

Is it that God is our Father and the pastor is the iconic representation of God? Since a man can be a father and a woman cannot, is it wrong for a woman to represent God? Or is it that Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride? If a woman were to stand before the bride of Christ in the stead of Christ a lesbian kind of relationship would be depicted?

The argument from the fatherhood of God and Christ as the heavenly bridegroom is not grounded in the doctrine of creation so much as in the doctrine of God. It is an argument from who and what God is, that is, from God’s nature to the pastoral office. It disallows women pastors because having women pastors contradicts what God has revealed to us about himself.

There is much to commend this approach. The goddess movement has invaded even the church itself. It cannot be mere coincidence that one generation gave us women pastors and the next generation gave us mother god. Several years ago I heard a sermon on a Grand Forks radio station preached by a pastor from a local congregation of the ELCA. It was Trinity Sunday. He asserted that while the church has traditionally addressed God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it would be just as legitimate to address God as Mother, Lover, and Friend. When women stand in the pulpit and at the altar to represent Christ confusion about God results.

But there is a weakness to the iconic or representative argument against women preachers. The fact is that a woman can and does represent God by God's own command: "Honor thy father and thy mother." Both fathers and mothers speak and act as God's representatives. Why may a mother be an icon of the Deity in the home but not in the church?

Furthermore, the iconic argument against women preachers ignores the essence of the preaching office in order to focus on what is secondary. We Lutherans conceive of the pastoral office, not in terms of pastors, but in terms of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. It is not so much what a pastor is as it is what a pastor does.

It is true that one may not do what the office gives one to do unless one is entrusted with the office. The office and the functions of the office go together. We cannot understand the office apart from the actual carrying out of the functions. If we are to stay with the language of our Confessions we will speak of the pastoral office more in terms of what the pastor does than in terms of what the pastor is. The office is essentially functional. That is to say, it is not the office except insofar as it is functioning as the office.

At this point I would like to try to clear up a bit of confusion. In recent years the formless model of the ministry popularized by the Wauwatosa theologians and adopted as the official doctrine of the WELS and the ELS has been designated the functional view. This is a very misleading designation. The problem with the formless doctrine of the ministry is not that it defines the office functionally – one wonders how else a Lutheran could define it – but because it falsely claims that the preaching office is infinitely divisible. We may, according to this opinion, chop up the office into innumerable constituent parts and retain the essence of the office itself. Each new office formed requires a divine call, of course.

Parochial school teachers receive "divine calls" to teach children in the Christian day school because religion is on the curriculum. Sunday school teachers receive "divine calls" to teach Sunday school. Laymen receive "divine calls" for the sole purpose of giving the Lord's Supper to the pastor during the Divine Service twice a month. Sometimes, laymen receive "divine calls" to read the pastor's sermon and administer the Lord's Supper to the congregation when the pastor is off on a vacation.

The formless doctrine of the ministry does not reckon with the fact that our Lord formed the office when he established it. He did not simply toss out the duties of the office and tell his Church to assemble the duties into offices. He gave to the original office holders

the duty to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. These divinely ordained duties form the fullness of the office. The Good Shepherd (Pastor) wishes to feed his Church by means of the pure preaching of his gospel and the right administration of his holy sacraments. He has established the pastoral office to do just that. The pastoral office is Christ's office and remains Christ's office. The primary pastoral task is the preaching of the gospel. It is public, both in the sense of official and in the literal sense of right out in the open. The public preaching is what receives emphasis in both the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

The formless doctrine of the ministry operates under a theological bait and switch that works like this. First, the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are reduced to a theological abstraction such as "using the means of grace." This abstraction replaces the concrete and specific duties that God gave to the office that he actually instituted. Then, after the substitution has been made, various kinds of activities that could fall under the designation "using the means of grace" are assigned to various people, each of whom carries out a part of the ministry and since a part is of the same essence as the whole a part of the ministry is the ministry. There is no form to hold it together. Anything even tangentially related to the abstract concept of using the means of grace becomes the ministry.

The problem with this model is not that it is functional. It is that it distorts the functions that make the office the office. The right definition of the office is given in the Augsburg Confession and it is a functional definition. We read:

That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works. (AC V, Triglotta)

There is nothing wrong with defining the office of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments according to the function of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments! This is precisely how the office should be understood. Being a pastor benefits no one. Preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments saves souls. One is not justified by seeing that a male of the species is a

more accurate icon of the Savior than a female. One is justified by faith in the gospel that the preacher is called to preach.

The iconic argument is of limited value in understanding why God forbids women to preach. The reason a woman may not be a pastor is not primarily because this contradicts who and what God is. The reason a woman may not be a pastor is because it contradicts who and what a woman is.

A man is called to preach. He is not called to preach what is within him. He is called to preach what is outside of him. The word of the Lord always comes to the prophet. Only Jesus spoke from himself, on his own authority: "Amen, amen, I say to you." Only Jesus speaks from within. The preachers God sends speak from without. It is the external word. It is given by God to the man to speak.

But a woman does not speak from without. It is against her nature to do so. The greatest blessing that God bestows on woman as woman is within her. Moses writes:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1, 27-28)

The very first blessing bestowed on man and woman was the fruitful womb. "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" What is this blessing? It is a human being made in the image of God. Where is this blessing? It is within the woman. Whether Cain or Christ, the woman is blessed in conceiving a child. She is blessed in nurturing the child within her own body. She is blessed in nursing the child at her breast. In each instance, the blessing is within the woman. And she brings God's blessing to the child by giving to the child what is within her.

God blesses woman by what he puts inside of her. Eve's baby is made in the image of God. Mary's baby is the image of God. Within Eve's womb lives the entire human race. So Adam calls her Eve because she is the mother of all the living. (Genesis 3, 20) Within Mary's womb lives all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2, 9) The woman looks within herself and she sees what no man can see. She feels what no man can feel.

Consider Sarah. It was an act of selfless love when she gave Hagar to Abram to become the mother of his son. She knew the risk she was taking. She was a woman!

She knew she could not conceive. She knew Hagar could. She understood the nature of a woman as Abram couldn't possibly understand. She was taking a risk. She was risking giving to Hagar a preeminence to which she was not entitled. And Hagar took advantage of the situation. She acted so high and mighty, so insufferably snooty, that Sarah had to throw her out.

Here is true love! She knew that God had promised a son to Abram, a son from his own body. She did not know that she was to be the mother. God had not said so. How could she know? She did not know that the child would be born outside of the laws of nature with which she was quite familiar. God had not said so. How could she know? She did not lack faith. She believed the promise. It was precisely because of her faith in the promise that God gave to Abram that she set out to get the job done in the only way she knew how. And what does the Bible say? It says: "And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai." (Genesis 16, 2)

The woman has faith. But she may not preach. Eve believes in the promise. Why else would she have said at the birth of her firstborn son, "I have gotten a man: the LORD?" Eve believes the promise but proclaims the first murderer as God incarnate. Sarah believes the promise and gives Hagar to Abram, which is the source of conflict in the Middle East to this very day.

A woman cannot do what is womanly to do as a pastor. It is against her nature not to speak, act, and think according to what is inside of her, because her greatest glory is what God puts inside of her, the child who grows inside of her, who is nurtured by her and is sustained as she gives what is in her to give.

But the preaching office does not benefit us by the preacher giving us what is within him to give. It benefits us by giving to us what is outside of mere men and women. It is the external, not the internal, word by which the church is born and nourished.

Listen to what Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles about departing from the external word and relying on what is within. He says:

And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may be protected against the enthusiasts, i.e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Muenzer did, and many still do at the present day, who wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare. For the Papacy also is

nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with [in] his church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word.

All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts, and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit, and nevertheless he accomplished this through other outward words. . . .

In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning [from the first fall] to the end of the world, [its poison] having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power [life], and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the Papacy and Mahomet. Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments. Part III, Article VIII

We are not benefited spiritually by another giving us what is within him or her to give. We benefit spiritually when we are given what comes from outside of us.

Everyone born of the flesh, whether male or female, is a born enthusiast. As Luther notes, “enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world.” Enthusiasm is of the very essence of sin. A man is no less an enthusiast than a woman. Both Adam and Eve were led away from God’s objective word to inner feelings.

Both men and women are by nature enthusiasts. They look for the answer to their spiritual problems wherein those problems reside. They look within and trust in their own sin to save them. God justifies both men and women in the same way. They are justified by faith in the external gospel. Sin is sin and faith is faith. There is no qualitative difference between the sin of men and women or between the faith of men and women. There is no inherent spiritual difference between men and women. Furthermore, when it comes to imparting the truth that is written down in the Bible, in the Creeds, and in the hymns of the Church, this communication is neither male nor female.

We’re talking about preaching – not believing, not praising, not even catechizing – but preaching. Most preachers preach what is within them to preach. This is not what God calls preachers to do. God calls preachers to preach what is written. The preacher must, if he is to be faithful, direct himself away from what resides within and focus

entirely on what stands as objectively true outside of himself or his experience of it. It is a rarity indeed when a man does this. It is not possible for a woman to do so. It is not just that it is against her sinful nature to do. It is against a man's sinful nature as well. But it is against her womanly nature.

And that is why God did not make a woman to preach. For a woman to become a preacher is for her to deny what God made her. The highest honor that God bestows on Christian women is to make them faithful wives and fruitful mothers. (Genesis 1, 28)

God blessed them and said to them to be fruitful. He did not curse them with children. He blessed them with children. He did not give them a list of options from which to choose, depending on their own self-understanding and personal preferences. He made them male and female, he joined them as one flesh, and he blessed them to have children.

To deny that children are a blessing from God is to distort the very nature of woman and to steal from her the honor God gave her. (Psalm 127, 3-5) To argue that there is a higher calling for a woman than to the divinely instituted office of Christian wife and mother is to demean womanhood, to despise children, and to hold God's creative work in contempt.

While the Christian Church scurries here and there for any tiny shred of biblical warrant for extending divine calls to women to do this or that activity in the church – anything by which the service of women may be glorified – she stands in mute acquiescence to the demeaning of true womanly glory by adopting the standards of the current culture of death as her own. A fictitious “divine call” to serve as a day school teacher, DCE, DE, DCM, and whatever other D's the church dishes up cannot possibly sanctify womanhood when the same church goes along with a culture that treats children as mere commodities in the market of what women want. This culture of death has enshrined within its law the right to kill unborn babies because babies are no longer valued according to God's Word but according to the fickle and sinful desires of selfish men and women. The Church must repudiate this culture at its very root. The divine call that God gives to Christian women is rooted in the first blessing that God spoke to Adam and Eve in paradise. The Church has no authority to mediate this call. The Christian woman does not need the Church to sanctify what God has made holy. She needs the Church to give her loud and clear “Amen!” to what God sanctified in creation and again from the Virgin's womb.

A few years ago, my wife got into a conversation with an ELS pastor's wife who told my wife how blessed she was to have so many children. My wife agreed. The woman then

shared with my wife her desire for more than the two children she had, but her husband did not want any more children. Naturally, this ELS pastor taught his parishioners that it was a sin for a woman to vote in the voters' assembly of the congregation. Is not the hypocrisy too obvious to deny? A man denies to woman what God blessed woman to do, and then, should she desire to do what a man is given to do, he denies her that as well. So what purpose then does a woman serve? Is it to please the man? Or is it to serve God? To assert the headship of man while deliberately disconnecting it from the blessing of the fruitful womb is pure male chauvinism.

There are women who, for one reason or another, do not marry. There are women who marry and are physically incapable of having children. There are women who can have children but might put their lives at risk if they did. There are many ways that a woman can fulfill her womanly nature without having and nurturing her own children. The fact that God withholds a blessing from one of his children does not diminish the blessing. God only knows why God does what he does and does not do what he does not do. We do know that having and nurturing and providing Christian instruction for children is a high honor given by God to women to do and it is an ungrateful and perverse generation of Christians that treats what is holy as if it were common and of little value.

The Psalmist speaks for God and sets forth God's values when he describes in these words how the man who fears the LORD is blessed:

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Psalm 128, 3

Children are true wealth. This is not merely a socially conditioned opinion. It is God's infallible declaration, as the Psalmist also writes:

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate. Psalm 127, 3-5

Many Christians have wondered over the years why God appeared so tolerant of polygamy during the times of the Old Testament patriarchs. That God is patient should not be misconstrued to mean he is lax. The account of the family life of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is sufficient biblical proof that God disapproves of polygamy. Nowadays, with the exception of a little sect presently being persecuted by the State of Texas, polygamy is practiced consecutively rather than concurrently. Marriage is in disrepair. Christian couples divorce at a rate as high as those who don't confess the

faith. Also among church goers men and women live together and enjoy the marital bed without first getting married. Fornication is celebrated by the popular culture. In the name of helping the poor, the Welfare State subsidizes illegitimacy. As the culture decays the Church appears more willing to conform to it than to challenge its assumptions and governing principles. You know the old saying, "When the church marries the culture she soon becomes a widow." When the Church herself is a widow she can hardly depend on the Church for assistance.

The theoretical rejection of our identify as men and woman created in the image of God may be expressed by the adoption of the doctrine of evolution, but the real rejection takes place in the practice of planned barrenness. Despising the fruit of the womb is to despise the One who gives it and the one who bears it. When the motherhood of woman is despised, the fatherhood of God falls with it.

The Apostle Paul grounded his teaching on the service of women in the church solidly within the original and ongoing creation of God. His words to Timothy prohibiting women pastors need to be heard within their wider context. Listen to the inspired apostle:

In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. 1 Timothy 2, 9-15

The beauty of a Christian woman is her modesty and willingness to accept from God his gifts on his terms. This is what it means to submit. No one who understands God's gracious dealings with us will see this submission as in any way demeaning to the woman.

Note how the apostle points to the chronological order of creation. Adam was formed first. Implicit here is that God gave to Adam the command not to eat the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. It was Adam who gave this command to Eve. It was Eve who was deceived. She was deceived because she trusted in her feelings. She was turned away from the external divine word to her inner feelings. The womanly feelings

so vital in the care and nurture of a child are no basis for authoritative preaching. This vocation is closed to her.

But the vocation of Christian motherhood is blessed. So says the apostle. In fact, she will be saved in childbearing. This does not mean that she will be kept safe as she goes through the delivering of a child. It means that the woman, as she fulfills the office God gave her in creation as the wife of the man and as the mother of children, will be saved from sin, death, and eternal damnation. Earlier in this Epistle the apostle writes, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 1 Timothy 1, 15 God saves us within a certain context. He doesn't rapture us out of the world when the world becomes too godless for us to tolerate. He saves us within the vocation to which he calls us. The woman will be saved as she lives within her vocation. She will be saved in childbearing.

When, in his First Epistle to Timothy, the apostle gives instructions concerning who should and should not be put on the list of widows to receive charity from the Church, he argues against including young women who are still of childbearing years. He says concerning them:

Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. 1 Timothy 5, 14

Is this just the notional opinions of an aging man? Or is this the divinely inspired instruction of Christ's apostle that women do what God has placed in their nature to do? It is not just a biological function common to the animal world. It is grounded in the original creation in the image of God. It is confirmed by the incarnation of the Son of God in the virgin womb of Mary. The apostle knows what is in the nature of a woman to do and he understands why the work is so precious.

St. Paul also appeals to creation when he denies the preaching office to women in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. In chapter eleven, we read:

Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. 1 Corinthians 11, 14-15.

A woman is a woman and a man is a man. Nature itself teaches us that a woman who seeks to rule over a man dishonors herself, whereas a woman who submits to her husband honors both him and God. The custom of a woman covering her head may or

may not express this truth, but the truth remains true even when the custom has lost its meaning.

Later on, in chapter fourteen, St. Paul writes:

As in all the churches of the saints, let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 1 Corinthians 14, 33b-35

The speaking that the apostle forbids is the authoritative speaking that belongs to the preaching office. This must be understood. He is not forbidding any and all speaking. She may not speak authoritatively. The Lessons in the Divine Service and the sacramental portions of the Liturgy are divine and authoritative. This activity is closed to her. A woman may not preach. She may not participate in the preaching of the sermon. Why not? Because it is shameful, that's why. It is ugly, base, and disgusting. This is what the apostle is saying. It is not just a run of the mill act of defiance of authority or the breaking of a rule. It is obscene. It goes against nature.

Women do not serve the church when they seek out the preaching office. God has not, does not, and will not call them into this office.

Indeed, the best way for women to serve the church is not by seeking out an office in the church. The best service women can do for the church is the service they provide to their own husbands and children in their own homes. This is the service that God loves. It is certainly more valuable than whatever monetary remuneration is gained by hiring others to take on the domestic responsibilities while going out to compete with men for jobs, thus depressing wages while depriving children of their mothers. When a Christian wife and mother of small children leaves the children in someone else's care in order to accept an allegedly divine call to an alleged ministry of the church this is no service at all to anyone but is rather a burden upon the home and the church.

This is in no way to diminish the godly service that women do for the church as parochial schoolteachers. This service is not, strictly speaking, the work *of* the church, but it certainly is service *for* the church. The day school is acknowledged as an auxiliary organization of the church, but it is essentially an extension of the home, not the church, an office of the law, not the gospel. The day school teachers get their authority to teach, not from the church, but from the parents of the children. Since the school teachers do not get their authority to teach from the church the church has no authority to extend to

them divine calls. The church has no more responsibility for teaching children than it does for teaching adults. When it comes to the teaching of children in a church sponsored school, fathers and mothers delegate their duties to teachers. There is nothing a parochial schoolteacher does that is not delegated to him or her to do by the parents. A Christian congregation may establish a Christian day school. This does not make the work done by the teachers of such a school the ministry of the church, not if we are using the word “ministry” to refer to the divinely established ministry of the Word.

We can and may speak of a ministry of mercy that encompasses every kind of good deed in which Christians rightly collaborate to do together. It may be providing help for widows who have no children to support them. It may be the establishment of a school to assist parents in their God given responsibility to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It may be an orphanage, a hospital, an old folk’s home, or any other institution in which a Christian ministry of mercy can take root and thrive. There is nothing to prevent women from serving in such auxiliary organizations of the church and much to commend them in doing so.

God excludes women from the ministry of the Word or the preaching office. Why? It is customary among conservative Lutherans to limit the service of women in the church to those offices in which women do not exercise authority over men. So then, is this all there is to it? Is it merely a matter of authority? Then what would prevent a woman from receiving a call to be a pastor – preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, including the celebration of the Lord’s Supper – to a congregation made up entirely of women? She would not be exercising authority over a man if there were no men there.

Believe it or not, this rather absurd hypothetical has become the occasion for an ongoing theological discussion between representatives of the ELS and the WELS over the past few years. The sole reason why the WELS forbids women to serve as pastors is because this would give women authority over men. For this reason, while the WELS is not advocating that women be called as pastors to women (though the practice of women communing women is not unknown in the Wisconsin Synod), she is unable to say that the Bible forbids it.

Is that all that is at stake in the debate about women preachers? Is this solely a matter of who has authority over whom? It is hard to argue that a woman usher is exercising authority over the men in the pews, but there is something unseemly about it nonetheless. It just doesn’t look right. She should not be acting as a representative of the congregation. It is also difficult to conclude the case against women’s suffrage solely by an appeal to the authority of voters over voters. What authority does a voters’

assembly have over the typical male parishioner who does not attend such meetings and pays no attention to what they do and say? A better case would be made, I believe, by pointing out that the domain of a woman is in the home and that it is not proper for men and women to be thrust together in situations where this woman and that man are required to interact with one another without the protection provided by the intervening institutions of marriage and family. To put it simply: It is unnatural. This woman is with that man. They belong together. God made them one flesh. And he made her the mistress of the home. He placed her at the center of domestic life. He gave her children, entrusted her with their care, and gave her womanly gifts by which she can serve him and the whole church by raising Christian children. Why would such a woman leave her children at home in the care of a baby sitter or a henpecked husband so that she can go off to the voters' meeting and do what the men do?

Men and women have been segregated from each other throughout history in a whole host of social arrangements. Why segregate them? When men and women are thrown together to do things together without marriage and family defining the way they are to interact with one another the result is conflict, confusion, adultery, and the consequent degeneration of the family. When marriage and children are at the center of the woman's life, she finds her identity where God himself has established it in creation. Women without husbands and children are also benefited greatly by this stability and they require a stable family life as much as anyone.

The service of women for the church begins at a very young age. A young girl in her teens can offer the greatest service to the church by keeping her virginity for her future husband and choosing as a husband a man who is sincerely devoted to the pure teaching of God's holy word and faithfully attends an orthodox congregation to receive it. A man honors his wife by cherishing her not only as his woman but as the mother of his children.

Are there certain offices the church may create that are especially suitable for women more so than for men? Yes, there are. I am thinking specifically of the office of deaconess. It is not necessary, probably not even desirable that a deaconess be given her theological training by an institution of a synod. It certainly isn't appropriate for men who are studying to be pastors in the church to be sitting next to women during their seminary training as these women receive instruction to be what God forbids them to be. A church that does not have a pastor competent to give a deaconess the theological training she needs is a church that should not have a deaconess.

But a deaconess can be a tremendous benefit to the church specifically in serving women in a way that a pastor cannot. While private confession and absolution is a

great blessing to the church, there are matters that are simply inappropriate for a woman to discuss with a man who is not her husband. God only knows how many pastor / parishioner relationships that began with a woman confessing her sexual sins to her pastor were concluded by the two of them sinning sexually together.

A woman can speak from within herself to another woman in a way a man cannot. No, this is not the ministry of the word, but it is a blessing from God. A woman can listen, understand, and give woman to woman counsel that no pastor can give.

But such service doesn't even need a formal position. Women do what God gives them to do. A mother's wisdom is not to be despised. One man's wife can help another man's wife to be a faithful Christian wife. Pastors should encourage women to go to women to get the kind of help that a woman can give.

Hanna held no office in the church, but in giving Samuel to Eli she made a greater contribution to the ministry of the church than Eli himself did, for his sons were worthless. Mary held no office in the church, but she stands until the end of time as the symbol of virginal purity, motherly devotion, Christian faith, and humble obedience. It is to these mothers in the faith that we would direct our daughters and wives, to find in them models to follow.

The preacher preaches what God gives him to preach. He subordinates all relationships to the pure doctrine, because the law is designed to condemn sinners, not to enable them to do better and the gospel is a message of an objective absolution that is not contingent on how you feel or what is inside of you, but upon the vicarious obedience of Christ who died for us all. The work of the preaching office is very male indeed. As women seek to establish relationships and to fix so many things at the same time, the pure preaching of the gospel always subordinates relationships to the truth.

But the woman who may not preach cannot help but praise her God. For he puts down the mighty from their seats and exalts lowly mothers, stuck in the drudgery of caring for babies, cleaning up other people's messes, and wondering when the job will ever be done. God says that their service is holy, and for Christ's sake it is. It is precious to God and it is indispensable to the church.

(1) From "It is not Given to Women to Teach: A Lex in Search of a Ratio," by William Weinrich, Church and Ministry Today: Three Confessional Lutheran Essays, John A. Maxfield, Editor, Luther Academy 2001.