

JG VOS File

## ARE WOMEN ELDERS SCRIPTURAL?

An Examination of the "Report of Committee on Ordination of Women Elders," and of the Paper accompanying the Report, as published in the Minutes of Synod, 1939, pp. 133-141.

### I.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE COMMITTEE'S ARGUMENTS

The Committee on Ordination of Women Elders, appointed by the Synod of 1938, affirms in its report that "the first and most important question to be decided is whether or not such ordination would be Scriptural", and then states that if the ordination of women elders can be shown not to controvert the Scriptures, then other phases of the question may be considered. From this point on, the Committee's argument is essentially as follows:

### II.

#### CONSIDERATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S ARGUMENTS

As herein analyzed, the Committee's report and accompanying paper present over thirty considerations, the cumulative effect of which is held to warrant the ordination of women to the office of Ruling Elder. We shall canvass the relevancy and cogency of the Committee's arguments, item by item, endeavoring to be as brief as possible without sacrificing clearness, as follows:

1. Scholars disagree as to the interpretation of Scripture passages bearing on this problem. Therefore the Committee has adopted what appeared to it to be a sane and common sense interpretation.

2. Paul states that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female, therefore the Committee concludes that at Pentecost women received gifts of power for service the same as men.

1. No man's opinion about the meaning of a text of Scripture is of any weight unless supported by substantial reasons. By weighing the reasons adduced by commentators in support of their opinions, it should be possible to approach closely to the true meaning of a text. Many evangelical scholars deny that the Bible sets forth any pattern of church government at all. By confining the inquiry to scholars who believe that church government is a matter of divine appointment, perhaps much of the diversity could be eliminated. On the other hand, it is to be expected that scholars who hold church government to be a matter of expediency will also tend to hold certain views about the question of women holding church office.

2. The Committee bases this on two grounds: (1) the *silence* of the record in Acts, which of course proves nothing as to matters of historical fact; (2) Paul's statement that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). The Committee *assumes* that this includes not

3. At Pentecost women received gifts of power for service the same as men; therefore the Committee concludes that Paul's statement that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female cannot be limited to salvation, but must be interpreted to include office in the church as well.

merely salvation and spiritual state, but office in the church as well. This assumption is the very thing which requires proof, namely, that "in Christ Jesus" is equivalent to "in the government of the visible church".

3. Items 2 and 3, taken together, form an argument in a circle. In No. 2, the Committee *assumes* a special interpretation of Gal. 3:28, and uses this to prove that at Pentecost women received gifts of power for service the same as men. In No. 3, the Committee *assumes* that at Pentecost women received gifts of power for service (including church office) the same as men, and uses this to prove that the words "in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female" cannot be limited to salvation and spiritual state, but include gifts of power for service (including church office) as well. Thus the Committee assumes A and uses it to prove B, and then turns around and uses B to prove A. Romans 8:1 shows the meaning of the phrase "in Christ Jesus": "There is therefore now no condemnation to

them that are in Christ Jesus". This is true of multitudes who are not members of the visible church at all, including all who have a saving interest in Christ; even an excommunicated person *may* be in Christ Jesus, though cast out of the visible church. To interpret the phrase "in Christ Jesus" as equivalent to "in the government of the church" is to confuse the invisible church with the visible church, by maintaining that membership in the former confers the right to hold office in the latter.

4. Jesus' teaching is silent on this subject, but he chose a woman to be the first bearer of the gospel to the people of Samaria, and he chose another woman to be the first preacher of the gospel of the resurrection to the apostles themselves.

4. Concerning the woman of Samaria, the record merely states: "So the woman left her waterpot, and went away into the city, and saith to the people, Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?" (John 4:28-29). There is no indication that Christ sent her, or told her to do this, or that her action has any bearing on the question of women holding church office. Concerning Mary Magdalene, to whom the Lord appeared first after his resurrection and

whom he sent to carry a message to the disciples (Matt. 28: 1-10; Mark 16: 1-8; Luke 24: 10; John 20: 11-18), there is no intimation that she did any "preaching" (that is, expounding the Scriptures as an official teacher before a public assembly) or held any position equivalent to ruling office in the church. In I Cor. 15: 1-8 six appearances of Christ after his resurrection are listed, and several witnesses named, but they were all men, and Mary is not mentioned among them. She carried a message from the Lord to the disciples, but this was not "preaching"; in fact, the real work of preaching the gospel could not begin until Pentecost (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8).

5. In Christ's human nature the perfections of both sexes were combined; "if either sex could be said to predominate in his fundamental humanity, it was the feminine". The church should be like her Lord; therefore throughout the organization of the church male and female officers should be combined.

5. We presume the Committee intended these statements about the sex of our Lord's human nature to be understood purely in the psychological sense. In that case, we should realize that there can be no absolute line of demarcation between "masculine" and "feminine" virtues. These psychological qualities are always relative. If we call



"courage" a masculine virtue, and "sympathy" a feminine virtue, it is at once apparent that many men are very sympathetic, and many women very courageous. Christ was perfectly sympathetic and perfectly courageous. The more progress Christians make in sanctification—the more like Christ they become—the more perfectly they embody all virtues, whether "masculine" or "feminine". If Christ, who was not a woman but a man, embodied perfectly all "feminine" virtues, then there is no reason why male elders in the church cannot possess, albeit imperfectly in degree, the "feminine" as well as the "masculine" virtues. The Committee argues that the church should be like her Lord, and that the most practical way of attaining this is to ordain women as elders. Rather, we should say, the best way for the church to be like Christ is to choose the most Christlike men in the church to be the elders.

6. The Apostle Paul often commended women and their work, and mentioned Priscilla before

6. We grant that the facts are as stated, but deny their relevancy to the matter in ques-

tion. Probably Priscilla equalled or excelled her husband in zeal for the salvation of souls; certainly she was an earnest Christian worker. From Acts 18: 24-26 we learn the nature of some of her service: it was "personal work" for an individual who needed help. There is no evidence that she expounded the Word in public assemblies, or held any ruling power in the church.

7. The only one of Paul's epistles to the churches containing restrictions on church ministry by women is I Corinthians. This suggests that the restrictions were occasioned by an extraordinary situation at Corinth.

7. On the contrary, (1) in these very matters Paul appeals to the *universal* custom of the churches, I Cor. 11: 16, 14: 33-34. He does not say "Let the women keep silence in your church", but says "As in all THE CHURCHES of the saints, let the women keep silence in THE CHURCHES". (2) Paul's first epistle to Timothy, 2:12-15, contains similar restrictions, which proves that these restrictions were not limited to Corinth. This epistle, while not addressed to a church, was written to teach right conduct in "the house of God, which is the church of the living "God" (I Tim. 3:15).

8. From non-Biblical sources we learn of bad moral conditions at Corinth, which furnish abundant reason for the precautions which Paul enjoined.

9. Three times in one chapter (I Cor. 7:6, 12, 25) Paul qualifies his statements, as if doubting his authority to deal with such matters.

8. We should note (1) that not a word in the Bible even suggests such a basis for Paul's restrictions on church ministry by women. (2) Paul does not imply that for a woman to speak in the church is right in itself, but temporarily inexpedient at Corinth; on the contrary, he says "It is *SHAMEFUL* (*aischron*) for a woman to speak in the church" (I Cor. 14:35). The Greek word means *base, dishonorable* (Thayer's *Lexicon*), *indecent* (Alford, B.B. Warfield), *ugly, deformed* (Charles Hodge). (3) If these restrictions were based on social conditions at Corinth, why should Paul appeal to the Old Testament law as he does in I Cor. 14: 34?

9. In I Cor. 7 Paul is dealing with questions concerning marriage and divorce, not with the question of church ministry by women. We fail to see any connection between the two. But did Paul really doubt his authority? We shall quote A.H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, p. 242: "I Cor. 7: 12, 10, ('I, not the Lord'; 'not I, but the Lord'). Here the con-

10. The term "angels" in I Cor. 11:10 means not angels but "spies" or "emissaries". Therefore Paul's restrictions were of a temporary nature, and the apostle himself would not attempt to enforce them at the present day.

trast is not between the apostle inspired and the apostle uninspired, but between the apostle's words and an actual saying of our Lord, as in Mat. 5: 32, 19: 3-10; Mark 10: 11; Luke 16: 18. The expressions may be paraphrased:—"With regard to this matter no express command was given by Christ before his ascension. As one inspired by Christ, however, I give you my command". Cf. also Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, pp. 470-471; and especially J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, p. 147.

10. Alford's *Greek Testament, in loc.*, lists seven special interpretations of this word, including the one suggested by the Committee, and rejects them all because "*hoi aggeloi*, absolute, never means anything in the N.T. except *the holy angels of God*". He adds: "Against all these ingenious interpretations is the plain sense of *hoi aggeloi* (Matt. 13:49. Mark 1: 13. Luke 16: 22. I Cor. 13: 1. Col. 2:18. Heb. 1: 4, 5, 7, 13 *al.*), which appears to me irrefragable". See

11. In restricting church ministry by women, Paul was accommodating himself to popular ideas; those who hold the contrary are inconsistent, for they do not obey Paul's command to "greet all the brethren with a holy kiss". Those who admit that customs have changed as to greetings, surrender the principle with reference to matters of church government.

12. In I Cor. 11:3, since Christ is equal with God, woman must

Alford's comment on the meaning of the entire verse.

11. On the contrary, Paul plainly stated that these restrictions were (1) the universal custom of the churches, I Cor. 11:16,14:33. (2) Based on the Old Testament law, I Cor. 14:34. (3) The commandment of the Lord, I Cor. 14:37. Moreover, the cases of *greetings* and *church government* are not parallel. Greetings, as to the particular mode to be employed, are a matter of expediency. Church government and religious worship, on the other hand, are matters of divine appointment. In greetings, whatever is not forbidden is legitimate. The command to greet all the brethren is valid today, but we are not bound to do it by a kiss. But in church government and religious worship, what is not commanded is forbidden, and, *a fortiori*, what is forbidden by express statements of Scripture is always forbidden.

12. An element of confusion is introduced into the paper by

be equal with man; therefore as Christ's subordination to God is temporary, so is woman's subordination to man.

the failure to draw a sharp distinction between *inferiority of nature* and *subordination of position*. A child is not inferior in nature to its parents, but is certainly subordinate to them in position. Woman is not inferior in nature to man, but is properly subordinate in position to man. Christ is *God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever* (Shorter Catechism, No. 21). His human nature, because created, always was and always will be essentially inferior to the nature of God, the Creator. His divine nature, because uncreated and of the same substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit, can never be inferior to God, for it *is* God. I Cor. 11:3, however, does not deal with the categories of superiority and inferiority, but with those of *headship* and *subordination*, and therefore does not speak of Christ's two natures, or either of them, but of his *person*. Because he took to himself a human nature, his person could be positionally subordinate to God (Phil. 2:5-8). It should be clearly understood that positional subordination is not in-



13. Woman's subjection to man came to her as a penalty for her part in the fall; this penalty has been satisfied by Christ's atonement, so that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female.

consistent with essential equality. At the same time we should bear in mind that essential equality cannot of itself cancel positional headship or subordination.

13. We reply: (1) Woman's subordination was not caused solely by sin, but is also based on the relative order of creation: I Tim. 2:13, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve". (2) The Committee errs in stating that "woman is restored to her original state of equality", for natural equality was never lost; women still share *human nature* with men. (3) The notion that woman's subordination to man is cancelled by the atonement is contrary to the New Testament. Seven times the New Testament sets forth the doctrine of man's headship and woman's subordination (I Cor. 11:3, I Cor. 14:34, Eph. 5:22-24, Col. 3:18, I Tim. 2:11-15, Titus 2:5, I Peter 3:1-6). All these texts were written after the atonement had taken place, concerning Christian men and women in the New Testament dispensation. The Committee cites Genesis 3:16

14. Through giving birth to the Redeemer, woman has regained equality with man, so that the former subjection is cancelled.

and claims that it has been cancelled by Christ's atonement. Have the above-listed seven passages in the New Testament epistles been cancelled too? And what about Gen. 3:17-19? Does the earth no longer bring forth thorns and thistles in the fields of believers? Do Christians no longer have to toil in order to live? Does man no longer die and return to dust? Is it sound exegesis to single out one feature of the consequences of sin, and say that this is cancelled by the atonement, while the other features remain in force? We must distinguish clearly between the *guilt* and the *effects* of sin; the believer is instantly freed from the former, but only gradually and partially, in this life, from the latter.

14. This claim rests upon a special interpretation of I Tim. 2:15. We should note that in the Bible the word "save" does not always mean *save from sin*, cf. I Tim. 4:10, Acts 27:20. Also, the correct meaning may be: "brought safely through the dangers of childbirth". The common interpretation is that

by keeping house and being a joyful mother of children (Psalm 113:9) woman will find her true sphere and exalted mission in life, rather than in occupying positions of leadership and authority over men. In this item the Committee again confuses the issue by introducing the category of *equality*, with the implication, of course, that "subjection" or *subordination* is inconsistent with essential equality.

15. In I Cor. 11:4-5 Paul implies that women should pray and prophesy, "that is publicly, in the church, on equal terms with the men".

16. I Cor. 14:34-35 is parallel to I Cor. 11:3-16, and should be interpreted along the same lines.

15. We concede that these verses imply that it is right for women to pray and to prophesy. We deny the Committee's inference that this means "publicly, in the church, on equal terms with the men". Neither prayer nor prophecy ever was an exercise confined to church assemblies. The Committee is begging the question, by assuming the very thing that requires proof.

16. The Committee *assumes without proof* that I Cor. 11:4-5 means that women should pray and prophesy "publicly, in the church, on equal terms with the men", and then affirms that I

Cor. 14:34-35 is parallel and should be interpreted in the same way. But the latter passage *directly contradicts* the Committee's interpretation of the former. It says: "Let the women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law". The Committee wishes to interpret this as follows: "Let the women *NOT* keep silence in the churches, for it *IS* permitted unto them to speak; but let them *NOT* be in subjection, as also saith the law".

17. The statements of I Tim. 2:12 are to be accounted for by the fact that Timothy would find the same conditions at Ephesus that Paul found at Corinth.

17. This is inconsistent with the context of I Tim. 2:12, where Paul gives two reasons for his commands: (1) man's priority in the order of creation, verse 13; (2) woman's priority in transgression, verse 14. The committee has ignored Paul's own stated reasons, and then *assumed* other reasons, for which no evidence is adduced, to account for his statements.

18. If I Tim. 2:12 were applied literally, women could not teach Sabbath School classes; but if

18. (1) This does not follow, for the clause "I permit not a woman to teach" must be in-



not permitted to do so, they would probably organize schools of their own and soon the other members of the church would follow them.

terpreted in accordance with its immediate context ("nor to have dominion over a man"), and also with its wider context, the whole Epistle, which was written to show how people should conduct themselves in the church (3:15). Therefore I Tim. 2:12 would not prevent women from teaching classes of women and children, even in the church, but only forbids such teaching as violates man's and woman's relative positions of headship and subordination. (2) Suppose it *did* forbid all Sabbath School teaching by women? The Committee suggests that in that case the women would probably organize schools of their own, "and it would not be long till we were all in them". We sincerely hope that that is not the attitude of the Covenanter Church toward the Word of God. We do not believe that this text forbids all Sabbath School teaching by women. But if it did, we hope the church would be disposed to obey it rather than rebel against it. I Samuel 15:22-23.

19. The Committee suggests as

19. Before the interpretation

the "natural, logical interpretation" of I Tim. 2:12, that Paul does not forbid a woman to *exercise* authority over a man, but only to *usurp* authority, that is, acquire authority in an unlawful manner.

of any text can be discussed, it is necessary to make sure that we have a correct translation of the original Greek. The Committee has cited the Authorized Version and apparently has assumed its correctness in the rendering "usurp authority". However, the evidence indicates that in this point the Authorized Version is in error. The Greek verb is *authenteo*, and Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* gives as the meanings of this verb in the New Testament: to *govern* one, to *exercise dominion over* one. The following comparison of renderings shows the consensus of translations to be against the rendering "usurp authority":

Authorized Version: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence".

American Revision: "But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness".

Twentieth Century New Testament: "I do not consent to a woman's becoming a teacher,

20. None of the above passages has any direct bearing on the question at issue, for in none of them is Paul discussing the right of women to hold office in the church. However if the restrictions stated in these passages are absolute and universal, then they would disqualify women, not only from holding office, but also from rendering any other service in the church.

or exercising authority over a man; she ought to be silent."

Weymouth: "I do not permit a woman to teach, nor have authority over a man, but she must remain silent".

Moffatt: "I allow no woman to teach or dictate to men, she must keep quiet".

20. We have shown that *authenteo* means to "exercise authority", not to "usurp authority", which makes the Committee's suggested interpretation of I Tim. 2:12 untenable. The eldership is a ruling office; for a woman to hold this office would certainly involve *exercising authority* over the members of the church, including the men, which is precisely what is forbidden by I Tim. 2:12. Hence the Committee is in error in asserting that this text does not have a direct bearing on the question at issue. *This one text is sufficient to settle the whole question*, provided the true meaning of *authenteo* is understood. But again the Committee is wrong in stating that this would exclude women, not only from

21. No text of Scripture states that women are eligible to the eldership; but it is also true that no text affirms women to have participated in the Lord's Supper.

22. The argument from the silence of Scripture is a precarious one, for it could be pressed to prove that women should not be baptized. The only recorded instance of the baptism of a woman is that of Lydia, twenty years after Pentecost, and she, as a widow and

the eldership, but also "from rendering any other service in the church". Is there no other service in the church than that involving *ruling power* and *public leadership*?

21. The cases are not parallel, because *church membership* and *church office* are not analogous. That women are church members is proved by Acts 8:3,12; 9:36; 17:34. If we admit that women are church members, then their right to the communion follows, for the Lord's Supper is the privilege of professing church members *as such*; but the eldership is not the privilege of church members *as such*, but only of those lawfully called to it according to Christ's appointment which is set forth in Scripture.

22. Acts 8:12, "But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women".

the head of a house, might be regarded as an exception.

23. The silence of Scripture does not mean that anything which is "right, reasonable and sensible in itself" is forbidden. "The Scripture does not purport to be a complete catalog of everything we may do or think".

23. It is true that the Scriptures do not purport to be a complete catalogue of everything we may do or think *in general*; but it is also true that they emphatically *DO* purport to be a complete catalogue of everything we may do in the worship of God and the government of the church. The only exceptions are those stated in the last sentence of Section 6 of Chapter I of the Confession of Faith. In matters of religious worship and church government, *WHAT IS NOT COMMANDED IS FORBIDDEN*. The argument from the silence of Scripture is precarious when we are dealing with matters of historical fact; the fact that Scripture nowhere states that Paul visited Spain does not prove that he never was there, for example. But the argument from the silence of Scripture is a perfectly sound and valid one to use when we are seeking to exclude corruptions in church government or worship. The fact that the Bible does not command the use of musical

24. Peter said that some things in Paul's epistles are hard to be understood; the Committee feels he would have been justified in saying "*many things hard to be understood*"; therefore we should not speak too dogmatically about Paul's sayings.

25. If taken literally, Paul's instruction about the Lord's Sup-

instruments for New Testament worship, for example, is the best of reasons for holding, as our church does, that instrumental music is unscriptural in New Testament worship.

24. We reply: (1) Paul himself insisted that all persons who claim to be spiritual accept his teachings about the position of women in the church as *the commandment of the Lord*, I Cor. 14:37. (2) Peter, as well as Paul, taught the doctrine man's headship and woman's subordination, I Peter 3:1-6. (3) These things may be "hard" to be understood, but they are not *impossible* to be understood. By careful study and sound methods of exegesis their meaning can be ascertained. (4) If these passages of Scripture are really so obscure that we cannot speak dogmatically as to their meaning, then it would be best to wait for further light on them, before undertaking an important change in the government of the church.

25. The Committee is in error. The Greek word used for "man"



per, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat", would exclude women from the communion table.

26. Paul states that an elder should be the husband of one wife, but this requirement would be satisfied by a woman's being the wife of one husband.

27. The Committee suggests that the reason why Paul requires an elder to be the husband of one wife "was his recognition of man's incompetence for the office without the advice and counsel of a good woman at home".

28. The Committee suggests that Paul's requirement that an

in this text is *anthropos*, which means a human being, whether male or female, without distinction of sex; compare "man" in the Greek of John 16:21. (Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 46). The word used in I Cor. 11:28 is *NOT aner*, which means a male person as distinguished from a female. (Thayer's *Lexicon*, p. 45). Hence this argument of the Committee is without weight.

26. We concede that if it were Scriptural for women to be elders, this command would be satisfied by a woman being the wife of one husband. But the "if" requires to be proved first.

27. This, of course, is a purely subjective opinion of the Committee and incapable of proof. But note that in the Greek the word "one" is emphatic (I Tim. 3:2, *mias gunaikos andra*). Paul does not say "the husband of a wife", nor "a married man", but "the husband of one wife", which is inconsistent with the Committee's suggestion.

28. (1) This is ruled out by the emphasis on the word "one"

elder should be the husband of one wife was a temporary expedient, to be observed until such time as women could be qualified to hold church office side by side with the men.

29. Women have been appointed by Synod to serve on some of the boards of the church; therefore it seems reasonable to hold that women are capable of efficient service as elders of a small congregation.

30. Secret societies have a wrong attitude toward women, treating them as inferior; our church criticizes the secret orders for this wrong attitude; yet the lodge might be justified in retorting "Cast the beam out of your own eye", because the gov-

(see No. 27, above). (2) Compare Titus 1:6, "If any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having children that believe, who are not accused of riot or unruly". Can we pick out any one of these qualifications and say, "This particular qualification is a temporary expedient, while the others are permanently valid"?

29. At this point the Committee's argument passes from the question "Is it Scriptural?" to the question "Is it reasonable?" Not whether it is right, but whether it would have good results, is now under consideration. The Committee assumes that it was Scriptural for Synod to appoint women to serve on some of the boards of the church. This assumption, however, requires proof.

30. Here again *subordination* is confused with *inferiority*. It is not the true that the church or the Scriptures, in excluding women from ruling office in the church, regard women as inferior to men. They are regarded as positionally subordinate,

ernment of the church is "a close corporation in which women have no representation".

31. Taxation without representation is unfair; women contribute a large proportion of what is given to missions by the church, yet this money is appropriated and administered by a Synod in which women have no representation or voice.

which is a very different thing. Moreover, the government of the church is *not* a close corporation in which women have no representation. Our church courts are not self-perpetuating close corporations electing their own members; on the contrary, they are made up of ministers and elders who have been elected by the whole body of communicants, including women, of the various congregations. The elders elected by a congregation represent the women just as much as the men. Thus the situation is entirely different from that in secret lodges where women can neither be members, nor vote for officers.

31. (1) There is no such thing as *taxation* in the Covenanter Church. No church in America can impose taxes; only the civil government possesses this power. All church money is given as voluntary contributions. (2) It is not true that women are not represented in the Synod which administers church funds. The Synod is composed of pastors and elders who have been elected by the whole body of com-

32. As a principle of lesser importance, the Committee states that "in our democratic system of civil government, the right to vote involves the right to be voted for"; but in our church government, we have ignored this logical implication, because "we have allowed the women to vote for officers in the church, without recognizing their right to hold those offices".

33. "Throughout the Scripture the church is always feminine—she is called the Bride of Christ". Therefore "as an ideal for the bride of Christ it is a hollow mockery" to exclude women from the eldership.

unicants of each congregation, including the women. Thus the women *are* represented by the members of Synod.

32. The government of the church it not to be patterned after the model of earthly civil governments, nor according to the maxims of human reason, but only according to the appointment of Christ set forth in the Scriptures.

33. (1) This is a figure of speech and not to be taken literally, hence it has nothing whatever to do with the sex of church members or officers, any more than the church being called "the city of God" (Psalm 46:4, 48:2, Heb. 12:22) means that church members ought to live in cities rather than in country districts. (2) Just because the church is the Bride of Christ, it must be subject in everything to the appointment of Christ, the Head, Eph. 5:23-24. One of Christ's appointments for the

34. "In view of the cumulative effect of all these considerations", the Committee submits the four recommendations which are listed in the report, and printed in the Minutes of Synod, 1939, page 134.

church, given through the inspired apostle Paul, is that in the church the leadership and ruling power must be held by the men, and that the women are to occupy a position of subordination, I Tim. 2:8-15.

34. A large number of weak or ineffective arguments are not equivalent to one strong and cogent one. When a great many remedies are recommended for a certain disease, it is a sign that no one of them is really effective in curing that disease. Many weak links fastened together do not make a strong chain. Many unconvincing or irrelevant arguments, taken together in their cumulative effect, do not make a strong, convincing case, but rather the contrary. I Tim. 2:12 still stands as a divine prohibition of women holding ruling office in the church, and *it cannot be explained away*. If we choose to ignore or disobey it, we are setting aside the *commandment of the Lord* through his apostle, and it is to the Lord that we will have to give account for our action.

### III.

#### GENERAL REFUTATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S ARGUMENTS

We have completed our analysis of the Committee's reasoning, and our canvass, point by point, of its relevancy and cogency. We now wish to discuss some considerations of a more general nature, which we believe are worthy of serious consideration in connection with the Committee's report and accompanying paper.

##### 1. The Same Arguments would Provide for Women Ministers

If the Committee's reasoning is Scriptural and valid, then women in the church could claim as a right the office of the Gospel ministry. One of the texts discussed in the paper is I Tim. 3:2, which deals with the office of "bishop", which includes that of the Gospel minister. The Committee urges that men and women hold office side by side in "the one body of the church throughout her entire organization". Probably few if any members of the Covenanter Church believe that it is Scriptural for women to be ordained to the office of the Gospel ministry. But if we accept the Committee's arguments as sound, we shall have to admit that it is Scriptural to have women ministers as well as women elders.

##### 2. The Same Kind of Arguments would provide for Hymns and Instrumental Music

Our church's testimony against uninspired hymns, instrumental music and other corruptions in worship is based on the principle that "what is not commanded is forbidden", which is a valid and Scriptural principle both in matters of religious worship and in matters of church government. The Committee expressly rejects this principle, so far as the question of women elders is concerned (see No. 23 of the *Analysis*). In order to show the far-reaching tendency of the Committee's arguments, we shall quote a portion from the 1939 Minutes of Synod, pp. 138-9, inserting or substituting the appropriate terms to make the argument apply to the question of instrumental music. The words thus inserted or substituted are printed in italics:



"We freely admit that we cannot place a finger on any particular text which says in so many words that *instrumental music may be used in New Testament worship*; nor can anyone cite a single passage in the New Testament which specifically warrants the participation of women in the Lord's Supper, or an instance in which they are said to have participated. They were not present at the original institution, though it is almost certain that there were women disciples in the house at the time.

"As we have said before, the argument from the silence of Scripture is a precarious one. There is no record that either Christ or his disciples ever baptised a woman, or that he directed them to do so. Since baptism takes the place of circumcision in the Old Testament, and only males were circumcised, the logical inference would be that only males should be baptised. The only recorded instance of the baptism of a woman was that of Lydia, twenty years later, and that might be regarded as exceptional because she was a widow and the head of a house. Yet no one questions the right of women to the sacraments.

"One of the principal arguments of those who deny the Virgin Birth is the fact that it is recorded only by Matthew and Luke, while Mark, John and Paul never mention it. The mere fact that a thing, *such as instrumental music*, which is right, reasonable and sensible in itself, is not mentioned in the *New Testament*, is not a proof that it is wrong and forbidden. The Scripture does not purport to be a complete catalog of everything we may do or think. It was evidently intended that we should make some use of the reason and intelligence with which the Creator has endowed us".

We do not for a moment mean to imply that the members of the Committee, or any of them, wish to modify the testimony of our church against the use of uninspired hymns and instrumental music in worship. Yet the above is precisely the line of argument employed in other denominations to justify the introduction of uninspired hymns, instrumental music, and other corruptions in worship. In essence the argument is as follows: (1) these things are not forbidden in the Scriptures; (2) they are reasonable and right in themselves; (3) therefore there is no reason why we should not use them.

### 3. God's Appointed Order Must be Observed in Family, Church and State

There are three great divine institutions in human society, namely the family, the church and the state. *The principles laid down in*

*Scripture for each of these must be observed and cannot be disobeyed or disregarded without sin.* It is not correct to say that these institutions would have had no existence apart from man's fall into sin. The family existed before the fall. Even if the race had not fallen into sin, assemblies for the social worship of God would have been necessary, and no doubt something corresponding to the institution of the state would have existed in human society. Accordingly, we note that one of the principles of God's appointed order is man's headship and woman's subordination, and that one of the grounds of this provision *antedates the fall of the race*, and consists in the relative order of the creation of man and woman: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (I Tim. 2:13).

The fall of the race into sin, however, introduced an element of extreme disorder into human life, so that a more urgent reason for headship and subordination existed. It has been said that "order is heaven's first law", which receives Scriptural confirmation from I Cor. 14:33. Sin brought confusion into human life, but this confusion is controlled and corrected, in part at least, by God's appointed order in the divine social institutions of the family, the church and the state. But there cannot be order without headship and subordination. God has appointed to man the position of headship, and to woman that of subordination. These relative positions will necessarily continue as long as sin continues to exist in the life of the race on earth. Of course the *guilt* and *condemnation* of sin are cancelled for believers by Christ's atonement, but sin continues to affect the lives of believers on earth. Only at death are believers made perfect in holiness. Hence man's headship and woman's subordination cannot be cancelled by belief in Christ, but must continue until the reason for them ceases to exist, that is, until the power, pollution and effects of sin have been completely eliminated from the life of the human race. Godliness is not a reason for insubordination, but rather should lead to a ready acceptance of God's appointed order.

In this connection we wish to quote from *The Larger Catechism*, No. 124: "By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are

meant, not only natural parents, but all superiors in age, and gifts; AND ESPECIALLY SUCH AS, BY GOD'S ORDINANCE, ARE OVER US IN AUTHORITY, WHETHER IN FAMILY, CHURCH, OR COMMONWEALTH". God's appointed order is obligatory, and is disobeyed by men at their peril.

#### 4. The Modern Feminist Movement versus the Word of God

In closing, we shall quote a paragraph from an article by Professor Benjamin B. Warfield, entitled "Paul on Women Speaking in Church", which was originally published in "The Presbyterian", October 30, 1919, pages 8 and 9, as follows:

" . . . the difference in conclusions between Paul and the feminist movement of today is rooted in a fundamental difference in their points of view relatively to the constitution of the human race. To Paul, the human race is made up of families, and every several organism, the church included, is composed of families, united together by this or that bond. The relation of the sexes in the family follows it therefore into the church. To the feminist movement the human race is made up of individuals; a woman is just another individual by the side of the man; and it can see no reason for any difference in dealing with the two. And, indeed, if we can ignore the great fundamental natural difference of sex, and destroy the great fundamental social unit of the family, in the interest of individualism, there does not seem any reason why we should not wipe out the difference established by Paul between the sexes in the church. Except, of course, the authority of Paul. It all, in the end, comes back to the authority of the apostles, as founders of the church. We may like what Paul says, or we may not like it. We may be willing to do what he commands, or we may not be willing to do it. But there is no room for doubt of what he says. And he certainly would say to us, what he said to the Corinthians: 'What? Was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it to you alone?' Is this Christianity ours—to do with as we like? Or is it God's religion, receiving its laws from him through the apostles?"

The present paper is submitted for the consideration of the ministers and elders of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in the earnest hope that what we believe to be an unscriptural change in the government of the Church will be rejected by the Synod of 1940.

(Signed) PHILIP W. MARTIN  
JOHANNES G. VAS =

December 1, 1939.