

The Man/Woman Relationship and Its Implications for the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office

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An issue about which there has only been increasing confusion over the past half-century is that of the ordination of women, that is, placing them into the Office of Word and Sacrament ministry within the Church. The confusion has largely arisen due to a complete misconception about the real, central issue at hand. Too much time and energy has been spent by those on each side of the issue either attempting to proof-text or contextualize the other side into submission. Not only have both sides failed in their goal, but they have engaged in some thoroughly poor exegesis and theological reasoning in the process. Indeed, both sides have oftentimes completely given up trying to determine the Scriptural position and have, instead, attempted to use the Scriptures for their own predetermined purposes. To be fair, there have been instances of theologians actually getting to the issue at the heart of the matter, but those tend to be few and far between.¹ My intention here is to give succinct appraisal of the issue and a contention for how the Church's practice must be demonstrated in a way that more faithfully upholds the message it proclaims.

In reality, the heart of the issue is the institution of marriage. As conveyed by the creation account in the first two chapters of Genesis, God created man and woman as husband and wife to be the caretakers of creation. Man was created first, but it was not good for man to be alone. So, God created from one of man's ribs a wife for him to be his helpmeet. Together, they were to be the image of God to the world, to all that he created. This specific design by God from the beginning is called the *order of creation*.

It should be noted, here, that while recognizing a created difference between man and woman (both biologically and, perhaps more pertinent to the point, in reference to the roles they have been given by God), this in no way denies the equal worth of man and woman. They are of equal worth, period. Both were created in the image of God. Both were fully redeemed by Christ. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Galatians, "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. 3:28). Notice from the "in Christ Jesus" that Paul is here talking about the *order of redemption*. Within this *order of redemption*, all are completely equal as inheritors of the grace of God in Christ. However, even though all are of equal value, the design—the way God set things up to work within the world—has not been annulled. God has created husband and wife to relate to each other in a particular way for a reason.

Within the *order of creation*, the entire creation is to be in submission to mankind, and the wife is to submit herself to her husband. We read in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that the relationship between husband and wife is specifically intended to be a reflection of God's relationship with Christ, and furthermore, Christ's relationship with the Church. Paul writes, "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" (1 Cor. 11:3).

The problem comes when a husband thinks it is *his* job to subject his wife to himself, when he thinks that God made him to have "authority" over his wife rather than to be her "head." Paul specifically uses the word "head" for a reason. Nowhere in Holy Scripture is the man commanded or even given permission to make his wife be submissive to him. Rather, he is described as her "head." This is a position that exemplifies itself with chivalrous love, care, and

¹ An especially good example of a well done, thorough treatment is Fritz Herbst's "The Office of Woman in the Church." St. Louis: CPH, 1955.

protection. Now, many object to this idea on the basis that it is “demeaning to women.” However, the very fact that it is a design that images the relationship between Christ and His Father demonstrates that it is intended to be anything but a demeaning arrangement. Just as Christ willingly submitted to the will of the Father, so it is that the wife should submit herself to her husband, not because he is any better or more capable than she, but because it is the order God has put into place. As such, the husband is to take his wife and her feelings into account and always strive to show her love and kindness.

Now, how does all of this relate to the ordination of women? In every way! This is what Paul is getting at in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2. Paul is telling husbands and wives that they are to conduct themselves in such a way as to exemplify the *order of creation* to those around them, especially within the context of public worship. If the Church is really going to take seriously God and the design He has set out for His creation (as exemplified within that creation around us and as Scripture continually expresses), then it has to actually abide by that design and act in such a way as to further support its proclamation of Scriptural truths. The reason Paul tells women that they should be wearing a head-covering and not speaking within the worship assembly is because, by doing so, they would be acting contrary to the *order of creation* which God has put into place. The one who does Word and Sacrament ministry, who teaches and proclaims absolution within the worship assembly, is demonstrating authority. And for a woman to be in that position both disregards and sends a conflicting message about God’s design. If the husband is truly to be the head and the wife is to submit herself, then all relationships between men and women should serve to further this design. This is perhaps especially true within the Church. A woman may be just as gifted, just as able to fulfill the requirements of the office, but she would not be living within the created order if she were to step into that office. Obviously, opportunities need to be made readily available for the woman to use the gifts God has given her, and there are many avenues for her to use such gifts.² In the end though, the Church, as the proclaimer of God’s truth to the world, must do all that it can to uphold the institution (of marriage) that God has made central (and foundational) to His creation.

² Admittedly, there are extremely rare exceptions in which a woman might have to function within this office. These exceptions would include being within the context of an all-female assembly. It might also occur that even within an assembly of both men and women, a woman may be forced to fulfill the responsibilities of the pastoral office. However, if this does occur, it should be realized that this is not according to God’s design and the men should be ashamed of themselves for not living up to the responsibility they have been given.