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PETTICOAT PRESBYTERIANISM:

A Century Of Debate In American Presbyterianism On The Issue Of The Ordination Of Women

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The purpose of this article is to explore the ideological factors at work in the debate on the question of the ordination of women, as carried on in the context of American Presbyterianism. Two factors in particular will be examined: the view and role of Scripture and the influence of feminism and the "women's rights" movement.

This topic may not be as esoteric as may appear at first glance. For one thing, Presbyterians have always been known as being prolific and careful in their deliberations. For another, the Presbyterian church has traditionally exercised great influence and leadership in this country. And, as shall be shown, there have been definite connections, both in the nineteenth century and in the 1980s, between arguments dealing with women's ordination and those dealing with "women's rights," including women's suffrage.

The focus on Scripture can be justified in at least three ways. First, a person conceivably could focus primarily on such a question as, "Which Presbyterian denominations

have been most sensitive to the anguished pleas of over half of their members?" How-ever, besides somewhat begging the question, that approach would be more "trendy" than of universal and abiding value. Secondly, the historic Christian church has always professed its belief in the plenary inspira-tion, and infallibility and inerrancy, of Holy Scripture. Third, the Presbyterian church in particular has defined its existence as being contingent on a strict interpretation of and adherence to the Bible. Presbyterianism, historically, has meant Puritanism. One term that can be used to describe its dependence upon the Word of God is the "regulative principle." This term, often applied to worship, refers to the belief that whatever God has commanded to be done is required and that whatever God has not commanded to be done is forbidden. In matters of polity, *jure divino* Presbyterianism was the phrase used to express this concept. If the justification of women's ordination in denominations calling themselves "Presbyterian" involves either the rejection of the Bible as the actual Word of God and/or the rejection of the absolute sufficiency of Scripture, then that fact will be quite significant.

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1. Historical Background

Aileen S. Kraditor has written that those who wished to deal with religious objections to woman suffrage "could meet Bible-based antisuffragism head on; they could point out those parts of the Scriptures that seemed to favor the equality of the sexes; or they could ignore religion in their rationale altogether. All three tactics were used." She went on to note that a reinterpretation of the Bible's statements on women was possible only because of the growing acceptance of higher criticism and evolution which tended to denigrate the authority of the Scriptures.¹

¹Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement. 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965) 76.

Those who wanted to hold both to suffragism and Christianity could address problem passages such as St. Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 14 in several ways: "They could find an error in the translation; they could discover that the context in which the Epistle had been written gave it meanings not applicable to modern times; or they could argue that Paul was expressing his own opinion in this letter, an opinion with which a modern Christian could disagree."² It was in such a context that Robert L. Dabney, the quintessential representative of Southern Presbyterianism, wrote two articles. In "Women's Rights Women," he attacked feminism and its radical roots. He wrote, "Radical America now means by natural liberty each one's privilege to do what he chooses to do," and added,

To meet the argument of these aspiring Amazons fairly, one must teach, with Moses, the Apostle Paul, John Hampden, Washington, George Mason, John C. Calhoun, and all that contemptible rabble of 'old fogies,' that political society is composed of 'superiors, inferiors, and equals'; that while all these bear an equitable moral relation to each other, they have very different natural rights and duties; that just government is not founded on the consent of the individuals governed, but on the ordinance of God, and hence a share in the ruling franchise is not a natural right at all, but a privilege to be bestowed according to a wise discretion on a limited class having qualification to use it for the good of the whole; that the integers out of which the State is constituted are not individuals, but families represented in their parental heads; that every human being is born under authority (parental and civic) instead of being born 'free' in the licentious sense that liberty is each one's privilege of doing what he chooses; that subordination, and not that license, is the natural state of all men; and that without such equitable distribution of different duties and rights among the classes naturally differing in condition, and subordination of some to others, and of all to the law, society is as impossible as is the existence of a house without distinction between the foundation-stone and the capstones.³

Dabney had no hope that "Northern conservatism" would be able to stem the tide of radicalism:

²Ibid., 87. See also Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 13-14: "The significant difference was that for men submission to God's will in spiritual matters was considered to be perfectly compatible with aggressive behavior and a commanding position in life. Men expected to be obeyed by women, children, and slaves, to be the decision makers and the ultimate sources of secular authority."

³Robert L. Dabney, "Women's Rights Women," *Discussions* (ed. C.R. Vaughan; 1891; reprint Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1982) 3.494-95.

[Northern conservatism] is worthless because it is the conservatism of expediency only, and not of sturdy principle. It intends to risk nothing serious for the sake of the truth, and has no idea of being guilty of the folly of martyrdom No doubt, after a few years, when women's suffrage shall have become an accomplished fact, conservatism will tacitly admit it into its creed, and thenceforward plume itself upon its wise firmness in opposing with similar weapons the extreme of baby suffrage; and when that too shall have been won, it will be heard declaring that the integrity of the American Constitution requires at least the refusal of suffrage to asses. There it will assume, with great dignity, its final position.⁴

Dabney postulated that three consequences would follow from the "fundamental change" advocated by feminists: the destruction of Christianity and civilization in America, since in Scripture "women are . . . consigned to a social subordination, and expressly excluded from ruling offices, on grounds of their sex, and a divine ordination based by God upon a transaction which happened nearly six thousand years ago!"; the corruption of the character and delicacy of American women; and the abolition of all permanent marriage ties, a consequence which some of the women's rights women, such as Mrs. Cady Stanton, were even bold enough to admit.⁵

In "The Public Preaching of Women," Dabney effectively addressed various "rationalistic arguments" urged in favor of this innovation. His exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11-14 and 1 Timothy 2 was more than adequate to refute those contemporary advocates who attempted to appeal to Scripture. The last several pages of this treatise contain parallel argumentation to that found in the article on the women's movement — indeed, some of the phrases are virtually the same. Two quotes will prove the logical connection:

Now, a wise God designs no clashing between his domestic and political and his ecclesiastical arrangements. He has ordained that the man shall be head in the family and the commonwealth; it would be a confusion full of mischief to make the woman head in the ecclesiastical sphere. But we have seen that the right of public teaching must involve the right of spiritual rule. The woman who has a right to preach, if there be any such, ought also claim to be a ruling elder. How would it work to have husband and wife, ruler and subject, change places as often as they passed from the dwelling or the court-room and senate chamber to the church? When we remember how universal the religious principles, which it is the prerogative of the presbyter to enforce, interpenetrate and regulate man's secular duties, we see that this

⁴Ibid., 496.

⁵Ibid., 498-502.

amount of overturning would result in little short of absolute anarchy.⁶

At the present time . . . the preaching of women and the demand of all masculine political rights are so synchronous, and are so often seen in the same persons, that their affinity cannot be disguised.⁷

What is particularly fascinating about this line of reasoning is that it utilized the proscription of women's political involvement as a basis for the exclusion of women from preaching and ruling office in the church.⁸

Dabney's views were not unique, nor were they confined to the Southern branch of the church.⁹ Before the regional divisions which occurred later in the nineteenth century, the 1832 General Assembly said,

Meetings of pious women by themselves for conversation and prayer, whenever they can conveniently be held, we entirely approve. But let not the inspired prohibitions of the great apostle of the Gentiles, as found in his Epistles to the Corinthians and to Timothy, be violated. To teach and exhort or to lead in prayer, in public and promiscuous assemblies, is clearly forbidden to women in the holy oracles.¹⁰

This deliverance was upheld in 1872. As late as 1912, the Northern Assembly said: "That while the Assembly gives its hearty endorsement to the broad work now being carried on by the godly women of our Church, we deem it inexpedient to have a Presbytery receive under its care women as candidates for the ordained ministry."¹¹

As shall be shown, there has been a difference historically in the debate about women's ordination, depending upon which office is being considered. The Presbyterian church traditionally has held that there are (at least) three offices: minister (pastor, teaching elder), ruling elder, and deacon. In more recent days, there has been a strong movement to

⁶Robert L. Dabney, "The Public Preaching of Women," *Discussions* 2.112.

⁷*Ibid.*, 114.

⁸Dabney did favor appointing women as deaconesses, but not apparently in ordaining them to that or any other office ("The General Assembly of 1881," *Discussions*, 2.634). He opposed closer fraternal ties with the Northern church because of its looser practices regarding women speaking in ecclesiastical gatherings ("Fraternal Relations," *Discussions* 2.487). He also stated, "The philosophy of this atheists' league is precisely that [which underlies] the demand for the ecclesiastical and social equality of women" ("The Sabbath of the State," *Discussions* 2.595).

⁹A few Presbyterian leaders (in the North) apparently took a different view: opposed to women's ordination, but supportive of women's suffrage. Cf. Rosemary R. Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Kellers (eds.), *Women and Religion in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981).

¹⁰Lewis Seymour Mudge and William Parker Finney, eds., *Digest of the Acts and Deliverances of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1938) 1.491.

¹¹Mudge and Finney, *Digest* 1.492.

recognize only two offices (elder and deacon), with the eldership being divided into two classes (teaching and ruling). For purposes of analysis, this paper will view the ordination of women to an office of teaching and/or ruling as being a different issue from that of ordaining women to an office of service (the diaconate).

II. A Unique Forerunner

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) traces its heritage to the "Killing Times" of Scotland. The "Covenanters" of the late seventeenth century were willing to die rather than to relinquish their allegiance to King Jesus and his crown rights. This denomination has maintained a testimony of historic Presbyterian worship, including a cappella exclusive psalmody. The group under consideration is the "Old Light" church, which in 1833 continued its opposition to active involvement in the political process because of the lack of a Christian amendment to the Federal Constitution.¹²

The Reformed Presbyterian congregation in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, elected one of its ladies to the office of deacon. The propriety of this action came to the attention of Pittsburgh Presbytery, which in turn referred the matter to the RPCNA Synod of 1888. At that time, this denomination's only written constitution was that of the Westminster Assembly, the documents of which did not specify male gender for ecclesiastical office. Thus, whatever decision made by the synod would be binding on the church. By a vote of 93-24, synod declared that female ordination to the diaconate "is, in our judgment, in harmony with the New Testament, and with the constitution of the apostolic church."

Having now determined church policy, the RPCNA Synod encouraged debate of the question in church publications. The Committee of Synod began its presentation by noting that everyone agreed that females should not be ordained ministers or ruling elders. Positively, the committee made the case by positing that "the offices in the New Testament church *are indicated . . . by official names given to the office-bearers*, and also by *terms descriptive of their work*." Appeal was then made to Phoebe, described as a "deacon of the church" in Romans 16. The report also argued that 1 Timothy 3 contains qualifications not of

¹²The "New Lights," who took the name Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, General Synod, separated from the "Old Lights" in 1833 over the issue of political involvement in a government not officially Christian. The New Lights abandoned their Covenanter distinctives and merged with remnants of the 1936 split from the Northern Presbyterian Church to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) in 1965.

deacons' and/or elders' wives, but of female deacons. The committee concluded,

We accord to our female members their corporate rights more fully than any church of the Reformation, and in following up what has at our late meeting of Synod been so auspiciously begun, we may still further draw out into active operation the mighty moral force lodged in our devoted Christian women, and thus accomplish a work for which posterity will bless us.¹³

Professor D.B. Willson's lecture at the opening of the session of the Theological Seminary, Allegheny, Pennsylvania, September 18, 1888, was also reproduced. His speech noted the great progress being made by women, because of education, even in pagan lands. He did say that the ultimate question is whether or not the Word of God sanctions female ordination, and he did make specific scriptural appeal. However, there was a clear dependence upon egalitarian principles of "human rights," and the contention that the essential equality of man and woman made in the image of God took precedence: "Whatever you deny to another that you claim for yourself, you must deny on a sure warrant. Your warrant to prohibit must be clear."¹⁴

Professor Willson's contribution in particular evidences the influence of abolitionism and its notions of human freedom. This author does not know if the efforts of women in both abolition and prohibition, official positions taken by the RPCNA, had any effect on the discussion, or on the initial decision to elect a woman.

III. Liberalizing Trends

At the opposite end of the theological spectrum from the Reformed Presbyterian Church was the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. This denomination organized in the early nineteenth century on the developing frontier in protest of the traditional Presbyterian requirement of an educated ministry. It also was distinct because of its modified Calvinism.

The Cumberland Church's pragmatic flexibility, along with a chronic shortage of ministers (especially for small, rural congregations), led to the employment of women as evangelists. The first female ordained minister was Louisa Layman Woosley, set apart by Nolin Presbytery in 1889. Kentucky Synod ordered that presbytery to remove her name from the roll of ministers. In defiance, Nolin Presbytery elected her as an alternate delegate to the General Assembly. When synod again ordered that her

name be stricken from the roll, her presbytery elected her as a commissioner to the 1894 Assembly. The Cumberland Church had been founded on the principle of the presbyteries being allowed to determine their own membership without interference from any higher judicatory, so commissioners were in an awkward position. They voted to invalidate her ordination, even though they did "endorse her as a lay evangelist and praised her 'eminent usefulness and her womanly behavior, under the most trying circumstances.'"¹⁵

Several other women were admitted to the ministry by various Cumberland presbyteries in the period between 1911 and 1920. The assembly in 1921 ruled that the word *man* as used in Scripture and the church's constitution was generic and "has no reference to sex, but should be construed to, and does, in fact, include the human being, whether male or female."¹⁶

Boyd and Brackenridge have written that the 1894 General Assembly debate brought forth all the traditional arguments on women ministers, pro and con. Sidney Slaton's biography of his mother states that her inward sense of call and the good effects of her preaching were determinative for her and for others that she should be ordained a preacher.¹⁷

The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, often called the Northern Presbyterian Church, had reiterated its 1832 position in 1872. That action, however, did not settle matters. Boyd and Brackenridge claim,

During the decade of the 1870's . . . two things had become evident. One, that women were quantitatively and qualitatively important to the work of the church, as demonstrated by their contributions both financially, and in service to the mission-oriented congregations. Two, the very fact that women were becoming more active meant that they inevitably would speak in church. Silence was no longer feasible given their leadership roles, and, although not many openly asked for the pulpit, the woman speaker, whether she preached, prayed, or lectured, broke the traditional barriers each time she appeared in front of congregations.¹⁸

The activity to which these authors allude was both in and out of the church: "Some of those who became active

¹⁵Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1983) 112-18.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 118

¹⁷Sidney Slaton, *Mama Was a Preacher: The Life and Work of the Reverend Mrs. Ada Slaton Bonds* (Memphis: The Frontier Press, 1971) 43ff.

¹⁸Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women*, 105. They also wrote, "Historian Barbara Welter has raised an interesting possibility that mission careers might have saved some from facing up to the questions raised by the American women's movement" (p. 165).

¹³Committee of Synod, "Women and the Deacon's Office," *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* 26 (1888) 383-94.

¹⁴D.B. Willson, "Should a Woman be Ordained a Deacon?" *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* 26 (1888) 394-407.

outside the home apparently saw no conflict between their maternal and domestic role and their other interests.”¹⁹

The deaconess movement, supported by traditionalists such as B. B. Warfield and others, provided an expanded opportunity of service in the late nineteenth century. A deaconess was essentially a nonordained office to which women were appointed to do various works of charity. In the early 1920s, immediately after rejecting a proposal to ordain women as ruling elders, the PCUSA enacted a provision allowing for female deacons.²⁰

Far greater attention was focused on the ordination of women to ruling or teaching office. In 1919, three presbyteries overtured the General Assembly regarding this matter. The Presbytery of Dallas wanted a thorough investigation of “enlarged opportunities for women because of the imminent passage of the suffrage amendment and in view of the fact that there seems to be a growing sentiment among the women of the Presbyterian Church, USA for more direct representation in the courts of the Church.”²¹ That assembly appointed a committee which reported the next year. The Special Committee on the Official Relation of Women in the Church stated its opinion that “the Scriptures do not forbid either women elders or women preachers.” Because of the interest in the subject by the church at large, the committee recommended that the following overture be sent down to the presbyteries for their action: “Shall the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. be so amended as to admit properly qualified and elected women to ordination as Ruling Elders, with all the rights and duties pertaining to this office.” This was adopted.²² Significantly, even though the issue was debated in the church papers as to its scriptural merits, the committee made no such effort in its presentation.²³ Confusion over the exact meaning of the overture and a belief that it was not in proper form since it did not specify which sections of the constitution were to be amended apparently helped to defeat it.²⁴

¹⁹Ibid., 95.

²⁰Ibid., 109-12.

²¹Ibid., 119.

²²Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1920) 1.126-31.

²³Among major articles cited by Boyd and Brackenridge (*Presbyterian Women*, 264) are these: in opposition — B. B. Warfield, “Paul on Women Speaking in Church,” *The Presbyterian* (May 20, 1920) 8-9, and Clarence E. Macartney, “Shall We Ordain Women as Elders and Deacons?” *ibid.* (January 13, 1921) 8-9; in favor — William H. Bates, “Paul (and Others) on Women Speaking in the Church,” *ibid.* (July 15, 1920) 9-10, F.L. Hitchcock, “The Eldership and Women,” *ibid.* (February 3, 1921) 9-10, A. Mackenzie Lamb, “The Ecclesiastical Rank of Women,” *ibid.* (September 9, 1920) 8-9, and J. Wallace MacGowan, “God’s Word about Women Speaking in Church,” *ibid.* (July 15, 1920) 11, 26. Several other major articles against women’s ordination were also listed.

²⁴Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women*, 121.

The Northern Church became embroiled in the modernist-fundamentalist controversy of the 1920s and 1930s. In the midst of that conflict, a two-woman subcommittee presented a paper to the General Council of the Assembly, entitled “Causes of Unrest Among the Women of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.” That report prompted the 1929 General Assembly to send down three overtures to the presbyteries: the first would have allowed election of women as ministers and ruling elders; the second election only as ruling elders; and the third the licensing of females as evangelists. As reflected in the General Assembly Minutes, these recommendations, like that of the 1920 Assembly, were spurred more by popular opinion than by a careful consideration of Scripture.²⁵ The presbyteries approved the amendments regarding elders, which provisions were enacted into church law by the 1930 Assembly’s approbation.

According to Boyd and Brackenridge,

The “women’s overtures” generated an unprecedented volume of articles and letters in Presbyterian journals and newspapers during the year between General Assemblies. The editor of the *Presbyterian Banner* had predicted that the discussion would “develop much heat and possibly little light,” and his estimation was not far off the mark.²⁶

Two articles that appeared in the *Presbyterian Advance* by opponents of these amendments argued more on pragmatic grounds than on solidly biblical ones.²⁷ On the other hand, a representative proponent made only a very weak case from the Bible, virtually ignoring the context of the verses to which he was taking exception; rather, he was more concerned with historical considerations and with sweeping themes of Scripture than with dealing intensively with particular Pauline passages which seem to proscribe women’s leadership on the basis of universal principles.²⁸ Other contributions likewise testified of the paucity of biblical evidence being considered. One editorial said, “the Presbyterian Church relegates woman to an inferior place to man, and this is against the spirit of our day, and the democratic basis of our church, and we believe it is not in accordance with the broad principles of Scripture, and it hurts.”²⁹

²⁵Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1929) 1.186-91.

²⁶Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women*, 136.

²⁷W. Courtland Robbins, “The Unwisdom of Ordaining Women”; Charles E. MacKean, “The Church and Woman.” *Presbyterian Advance* (January 30, 1930) 7-9.

²⁸Samuel Tyndale Wilson, “Give the Women Full Opportunity,” *Presbyterian Advance* (January 30, 1930) 9-11.

²⁹James H. Snowden, “Dr. Swearingen Opposes the Ordination of Women,” *The Presbyterian Banner* (April 3, 1930) 8. Margaret E. Hodge, in “Woman’s Service in the Church” (*The Presbyterian Banner* [April 25, 1929] 11), rhetorically asked, “is there much

In 1946, the General Council proposed an overture to the General Assembly that would have changed the constitution to read, "the office of minister may be either men or women." The three reasons offered for approval were the following: females were rendering useful service to the church, women had the right of ordination in other denominations, and they already had the right to be ordained as elders and deacons.³⁰ This proposal was defeated in the presbyteries.

In 1953, the General Assembly appointed a Special Committee on the Ordination of Women. That committee was granted until 1955 to make its final report, which stated, among other things:

. . . there is an increasing cooperation between men and women in the business, industry, government, professional life and the Church, whereby each makes room for the other to develop his or her special potentialities, and each recognizes the other as a partner on equal footing; . . . the general trend throughout the world is toward increasing the opportunities for women to take leadership along with men.

This committee also contended that

the Bible does not prescribe a permanent and specific social structure for the Church or society; and . . . the Bible neither provides specific direction for nor prohibits the ordination of women to the Gospel ministry . . . the Reformed doctrinal view, as it pertains to the place of women in the Church, . . . set[s] forth . . . [t]hat structure in the Christian Church, is essentially functional in character . . . [and that] there is no theological barrier against the ordination of women if ordination would contribute to the edification and nurturing of the Church in its witness to the Lord of the Church.³¹

The Form of Government was amended by action of the 1955 Assembly, approval by the presbyteries, and ratification by the 1956 Assembly.

The United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA) was formed in 1858 as the result of a merger

wonder that many women are bewildered and wondering if they are considered mere money-raising organizations, this same money to be spent not as they desire but as they are directed?" Robert E. Speer, in "The Place of Women in the Church" (*The Presbyterian Banner* [April 18, 1929] 12, 16), totally ignored Pauline passages which address church polity, while maintaining, "it would be a strange and anomalous thing to deny equality in the Church which is the very fountain of the principle of equality." M. Katherine Bennett, in "Those Restless Women" (*The Presbyterian Banner* [April 18, 1929] 13, 16), did not venture a Scriptural argument but noted instead the revolution in thinking that was occurring.

³⁰Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women*, 145.

³¹Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1955) 95-98.

between groups reflecting both Covenanter and Seceder (Associate Presbyterian) roots. This denomination allowed for the ordination of women as deacons in 1906.³² The question of ordaining females as ruling and teaching elders loomed as one of the obstacles to merger with the Northern Church, which was consummated in 1958.

One of the advocates of ecclesiastical union argued that the Bible revealed "that dim period of history when the Church as an organization, and Christian theology as a system, were still for the most part fluid and amorphous." This theology professor tried to present a scriptural case while ignoring the teaching of 1 Timothy.³³ Gordon H. Clark countered by pointing out that all relevant Scripture must be brought to bear on an issue; that God's plan for salvation in which there is neither male nor female (Gal 3:28) does not address the question of ordination; and that the reference to prophetesses is irrelevant since revelation has ceased.³⁴

The United Presbyterians, by merging with the Northern Presbyterians to form the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA), acquired the practice of female ordination to the ruling and teaching offices of the church.³⁵

The Presbyterian Church in the United States, founded in 1861 as a result of the passage of resolutions at the General Assembly requiring allegiance to the Federal government in Washington, D.C., and commonly known as the Southern Presbyterian Church, was one of the more conservative denominations. In the early part of the twentieth century, even amidst controversy over the organization of women's groups above the congregational level and over the issue of females speaking in church meetings, there was virtual universal opposition to women preaching and ruling in Zion.³⁶

By the 1950s, the scene had changed dramatically. A committee, appointed by the 1955 Assembly, reported the next year its findings. The committee said,

We do not interpret our study to be limited to the discovery of the position of women in the Church during Bible times as revealed in God's Word. But we feel that with this material as background, we should seek to view the Church of today

³²Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women*, 112.

³³Theophilus M. Taylor, "Women and the Christian Ministry," *The United Presbyterian* (October 14, 1956) 5-6, 22.

³⁴Gordon H. Clark, "Does the Bible Forbid the Ordination of Women?" *The United Presbyterian* (December 30, 1956) 9-10.

³⁵The other example of ecclesiastical merger resulting in an expansion of the practice of women's ordination was the absorption of the last distinctive Seceder branch, the Associate Presbyterian Church of North America, by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, June 7, 1969.

³⁶Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women*, 212; Presbyterian Church in the United States, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (Richmond, Va.: 1916) 48-49, 76-77, 80a-b, 171-79.

and endeavor to interpret the teaching of the Bible and the Holy Spirit as it applies to the place and part of women in the public worship services and government of the Church of our day

The rules of Church government and practice are often outgrowths of helpful and fruitful customs which have arisen in the Church's life and work.

It would be a mistake to try to obtain any correct interpretation of the teaching of God's Word on this matter without some associated study of the experience and practice of the Church as led by the Holy Spirit.³⁷

The fact that women play such an important and vocal role in the life of the local congregation, on various church committees, and on the mission field was a key component to the contention that "the Holy Spirit is *leading us today* into a new understanding of the place of women in the church today." The report stated:

Throughout history new forms of service have been devised under what We believe to have been His [the Holy Spirit's] guidance, (such as the Sunday School movement and the modern Missionary movement) in which Christians, men and women, could minister to their generation. Among these, we are convinced that the larger sphere of usefulness open to women today is in line with His leading. Many denominations and Communion throughout the world, recognizing the development which has guided women into all kinds of professions and many types of service in society and the Church, and, believing this to be a gradual development of the Christian viewpoint of mankind, have changed their policies in regard to the service of women in the Church.³⁸

The committee's work rested upon at least two unproven assumptions: one, that the fact that changes in church administration occurred in Scripture authorizes the Body of Christ to enact similar modifications on the basis of her experience; two, that exceptions to the "rule" that women should be quiet among the people of God may be legislated by them rather than only by revelation. The committee's view, which was narrowly adopted by the General Assembly, thus directly conflicted principally with traditional Southern Presbyterianism and its adherence to *jure divino* polity.

The presbyteries defeated the proposal. However, female ordination was finally enacted into church law in 1964.³⁹

IV. Subsequent Developments

Proponents of female ordination were quick to assure church members that admitting women to office was to be only on a permissive basis, and that this practice would not be forced on anyone.⁴⁰ This situation changed greatly in the last decade or so.

Walter Wynn Kenyon, candidate for the ministry, applied to Pittsburgh Presbytery for ordination. He stated his biblical objections to the ordination of women, saying that he could not in clear conscience participate in such an ordination service. Pittsburgh Presbytery voted to ordain him, but that action was appealed, which appeal was sustained. The General Assembly's Permanent Judicial Commission declared, "It is the responsibility of our Church to deny ordination to one who has refused to ordain women."⁴¹ The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. also adopted, in 1979, a provision to the Form of Government which would mandate that women be represented on the session and the board of deacons.⁴²

In 1983, the Southern Presbyterian Church and the United Presbyterian Church merged to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). One of the first judicial actions of that united body was to uphold an appeal from Fayetteville Presbytery, to the effect of dissolving the pastoral relationship between the congregation in Raeford, North Carolina, and a man who had scruples about ordaining women and admitting small children to the Lord's Supper.⁴³

These coercive activities helped to spur withdrawals from "mainline" Presbyterianism by evangelicals. One of the results was the formation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) in 1981. The attitude of the EPC may be summed up by its motto: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." The application of this phrase is found in these words:

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church does not believe that the issue of the ordination of women is an essential of the faith. The historic Reformed

³⁷Presbyterian Church in the United States. *Minutes of the General Assembly* (Richmond, Va.: 1956) 138.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 141-42. It is undoubtedly amazing to many conservatives to whom Dr. Manford George Gutzke, beloved Bible teacher at Columbia Theological Seminary, was a great mentor, to know that he served on this committee and agreed with its conclusions.

³⁹For an opposing viewpoint, see McFerran Crowe's three-part article, "Ordain Women?" *Presbyterian Journal*, 22, nos. 19-21 (September 4, September 11, September 18, 1963). Dr. Crowe made the case both from specific texts and from the sweep of Scripture. Interestingly, he hinted that his main concern was with regard to the office of rule (elders), not necessarily with the office of service (deacons, who do not constitute church courts).

⁴⁰For example, see Taylor, "Women and the Christian Ministry," and Cleland B. McAfee, "Women and Official Church Life," *The Presbyterian Banner* (January 16, 1930) 13, 32.

⁴¹Boyd and Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women*, 235.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 236.

⁴³Presbyterian Church (United States of America), *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1983).

position on the Scriptural doctrine of the government by Elders is believed to be that form needed for the perfecting of the order of the visible church, but has never been considered to be essential to its existence . . .

. . . while some churches may ordain women and some may decline to do so, neither position is essential to the existence of the church. Since people of good faith who equally love the Lord and hold to the infallibility of Scripture differ on this issue, and since uniformity of view and practice is not essential to the existence of the visible church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has chosen to leave this decision to the Spirit-guided consciences of particular congregations concerning the ordination of women as Elders and Deacons, and to Presbyteries concerning the ordination of women as ministers.⁴⁴

Many of the founding congregations of the EPC did have women officers. This denomination believes that the preservation of the unity of the church is more essential than the perfecting of its order.

V. Views in Various Denominations of NAPARC

In 1975, five denominations formed the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Membership is open to churches that are committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and to its teachings as expressed in the standard Reformed creeds.⁴⁵

One of the original members, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES), came into being in 1965 as a result of a merger of the "New Light" Reformed Presbyterians and the "New School" wing that separated from the Northern Presbyterian Church in 1936. A Study Committee on the Role of Women in the Church gave a report to the 1976 Synod, which stated: "*the basic principles to be observed with respect to the role of women in the church are (1) that the work of an elder is restricted to men, and (2) that the Scripture knows only two specific classes with respect to ecclesiastical authority, elders and non-elders.*"⁴⁶ Specific recommendations were that the

⁴⁴Evangelical Presbyterian Church, "Position Paper on the Ordination of Women," adopted by the 6th General Assembly (June, 1986).

⁴⁵Presbyterian Church in America, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (Montgomery, Ala.: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 1975) 86, 173-75. Founding denominations were: Christian Reformed Church; Orthodox Presbyterian Church; Presbyterian Church in America; Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod; and Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Korean American Presbyterian Church were admitted to membership in 1982.

⁴⁶"Study Committee on Role of Women in the Church." *Minutes of the 154th General Synod* (1976), cited in *Documents of Synod*

Form of Government be amended so as to allow for women deacons, and that denominational agencies be allowed to modify their by-laws to permit women members on their boards.⁴⁷

The next year, synod heard the majority report and two minority reports of this expanded committee. The judicatory voted down the proposal that women be elected deacons, and approved the following statement:

We affirm in the absence of any compelling biblical evidence to support the ordination of women to the special office of deacon, that this office be limited to qualified men. At the same time acknowledging that the Scriptures contain many examples of women who serve, we affirm the right of a local church to have a separate body of unordained women who may be called deaconesses.⁴⁸

A tongue-in-cheek evaluation of synod's actions may be found in these words:

. . . as for all the ladies, Whose service is so famed, They can still perform the functions, They just cannot have the name.

O, listen to the motions, the amendments, and the votes, As we hear each other's arguments and inspect each other's notes.

This question's still before us, just where we should perch On this very shaky question of the women in the church.⁴⁹

The Presbyterian Church in America was formed in 1973 by conservatives withdrawing from the Southern Presbyterian Church. One of the reasons cited for the separation, along with "a diluted theology, a gospel tending towards humanism, an unbiblical view of marriage and divorce, . . . financing of abortion on socio-economic grounds, and numerous other non-Biblical positions," was "the ordination of women." All of these matters were "traceable to a different view of Scripture from that we hold and that which was held by the Southern Presbyterian forefathers."⁵⁰

(ed. P.R. Gilchrist; Lookout Mountain, Tenn.: Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, 1982) 434.

⁴⁷Ibid., 436. The proposal regarding women serving on agency boards lost, 65-67.

⁴⁸*Minutes of the 155th General Synod* (1977), cited in Gilchrist, *Documents*, 475.

⁴⁹Thomas F. Jones. "The women of the Church," from the cassette tape, "Dameron & Jones Sing the Songs of the Church." The song also contained the warning of one of the commissioners not to "lay hands on a woman, suddenly or otherwise."

⁵⁰National Presbyterian Church (now Presbyterian Church in America), *Minutes of the First General Assembly* (Montgomery, Ala.: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 1974) 41; see also Morton H. Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim* (Jackson, Miss.: Premier Printing Co., 1973) 61: "One of the more obvious departures from the Biblical position on church government was the acceptance of the change in the *Book of Church Order* to allow women to serve as teaching and ruling elders and deacons in the Church."

Although there was discussion at the First General Assembly as to the propriety of a denominational women's organization, a subcommittee of several women has functioned under the Committee on Christian Education and Publications since the church's inception.⁵¹ The suggested manuals for the Women in the Church at the local and presbyterial levels were written with a strict view to making sure that this arm of the church was under the absolute oversight of the respective church courts.⁵²

Discussion of the role of women, especially the question of ordaining them to the diaconate, has heated up considerably in the PCA since its absorption of the RPCES in 1982. A complicated series of judicial cases was before the Assembly every year from 1983 to 1987, involving the contested ordination of a man whose beliefs were in conflict with the church's constitution at several points, including the issue of women deacons.⁵³ The Assembly instructed the presbytery to ensure the ordinand's conformity or begin the process of divestment. In 1984, the assembly declared that the previous assembly "sustained the complaint [against ordaining the man] as a result of the cumulative effect of the sustained specifications," and then said, "The position that one believes that it is Biblically valid to ordain women as deacons, but who agrees to abide by the position of the [Book of Church Order] is not sufficient reason by itself to deny ordination or reception in the PCA."⁵⁴ An overture to that same assembly that would have established a special study committee on the legitimacy of women deacons was answered in the negative.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it appears that an increasing number is taking exception to the denomination's stand on this matter.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the "Old School" wing that left the Northern Presbyterian Church after the discipline of J. Gresham Machen and others in 1936, has been involved in merger talks with the PCA for several years. At least as early as 1980, there was serious talk in the OPC about ordaining women as deacons. The Presbytery of New York and New England debated whether to send an overture to General Assembly, requesting that change in the Form Of Government. The presbytery declined to send that overture. Contributing to its defeat was a paper by Gregory E. Reynolds, which said: "Women ought to have a key position in the work of

diaconal ministry using their 'unique capacity.' Women such as Phoebe were central in ministering to a wide range of diaconal needs in the apostolic church. But this nowhere indicates, warrants or necessitates their ordination." Reynolds emphasized the "regulative principle" with these words: "To ordain women to the office of deacon without the direct warrant of Scripture is to succumb to humanistic liberation theology of our age. Since such warrant doesn't exist let us take our stand on the Word of God."⁵⁶

The 1984 General Assembly acceded to a request from Midwest Presbytery to establish a three-member committee "to consider the hermeneutical aspects of the debate over the role of women in ordained office." That committee presented a rather controversial report to the 1985 Assembly. That court recommitted the whole matter to an expanded committee. The committee's report to the 1986 Assembly rejected both a "culturally-conditioned, therefore not normative" approach to certain passages of Scripture, and the traditional premise "that men are relatively more important than women and that women are more susceptible to temptation": "as long as that premise continues to control and the decidedly unbiblical elements in its assessment of women persist, we will not be able to put the issue of women's ordination in proper perspective, nor will we be able to make the necessary and constructive advances in grasping why *Scripture* prohibits their ordination." Local church sessions were "encouraged to search out ways consistent with Scripture and subordinate standards of our Church to recognize, nurture, and utilize the rich and diverse gifts given by Christ to the women in their congregations."⁵⁷

The 1988 General Assembly sent both a committee report (advocating keeping the status quo) and a one-man minority report (arguing for ordaining women to the diaconate) down for study. The assembly turned down a minority proposal to see what changes in the Form of Government would have to be made if the church would decide in favor of female deacons. It appears that there is virtually no sentiment in the OPC for ordaining women as elders; even the minority report came out strongly against such a notion. Also noteworthy was the assembly's sustaining of a complaint by Elder Brinks against the Wheaton, Illinois, congregation's policy of having women speak in worship. The assembly then decided to set up a committee to study the whole matter. Meanwhile, a committee of New York and New England Presbytery unanimously agreed that only ordained people should read Scripture in public worship, and there was every

⁵¹See Overture 8 from New River Presbytery, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1975) 32.

⁵²National Presbyterian Church, *Minutes of the First General Assembly*, 171-204.

⁵³Presbyterian Church in America, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1983-1986). Ironically, Pittsburgh-area Presbytery of the Ascension, founded by people leaving the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. because of the Kenyon case (see above), was the judicatory involved.

⁵⁴Presbyterian Church in America, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1984) 143.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 42, 102.

⁵⁶Gregory E. Reynolds, "A Response to the Proposed Overture to Ordain Women to the Diaconate Brought by First Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, Massachusetts to the Stated Spring Meeting of the Presbytery of New York and New England — April 15, 1980," 10.

⁵⁷"Report of the Committee on the Hermeneutics of Women in Office," given to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church General Assembly, 1986.

expectation that the presbytery would concur with that position.⁵⁸

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP) is the southern branch of the merged Seceder and Covenanter strands. Left-wing trends infiltrated this historic denomination, but those wishing to adhere to the church's traditional testimony, and other conservatives, have in the 1980s stemmed the tide.⁵⁹

The first substantial effort to institute female ordination came in 1969, when the Committee to Revise the Constitution proposed that women be eligible for the offices of elder and deacon. That provision contributed largely to the defeat of the whole constitution. During debate, John Brawley argued for women's ordination, speculating even the office of elder may in the future be obsolete: "In fact, he argued, the entire institutional church might die out so that the universal church might flourish."⁶⁰ After the defeat of the proposed constitution, the ordination of women as deacons was approved with very little discussion.⁶¹

Discussion of women's role in the church continued throughout the 1970s. The decisive votes came at the 1981 Synod. This judicatory voted 136-101 against a motion that would have established a study committee to examine the biblical basis of the women's issue. Synod voted 160-83 to deny the privilege of the floor to three female advocates of women's ordination. At that point, one of these three ladies, who had grabbed a microphone from one of the pages, tried to address synod anyway; but the man in charge of the public address equipment, by the flip of a switch, effectively carried out Paul's injunction about women keeping silent in the church. By a count of 173-55, the synod ended debate on the subject.⁶²

VI. Other Conservative Denominations

In denominations such as the Bible Presbyterian Church, Covenant Presbytery Autonomous, the Presbyterian Reformed Church, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States, the issue of women in the church has apparently never been broached. The reason, quite simply, is that there has never been reason to discuss a subject on which there is unanimous disapproval.⁶³

⁵⁸Gregory E. Reynolds, phone conversation, September 24, 1988. Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *Minutes of the General Assembly* (1988), pp. 42-43.

⁵⁹Large responsibility for the turnaround resides with the Alliance of Loyal Laity and its publication, *The Highroad for ALL*.

⁶⁰Lowry Ware and James W Gettys, *The Second Century: A History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1882-1982* (Greenville, S.C.) 322-23.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 323

⁶²*Ibid.*, 324-28.

⁶³The Bible Presbyterian Church has been mostly associated with Carl McIntire. Covenant Presbytery Autonomous was formed

Among members of the American Presbyterian Church, the topic is a hot one, but not because of any differences in their views. This denomination, greatly distinct for its particular combination of various theological positions,⁶⁴ has made a self-conscious effort to perpetuate the historic stances of the Presbyterian church in this country. Louis F. deBoer, one of its ministers, reflected the thinking of his church in a couple of articles in his monthly newsletter, *The Pilgrim*. In the first one, he wrote of the necessity of the doctrine of female subordination, which subjection "lies not in culture, but in the creation." He continued, "In a society that holds that the distinction of the sexes is evil and oppressive, the cultural dregs of inferior civilizations, it is logical to expect male and female to become indistinguishable in the drive towards unisex."⁶⁵ In the subsequent article, Mr. deBoer noted that Karl Marx's plan to abolish private property involved the extension of the franchise (as in the 19th and 26th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution) and the destruction of the family as the basic unity of society. After quoting from Dabney, this pastor stated:

Over 400 years ago [John] Knox declared, "To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire above any regime, nation, or citie, is repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his revealed will and approved ordinance, and finallie it is the subversion of good order, of all equitie and justice." It may sound somewhat harsh on twentieth century ears, but it was eminently scriptural Those who refuse to accept it and only carp at the excesses of the [Equal Rights Amendment] have not a leg to stand on. Those who reject this position must inevitably learn to accept the social order of the Marxist totalitarian state. They must learn to accept the abolition of marriage, the destruction of the family, and the socialist bureaucracy required to eliminate all sexual discrimination and enforce that kind of radical equality.⁶⁶

The American Presbyterian Church accordingly has voting by male heads of households only at congregational meetings.⁶⁷

by people leaving the Bible Presbyterian Church around 1971. The Presbyterian Reformed Church resembles most closely the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland; its women are expected to wear hats for worship. The Reformed Presbyterian church in the United States was founded by theonomic postmillennialists from the Presbyterian Church in America.

⁶⁴Among its beliefs are a cappella exclusive psalmody; total abstinence; close communion; premillennialism; and a strict subscription for office-bearers and a submission to its doctrines by all members.

⁶⁵Louis R. deBoer, "The Second Blast of the Trumpet: 'Women's Liberation,'" *The Pilgrim*, no. 2-9 (n.d.).

⁶⁶Louis F. deBoer, "The Third Blast of the Trumpet: 'Women's Suffrage,'" *The Pilgrim*, no. 2-10 (n.d.).

⁶⁷Louis F. deBoer, telephone conversation, October 25, 1986. The American Presbyterian Church's *Form of Government*

VII. Analysis and Conclusions

During the last century, many theological and social upheavals have occurred. These revolutions in ideas have had tremendous impact upon the church's views of the proper role of women.

Despite disclaimers to the contrary, women's ordination in left-wing denominations has been promoted and enacted only because of the denial of the authority and normativity of Scripture. Sometimes this denial has been explicit, as one can see especially developed in various contemporary works.⁶⁸ Often it has been more subtle, as in articles which conveniently neglected to discuss biblical texts seemingly inimical to female ordination, and in committee reports which were more interested in public opinion and the church's experience than in the teachings of the Word of God.⁶⁹

indicates that the heads of households elect officers and take vows of obedience to them; and that representation in higher church courts is determined by the number of families in a particular congregation. At the 1985 Presbyterian Church in America General Assembly, there was informal discussion in a committee that the response to an overture from Oklahoma Presbytery regarding removing congregational franchise from children should be the enactment of household voting. [See also Overture 33 from Heartland Presbytery to the 1994 General Assembly regarding who should vote in congregational meetings. Trinity Presbyterian Church of Omaha, which sponsored the overture, was willing to underwrite the expense of the proposed study committee. The Assembly, however, turned down the request.]

⁶⁸For example, Dennis Ronald MacDonald (*The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983] 97) argued that we should accept both the Pastoral Epistles and the (noncanonical) *Acts of Paul* as both being expressions of post-Pauline thought; that the canonization of the Pastorals does not mean that they alone should be accepted as the rightful second century heirs of Paulinism; and that the Pastorals were written, not linearly, but dialectically, in opposition "to another strand of Pauline tradition whose legends depicted him as a social revolutionary" (p. 97). MacDonald also stated that the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation "effectively removed the Paul of legendary memory from serious theological consideration and then deported him to the remotest corners of the church's self-consciousness, to regions traveled only by historians who enjoy collecting early Christian esoterica" (ibid.). Other Westminster Press books include Leonard Swindler's *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (1979), which claimed that rejection of verbal inspiration has cleared the way to get rid of sexism in the Bible; and Nancy van Vuuren's *The Subversion of Women as Practiced by Churches, Witch-Hunters, and Other Sexists* (1973), which contained the following: "The Reformation itself did not liberate women any more than Jesus and the beginning of Christianity had liberated women. The reformers, still misogynists, even though their popular power and support may have originated with women, controlled the churches that had separated from Rome" (p. 47).

⁶⁹Other historians supporting this view include the following. Boyd and Brackenridge (*Presbyterian Women*, 108) said that the theological acceptance of "higher criticism," such as that found in George P. Hays' *May Women Speak?* helped to pave the way for a change on the church's view on the role of women. Mary Faith Carson and James J.H. Price wrote an article for the *Journal of*

In denominations where the Bible is regarded officially as inerrant, there has been general rejection of the induction of women into ruling and teaching office.⁷⁰ However, the question of female ordination to an office of service remains controverted. In this discussion, study committees have given serious attention to the biblical data (this is in sharp contrast to liberal denominations' committees). In this debate, at least two issues have emerged as being of pivotal importance.

The first is that of the regulative principle. Opponents of women's ordination to the diaconate may concede that proponents have a plausible case, but would dispute that it can be proven on the basis of *sola scriptura*. Ignorance about and rejection of the regulative principle of worship over a span of many years in evangelical Presbyterianism have affected the debate on this matter of polity.⁷¹

The second issue is that of the nature of the diaconate and of ordination. Basically, advocates of female deacons, whether in conservative or liberal denominations, tend to emphasize what is termed the general office of the believer (as prophet, priest, and king). They therefore downplay the notion of authority conveyed by the laying on of hands.

Presbyterian History 59 (1981), "The Ordination of Women and the Function of the Bible," in which they maintained that even in the Southern Presbyterian Church, which had a much more traditional view of Scripture than the Northern Church, "there was never a compellingly felt need to address their [opponents'] understanding of Scripture in the official discussions of the issue" (p. 261). According to Carson and Price, advocates of women's ordination distinguished between "permanent" and "time-conditioned" Scripture passages, and discarded the latter as "no longer binding on the church" and certainly not authoritative (p. 260). Ernest Trice Thompson, in *Presbyterians in the South* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1973) 3.478-79, triumphantly crowed, "This action [adoption of report advocating female ordination by the 1956 Assembly] was significant, not only for the particular matter in hand, but because it marked a clear departure from the Thornwellian tradition, the legalistic static *jure divino* interpretation of Scripture which had so long dominated the church's life; the acceptance of a more dynamic understanding of Scripture — as set forth by the ad interim committee, 'From our study of the Bible we are led to believe that the Holy Spirit will progressively lead God's people into a new understanding of the practice of the will of God. This is the promise of Jesus (John 16:13-14).'"

⁷⁰The one exception is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, where the General Assembly technically has not endorsed women's ordination or taken a position that it is a good idea.

⁷¹The same rationalization process that has been used to oppose the regulative principle of worship is at work to break down traditional opposition to women's ordination. Even though the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America has kept its tradition of a cappella psalmody, one could legitimately ask if there is widespread understanding of the regulative principle itself and its implications regarding the worship service as a whole. The contention is often made that a church can have women deacons and not necessarily women elders, with the Reformed Presbyterian example being mentioned. However, there may be other consequences to the ordination of women to any office that may not be immediately evident.

Opponents tend to have a “high” and “official” view of ordination.⁷²

Presbyterians dealing with the matter of women's ordination have inevitably interacted with and been affected by society's changing mores of the proper role of women. For example, a group of women who were involved in the beginnings of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1973, shared with an Atlanta reporter these comments:

[Ordination of women] was done in disobedience to the Bible God does not give woman the authority to rule or teach and, therefore, the ability to rule over men In any church where you have women ruling, there will be psychological problems. When men rule, things are in order . . . I don't think women should have authority over men in the working world, either. I would never accept a position that put me in authority over a man, because I would not feel [God] would bless me in this [Woman] will not find peace and happiness and joy until she accepts [her place of being a helpmeet].

Certainly, I don't think we should ever have a woman president or governor. I think woman's place is in the home.

Women are not less capable than men, but this is not to say women should be ordained as ministers or elders. It's just not Scriptural.⁷³

But despite such intentions by people of this and other conservative churches, the question will remain as to whether or not they will be able to resist the pressure of the surrounding world to conform to egalitarian principles. Many of these separatist denominations have accepted the premises of women missionaries, women speaking in church, and a national women's work organization. In the

⁷²Gordon H. Clark recognized that the main issue in the debate in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, was over the nature of ordination (“The Ordination of Women” and “The Presbyterian Doctrine of Women,” found as appendices in John W. Robbins' *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries* [Jefferson, Md.: The Trinity Foundation, 1985], Part 1: Feminism, 61-108). Mike Marcey, who wrote an S.T.M. thesis in favor of women's ordination to the diaconate, would counter that the regulative principle addresses the question of office, not the qualifications and quality of people in that office; and the role and function of diaconal ministry does not contradict the role and function women played in both the Old and New Testaments, therefore that type of authority is appropriate for women (telephone conversation, November 14, 1986). Robbins' book is a caustic, and effective attack on three writers in conservative Presbyterianism who, according to Robbins, have imbibed too much at the well of feminism: James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); George W. Knight III, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977); and Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

⁷³Colleen Teasley, “Church Stand on Women Hit,” *Atlanta Constitution* (May 18, 1973) 4-B.

past, these movements have been indicative that the push for female ordination is not far behind.

The question of whether or not opposition to women's ordination implies a certain position on their role on society is also still unanswered. The report to the Orthodox Presbyterian General Assembly said,

God gave the dominion over the earth to both man and woman, individually, and called them to subdue it. That the terms of the cultural mandate extend beyond marriage gives us warrant to believe that there is a broad terrain of society on which man and woman relate to each other in such a way that the order between them is determined only by their individual ability and training, and not by a typical relationship of authority and subordination, as in the family. Their relationship as man and woman in other connections, such as that of the church, would then depend on whether this particular grouping is characterized by a typical authority/subordination relation between man and woman, or whether it is composed of a free association in which men and women relate as individuals.⁷⁴

That sentiment represents a repudiation of the historic Presbyterian view of a general subordination of woman to man, as expressed by Dabney.

Debate may continue on whether or not women's ordination can be or should be proved from Scripture. But on the historical question, there should be no doubt that, within Presbyterianism, the ordination of women, at least to ruling and teaching office, has never been demonstrated by a serious appeal to the Bible.

POSTSCRIPT TO PETTICOAT PRESBYTERIANISM

In the several years since this article was written, there have been interesting developments in the Presbyterian Church in America. In 1989, Tennessee Valley Presbytery overtured the General Assembly to study “whether women could be included on some or all of the permanent committees and agencies of the General Assembly.” The Bills and Overtures Committee, by a vote of 8-5-2, recommended that this overture be denied; and, by a vote of 12-2-1, gave the following grounds:

Women certainly may serve in the Church and be “ministers” in that sense. However, for women to participate on General Assembly committees and agencies would allow them to exercise ruling authority in the Church, in violation of I Tim. 2:11ff.

⁷⁴“Report of the Committee on the Hermeneutics of Women in Office,” 563.

This motion was referred to the Committee on Judicial Business for final disposition, along with a Constitutional Inquiry that had come about because of the presence of Dr. Diane Langberg on the Ad Interim Committee on Divorce and Remarriage. The Assembly concurred with the Judicial Business recommendations, that “a non-ordained person [may not] serve in a voting capacity on a General Assembly committee”; and that

There is no provision for a woman to function on an ad interim committee. The Assembly might allow women to serve in an advisory capacity with a committee. Examples of such approval might be found in the *Minutes* of the First General Assembly approving the establishment by Christian Education and Publications of the Women's Advisory Committee and in the permanent Committee on Judicial Business Manual.

The Tennessee Valley overture was then answered by reference to this Constitutional Inquiry from TE Paul Alexander.⁷⁵

Subsequent to this action, the Board of Covenant College (which is located within the bounds of Tennessee Valley Presbytery), with no prior approval by the General Assembly, “appointed advisory trustees to serve on the six standing committees of the board.” It reported that “[o]n each committee there will be two advisory trustees, one nominated by the PCA Women in the Church and one nominated by Covenant's alumni executive committee. This new development is the result of many months of planning.”⁷⁶

In 1991, women from Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia advised women from Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan as to how to set up deaconesses; and, in the process, were quite candid about how they served essentially in an equal role with male ordained deacons. In 1993, Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Winston-Salem ordained women as deacons; but, after concern was voiced to Central Carolina Presbytery, later overturned that action on a technicality.

These activities undoubtedly helped to generate some overtures. Affirmation Presbyterian Church asked Northeast Presbytery to declare that congregational election of deaconesses, deaconesses sitting on the Board of Deacons, and any other than elders and deacons being set apart by the laying on of hands and prayer, were violations of the church's Constitution. This resolution, which was presented to the May 1991 meeting of Presbytery, got shelved until January 1994, when it was brought forth from the Administration Committee to which it had been referred.

⁷⁵Presbyterian Church in America, *Minutes of 17th General Assembly* (1989), pp. 128, 176, 183f.

⁷⁶Presbyterian Church in America, *Minutes of 20th General Assembly* (1992), p. 367.

Presbytery voted to postpone consideration until May 1994, at which time it turned down all three parts of the overture. However, gratitude was expressed on the floor of Presbytery for the good-natured spirit of the debate, and for the usefulness of it for those churches that do employ deaconesses in terms of raising caution flags over possible abuses and misunderstandings. In January 1994, Southeast Alabama Presbytery overtured the 1994 General Assembly to encourage churches to use the provision allowing for female assistants to the deacons, but also to reiterate the position that only men should be ordained. These resolutions passed unanimously. However, the 22nd General Assembly, instead of adopting them, merely stated that the Constitution was sufficiently clear on these matters and that there was no need to restate what was already affirmed.

Meanwhile, the 1993 General Assembly took exception to the minutes of the Mission to the World Committee for approving team planning documents “identifying that deaconesses be constituted as a church office.” It also took exception to Philadelphia Presbytery's minutes, by stating “Women should not be on an executive committee in what appears to be a ruling capacity (I Timothy 2:12; BCO {7-2, {9-7}).” This past year's Assembly also took North Georgia Presbytery to task for having women serve on presbytery committees with vote. However, it also approved Philadelphia Presbytery's response to last year's exception, which essentially tried to explain away the Presbytery's practice without changing it.⁷⁷

The issue of women's ordination has come up in terms of interchurch relations. The 1989 General Assembly, in contrast to the recommendation of the Permanent Committee, voted “that the PCA not seek a relationship of 'ecclesiastical correspondence' with the [Evangelical Presbyterian Church] because of their irrevocable position providing for the ordination of women as ruling and teaching elders.”⁷⁸ More recently, this past year the Permanent Committee stated its view that even if the Christian Reformed Church were to ordain women to ruling and teaching office, that would not be grounds in and of itself to break off fraternal ties with the CRC. Both that report from the Permanent Committee, and one from the Committee of Commissioners taking a distinctly opposite position, were defeated in favor of a substitute that pleaded with the Christian Reformed Church not to take the final step toward ordaining women as elders and ministers and that resolved that should the CRC give final approval of

⁷⁷Presbyterian Church in America, *Minutes 21st General Assembly* (1993), pp. 83, 246; *Minutes 22nd General Assembly* (1994).

⁷⁸*Minutes* (1989), p. 59.

this measure, relations with that denomination would then be re-evaluated.⁷⁹

What is clear is that the issue of women's role in the church is not going away, but rather that it is increasingly becoming a topic of discussion and debate. One recent example of that is the *Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America*. This document says, "We affirm that such matters as . . . the legitimate ministries of women (other than elder) . . . are important issues but should not be treated as though the very foundation of Christ's Church at large, or the Reformed Church in particular, were threatened by them." It goes on to say, "The PCA is facing a number of questions today which have the potential for division, . . . [including] the legitimate ministries of women." Among worship practices which are admittedly "somewhat controversial" is "the use of women in liturgical leadership."⁸⁰

What is also clear is that there have been bold moves toward putting women in places of spiritual leadership, in terms of both the life and the worship of the church. Who would have thought even ten years ago that the Mission to the World Committee would have approved the concept of women serving in the office of deacon? Who would have thought that a PCA church, even if "inadvertently," would have ordained women to office? Who would have thought that women would be encouraged to "use their gifts" in public worship, in terms of leading in prayer, reading Scripture, taking up an offering, speaking from the pulpit, and even helping to serve communion? Yet these things have occurred.

What is not clear is where the PCA ultimately will head with regard to female ordination. Certainly there are tremendous pressures in church and society towards acceptance of egalitarianism, and denominations such as the PCA are increasingly standing alone in opposition. Most assuredly, the more that women are put into positions of leadership, the less potent will be the resistance to distaff ordination. And, there are disturbing signs that many of the seminaries that are supplying PCA pastors are soft on the issue. (An example is the recent report that women are leading in chapel at Westminster Theological Seminary, and are being encouraged in "small group" chapel to expound the Word.)

⁷⁹*Minutes* (1994).

⁸⁰*Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America* (1994), pp. 11, 12, 19-20. [The committee that produced the *PSI* after much negative reaction sent letters requesting presbyteries not to take the paper under consideration. The paper is being revised. Dr. Smith was one of the contributors to a response to the *PSI* published by FPCR, *Answers to PCA Consensus: An Analysis of A Proposed Statement of Identity For the Presbyterian Church in America* (September, 1994). See the collection of extracts from this paper in this issue of *The Blue Banner* starting on page 18.— Ed.]

But it is also true that the PCA remains, in its grass roots, a very traditional group, not a "yuppie" one. Further, there are testimonies from numerous congregations against these modernist trends. First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas, for instance, does not allow women to give prayer requests nor to pray aloud during public prayer meetings. Affirmation Presbyterian Church of Somers, New York, when it acquired its own property, stated in its church covenant that any attempt at deviation from standard Presbyterian theology and/or polity (including the principle that only men should be ordained) would justly call God's wrath down upon the innovators. And Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashua, New Hampshire, principally will not establish a (semi-autonomous) women's group.

Unlike the situation in the Southern Presbyterian Church in the 1960s, the ordination of women, even to the diaconate, in the Presbyterian Church in America would create a big rupture. The prevention of that apostasy and subsequent withdrawal is, in the final analysis, in the Lord's hands; but we are responsible to be sure of the teaching of Scripture and to instruct others, particularly officers, as to the true nature of church polity and especially the hermeneutical principles that must guide the Church in determining such matters. The question of polity, like that of worship, is not "Why not?," but rather "Why?" There are no commands and there is no Biblical justification to ordain women to office, and therefore we must stand steadfastly against this notion. ♦

Coming in Future Issues of The Blue Banner

Calvin and the Worship of God, by W. Robert Godfrey, Ph.D. Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary in California. Nov/Dec 1994.

The author discusses Calvin's theology of worship, his practice and basic principles. He identifies Calvin's theology on worship with that of the Puritan's, which has now come to be known as the Regulative Principle of Worship.

Beyond Canterbury: A Review of James B. Jordan's *Liturgical Nestorianism*, by Richard E. Bacon. Jan/Feb 1995.

Ten years ago Kevin Reed wrote *The Canterbury Tales*, a review of some articles by Mr. Jordan on the subject of worship. He wrote then, ". . . we marvel at Mr. Jordan's frequent jabs and swipes at Presbyterianism, the position of the Reformers, the Puritans . . . and the confessional standards themselves. His writings often show more charity toward Papists, than toward the Reformed faith." Mr. Bacon reviews the latest such "swipes" in Jordan's *Liturgical Nestorianism*. ♦

Does Feminism at Ephesus Explain I Timothy 2:12?

By Steven M. Baugh, Ph.D.

[Reprinted by permission from *Elders' Forum*, Volume V, Issue 1, Spring 1994. Published by Westminster Theological Seminary in California. Dr. Steven Baugh is Assistant Professor of New Testament at WTS in California. The NIV citations were made by the author and are retained here for that reason.]

Until quite recently, the church has generally understood the Bible to teach that God calls only men to the office of elder. Today this is changing fast in the cultural atmosphere of radical egalitarianism. The arguments for women's ordination sweep in like a firestorm. They are presented as an impassioned commitment to fairness and the defense of divinely granted rights to women. The crusaders liken themselves and their issue to the fight against slavery in the last century.

Many who are taken by the plausibility of their arguments have not considered the implications. What harm is there, they ask, if women serve as elders and pastors? Don't we know women who are gifted teachers? It seems fair to let them teach in the church too. But the issue is not really about fairness toward women or whether they can participate in the life of the church – all believers, male and female, are called as “general officers” of Christ's church to a host of variegated ministries (see for example: Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-12 and Tit. 2:3-5).

Is Christ the Head of his Church? Does he have the authority to discriminate in his selection for church office ?

No, the real issue is twofold. The first concerns the nature of the office of elder itself. Office in Christ's church is not defined in terms of power and rights, as if church office were like political office to which any citizen can be elected. To change the focus from a calling to spiritual service in the Word of God to the asserting of a claim to rights invites the political power brokerage specifically forbidden by Jesus (Mark 10:42-45). In the home and in the church the Lord has appointed a sacrificial, serving headship like his own. If the egalitarian principles employed today are developed to their logical outcome, there will be anarchy in our churches and families – a fifty percent divorce rate today and children suing their parents in court are just two of the fruits of egalitarian “gains.”

The second issue, though, is the really important one. Is Christ the Head of his Church? Does he have the authority to discriminate in his selection for church office? “All are

not apostles, are they?” (1 Cor. 12:29); “Didn't I personally choose you to be the Twelve?” (John 6:70). Inevitably, the question continues to be whether the Word of God will remain the church's rule of faith and practice or whether our standards will be dictated by an increasingly anti-biblical culture.

“HAS GOD REALLY SAID ... ?”

So what does the Bible say about this issue? One of the key texts, 1 Tim. 2:12, says: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” (NIV). This certainly seems clear enough. But we are told by some scholars, even in historic Reformed communions, that this verse is far more complex and obscure than it appears; it needs special handling by experts with specialized interpretive skills. Then, nearly every word in this key verse is questioned, researched, reinterpreted, and subjected to labyrinthine retranslation to mean something other than what is found in all major translations. In that way it is removed as one of the prohibitions to a female eldership.

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve.”

For example, egalitarians say that 1 Tim. 2:12 really means: “I do not, for the time being, allow women to teach. After they are better educated they can serve as teaching elders.” Others read the verse, “I do not allow women to teach in a domineering way” or “to teach so as to dominate.” In the end, though, the original text simply cannot be made to say these things; it really is not obscure at all. And note especially that these retranslations cannot be made to fit verse 13: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.”

THE HISTORICAL QUESTION

So far, ordinary Bible study can demonstrate that the Bible's teaching on women's ordination is not so obscure after all. But there is an egalitarian argument currently in fashion which may intimidate non-specialists. It runs like this: Ephesus (where 1 Timothy was directed, see 1 Tim.

1:3) was a peculiarly feministic outpost in an otherwise male-centered world. In fact, its religious scene was so filled with domineering women promoting eccentric teachings that Paul (in contrast to his general practice) felt constrained to forbid any women *at Ephesus* from assuming the eldership. His statement is culturally bound to a specific historical situation so it is no longer relevant today. There is, we are told, no abiding principle in this passage.

Now, there are a number of obvious objections to this argument.¹ But the basic cultural issue has engaged my attention for the past year or so. I pursued my doctoral studies at U.C. Irvine in the field of ancient social history. My dissertation was on Acts 19 and Paul's relation to the society of Ephesus. So it happens in God's providence that I had the opportunity to pursue specialized research on Ephesian society. There was no feminism there, not a trace.

Until recently, this supposed feminism was simply asserted without much proof other than that the Ephesians worshipped a female state goddess, Artemis Ephesia (the "Diana of the Ephesians" in Acts ...)

How, then, has it been maintained that 1 Tim. 2:12 is irrelevant because of an Ephesian feministic culture? Until recently, this supposed feminism was simply asserted without much proof other than that the Ephesians worshipped a female state goddess, Artemis Ephesia (the "Diana of the Ephesians" in Acts 19:23-40). Indeed, she looks like a fertility goddess to casual study.² But this line of argument is quite frail. The ancient pagan sources unanimously describe Artemis Ephesia as "Artemis the pure," "the renowned, vigilant maiden," a chaste virgin goddess, not a mother goddess. And female goddesses are quite frequently the chief goddesses of Greek city-states like Ephesus, where no amount of feminism can be discerned (for example, Athena of the Athenians or Aphrodite of Aphrodisia).

Hence, it was with real interest that I reviewed the recent book by Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger which proposed, finally, to present technical, historical evidence

¹For instance, Paul grounds the injunction of verse 12 in a trans-cultural creation structure and the historical example of Eve usurping Adam's authority in verses 13-14. Furthermore, all biblical teaching is conditioned by cultural factors in one way or another. Galatians, for instance, was written for a specific religious situation, but we use its principles today. And Paul moved primarily in urban cultures, yet he found abiding principles in an Old Testament teaching on farm animals relevant enough in 1 Cor. 9:8-10 and 1 Tim. 5:17-18.

²Because of the supposed "breasts" on the statue; but experts agree that these protrusions on her midriff are ornamentation of some other kind. The fact that Zeus (!) has such ornaments on some of his statues undergirds this judgment.

for the conjectured Ephesian feminism.³ Their handling of the Bible had drawn exceptionally strong criticism in the scholarly reviews prior to mine, but I determined to read their work as fairly as I could. I was, to put it mildly, underwhelmed. No, I was, and am grieved to think that their views on Ephesian society have been accepted and influential.

Let me give you just a taste of their work. They argue that although Ephesus was not feministic in the political and social realms, women were domineering in Ephesian religion. Here is how they characterize Ephesian women.

Ephesus stood as a bastion of feminine supremacy in religion ... In Ephesus women assumed the role of the man-slaying Amazons who had founded the cult of Artemis of Ephesus ... The female dancers at the temple of the Ephesian Artemis clashed their arms, so lethal weapons were part of the priestesses' religious accoutrements. There are reasons to suspect that the dances may have contained a simulated attack on males, especially as they were performed with spears ... They would surely have inspired terror; and this, Strabo tells us, was one of the purposes of the dance (pp. 54; 186-87).

With such a scenario, and assuming that such masterful women were among the early converts at Ephesus, it is no wonder that the Kroegers and others argue that 1 Tim. 2:12 merely tries to rein Ephesian women in a bit. The passage in Strabo⁴ behind the Kroegers' description of the Ephesian priestesses mentions a ritual connected to the mythology of Artemis' birth performed by certain "Kouretes" (untranslatable religious officials). The Kroegers take these "Kouretes" to be female priestesses. The problem is, we know the names of hundreds of these Kouretes from honorary inscriptions from Ephesus. They are all men.⁵

They were more like "Rose Bowl queens" than Amazonian warriors !

Furthermore, the few priestesses of Artemis Ephesia we read about from our abundant evidence were nothing like the domineering, spear-wielding feminists of Kroegerian imagination. Many of them were demonstrably 12 to 14 year-old girls whose wealthy parents paid for their maiden daughters to obtain this high honor. The main function of these girls was participation in a religious procession in

³See Baugh, "The Apostle Among the Amazons," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 153-171.

⁴A Greek historian from Pontus who died around A.D. 20.

⁵I am preparing a more detailed presentation of Ephesian culture. See: "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century," in *Women and the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Its Literary, Cultural, and Theological Contexts* (S. Baldwin, A. Kostenberger, and T. Schreiner, eds.; Grand Rapids: Baker) (forthcoming).

honor of the goddess. They were more like “Rose Bowl queens” than Amazonian warriors! And we can further show that male civic and cult officials of Ephesus were the real authorities in the cult of the Ephesian goddess.

Such arguments for the ordination of women to the eldership are not convincing. If they were, I think most of us who love the Lord and his Word would be campaigning for women's ordination. Instead, I think it is a campaign that can do nothing but harm to women themselves. It is his Word that defines his calling, and it gives the sternest warning to those who intrude without it: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3: 1; NIV; see also Heb. 13:17). ♦

BOOK REVIEW

Jim Owen, *Christian Psychology's War on God's Word* Eastgate Publishers; Santa Barbara, CA; 1983

Here's yet another critique of Christian psychology put out by Eastgate Publishers. Jim Owen, an associate professor at The Master's College, argues that the Christian psychology movement creates a tossed salad of biblical doctrine and behavioral theory which "profoundly reinterprets the Gospel - with staggering implications for Christianity."

Much of Christian psychology movement, according to Owen, has fed on two major dilemmas. One involves well-intentioned Christians, generally without a solid Biblical background, who falsely see these imported ideas as adding a dose of relevance to the faith. The other quandary is that of churchgoers who do not want to face their sinfulness and personal responsibility but still want to feel “spiritual.”

Owen reaffirms what most *Blue Banner* readers already know. Much of the Christian psychology movement presents a watered down version of the sinfulness of sin and the sufficiency of Christ and of the Scriptures. Sadly, the examples Owen offers of modern antinomianism are now commonplace and no longer shocking. Is anybody still surprised by stories of healing-of-memories or self-actualization dressed up as sanctification? Or startled to hear the reason people don't accept Christ is because they had bad relationships with their fathers? Or staggered at the teaching that Matthew 22:39 (“love your neighbor as yourself”) means that we must love ourselves before we can love others?

Owen is most profound at describing the word games Christian psychology plays. He notes how the phrase “people are hurting” has become a substitute for “people need Jesus.” The word “victim” has been so trivialized as

to refer to almost everyone. At one point Owen jumps into a satire where a Christian counselor tells the Apostle Paul,

You mustn't go to such idealistic extremes. Just saying ‘no’ as you are telling the Colossians to do isn't enough. For many the hurts from the past are too overwhelming. They drive these people to despair in their walk with the Lord. It isn't enough to tell them to focus on Christ. The damage is too subtle to so easily leave behind. They need someone with proper training . . .

A real-life southern California pastor is quoted here saying that Issac was victimized by Abraham, “had no idea of the pain in his life,” and “had no internal validation program.” Hoo, boy.

One flaw in the book is Owen's tendency to lump a large group of people and theories under the umbrella of “Christian psychology” and “victimization therapy.” He seems to overlook the differences between different popularizers and theorists and assumes they all teach the same errors to the same degree. There are many differences, for example, between men such as Larry Crabb and David Seamonds. Seamonds promotes a mystical “inner healing” teaching. Crabb claims to present a middle path between the smog of psychobabble and what he sees as narrow biblicism. The dearth of such distinctions gives the book an unfortunate Dave Hunt-ish tinge in places. (Also, isn't it time the PsychoHeresy people stopped putting such sensationalist titles on their product? First “PsychoHeresy: The Psychological Seduction of Christianity.” Then two volumes of “Prophets of PsychoHeresy.” Then “12 Steps to Destruction.” Now “Christian Psychology's War on God's Word”. Enough already.)

There are important points in this book, however, that seem to fall on deaf ears no matter how often they are said. American Evangelicalism has created a subculture where many lose their sense of their own sin because of their religious social setting. Owen refers to many Evangelical youth as living in a modern half-way covenant; young people are told over that they have eternal security because of a childhood profession – no matter how rotten they become later.

Owen notes how too many methods and teachings in Evangelicaldom have perilous similarities to the pragmatic liberalism of a century ago. “The history of the church” he writes, “is haunted by the debris of ambitious and/or zealous ‘believers’ who have sought to improve Christianity for God's sake and in Christ's name.” Isn't it time American Christianity figured that out?

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Extracts From Answers to PCA Consensus.

In July of this year a paper was sent out entitled, *PCA Consensus: A Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America* (PCA). It was sent out to be considered by all the presbyteries of the PCA. In September FPCR published a response and analysis of the *PSI*, appropriately titled *Answers to PCA Consensus: An Analysis of A Proposed Statement of Identity For The Presbyterian Church in America*. PCA Consensus, after experiencing overwhelming negative reaction to its *PSI*, has asked the presbyteries of the PCA not to consider it at this time. See the back page of this issue if you are interested in obtaining a full copy of this *Answer*.

INTRODUCTION, Christopher Coldwell

The following papers were solicited, compiled and edited into this collection in response to the call in the introduction of *A Proposed Statement of Identity (PSI)*, for "open discussions" of the issues raised therein. It is the hope of the contributors to this collection, as well as the editor, that the clear identification of the problems in each of the chapters of the *PSI* will be useful to the debate over what should be done with that document.

. . . they all believe that this *Answer* is necessary because the views of a portion of the PCA were ignored by PCA Consensus, and that some of the affirmations, denials, and propositions of the *PSI* if put in practice, could be detrimental to biblical church government, biblical worship and biblical discipline.

CHAPTER I: SCRIPTURE AND HERMENEUTICS

Larry E. Ball, Pastor of Bridwell Heights Presbyterian Church, Kingsport, TN.

At the bottom of page three of the *PSI* in the chapter on Scripture and Hermeneutics, the authors refer, in the context of emphasizing the importance of the Scriptures over Confessions, that we live in a "pluralistic age". Such a phrase assumes the equality of all religions under one civil government which is devoted to neutrality. Pluralism, in times past, referred to the acceptance of various Christian denominations living under one nation which was founded upon Christian law. Now, the concept of pluralism is used to promote the equality of all religions under some undefined 'natural law' which must be the final authority in civil matters.

Actually, there are only two religions, God's and Satan's. As Dr. Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary used to say, the choice is either theonomy or autonomy. Such is the case in the realm of civil government as well. Either God's law or man's law will reign. The question is not whether religion will influence civil government, but rather which religion. Will it be Christianity or will it be some modern form of Satan's idols such as Secular Humanism?

CHAPTER II: SUBSCRIPTION

E. C. Case, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Woodville, MS.

The *PSI* also introduces the caricature of full subscription which allegedly commits a candidate to profess "to receive every detailed proposition within the Confession". This chimerical bogeyman of 'jot and tittle' subscriptionism is frequently found in company with the hobgoblin of the elevation of the Standards to a virtual equivalency with Scripture. Such positions are repudiated by the full subscriptionists, as the writers of the *PSI* know very well. It should further be noted that subscription to the Standards is not to be confused with subscription to a particular theologian's point of view with regard to the doctrine. For example, subscription to the doctrine referred to in the Confession as the 'Covenant of Works' does not oblige the

subscriber to adopt the peculiar view of Charles Hodge. Also, it is recognized that certain terms in the Standards may have become infused, in the course of theological debate, with a meaning not strictly demanded by the terms themselves or their use in the Standards. Thus, language referring to Christ as "freely offered to us in the gospel" does not oblige one to subscribe to the peculiar view of Murray and Stonehouse on the subject.

Full subscription does not preclude development of the Truth any more than our commitment to Scripture as infallible and inerrant and authoritative for every department of faith and life precludes study and development of the Truth. What full subscription does is commit us to work within a rather precise framework, and within certain boundaries which are not to be summarily cast aside at the whim of the individual.

CHAPTER III: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Grover Gunn, Pastor of Carrollton Presbyterian Church, Carrollton, MS.

The introduction notes that the Westminster Standards are a product of "the Church primarily of the Seventeenth Century." True, but they have also been reaffirmed by Bible believing Christians in every century since. And there is a significant sense in which there is nothing new under the sun. The Westminster Standards represent the theological crest of an extended revival and reformation, the likes of which we have not seen since. Yes, there is a need for continued theological reflection and contemporary application beyond the specifics found in the Westminster Standards. Yet we must take care not to become too enamored with the unique wisdom of our own age, which is the temptation of every generation. . . .

There are other things we should also be doing to heal the fragmentation in our denomination. Some if not all of these are implied in the *PSI*. To begin with, we need to recognize that our problem is a spiritual problem for which there is no quick and easy political solution. To the degree there is a problem in the PCA, the problem is us, not our Constitution. Spiritual unity and genuine reformation will come only in the context of a Spirit-inspired revival within our midst. Let us pray for the day and patiently wait upon the Lord of the harvest.

CHAPTER IV: CHURCH POLITY

Richard E. Bacon, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Rowlett, TX

PSI denies, "that the Church can effectively serve Christ if she irresponsibly opposes and criticizes her leaders privately and publicly; we further deny that the Church can effectively serve Christ if she seeks to function like a democracy, with no recognized and empowered leadership." One wonders if this statement was crafted in Vatican City! Surely the PCA does not believe its leaders are above criticism?! Who should we think is going to determine whether criticism is responsible or irresponsible? With the "loss" of literally millions of dollars in one of our permanent committees and the withholding of a document (the legal audit) from the board of the PCA corporation, it may not be the criticism that is irresponsible....

Certainly we have a responsibility to “obey them that have the rule” in the church. In that context, of course, we must “consider the end of their conversation,” i.e. whether they have conducted themselves according to their office. The office in view, however, is clearly that of a pastor or teaching elder – not a coordinator, president, or permanent committee member.

Does PSI understand the “recognized and empowered” leadership in the church to be those elders who have been chosen by the people (Acts 14:23; etc.) or does it understand that leadership to be permanent committee members, who should be understood as the servants of the court and who serve at the court's pleasure? The effect of adopting such a statement could be grave for the PCA. Are servants to be regarded as “above criticism?” Responsible criticism should be welcomed by those in the PCA who have been designated the servants of the Assembly.

CHAPTER V: WORSHIP

Dr. Frank J. Smith, Pastor of Affirmation Presbyterian Church, Somers NY.

The concern we have, however, has to do with the fact that worship elements (and expressions) are being legitimized on the basis of the principle of their not being ‘specifically prohibited.’ This, of course, is essentially the Catholic/Lutheran/Anglican position; and, is a complete reversal from the fine statements found in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. We are, quite frankly, at a loss to comprehend how the author(s) could subscribe to the regulative principle of worship, and then two pages later in essence deny it. If someone were writing a parody of a ‘loose’ theological position (or of the state of theological and intellectual reflection in today's church), he could hardly do better than simply to quote from the document under consideration. . . .

The final paragraph appears to be raising a straw man argument against the Reformed tradition. Again, let it be said that there are many circumstantial details regarding worship – including which tunes to use – that can, may, and do change throughout time. However, if our tradition, in terms of the elements/practices of worship, is thoroughly Biblical, then there is no reason to modify it. And, why should it be so hard to believe that the Westminster Assembly, representing the pinnacle of Reformation thought and working during a time when the subject of worship was intensely debated, actually may have known what it was talking about with respect to it?

CHAPTER VI: BIBLICAL DISCIPLINE

Richard E. Bacon, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Rowlett, TX.

In this writer's opinion much more remains to be said with respect to church discipline in the PCA, especially in light of case 93-3, Chen v. Ascension Presbytery. In that case the SJC opinion unwarrantedly and unconstitutionally extended the provisions of Book of Church Order § 25-11 to include private members. Further, it unconstitutionally changed the meaning of BCO § 46-5, “but only after the Session has followed scriptural procedures (Matthew 18).”

According to SJC (and by its concurrence, the General Assembly of the PCA), a Session is not to follow the scriptural procedures of Matthew 18 which procedures include how to proceed when the offending party is contumacious, “but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matthew 18:17). Not only has SJC (and the 1994 GA) thus changed the meaning of our constitution, it has done so in a way that undermines biblical discipline. The effect of case 93-3 is that a person cannot be disciplined except with his own permission.

Biblical discipline has been understood by Presbyterians since at least 1560 (and many would argue even earlier) to be one of the irreducible marks of a true church. If the PCA chooses to continue on the course begun in Chen v. Ascension Presbytery and hinted in PSI, it is only a

question of time until it is no true church at all, but has its candlestick removed by the Judge of both the church and the nations.

CHAPTER VII: MISSION

Carl W. Bogue, Pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church, Akron, OH.

The issue that hovers just beneath the surface, an issue that arises in #9 and #10 as well as the exposition, is ‘contextualization.’ Any student of missions knows of the considerable debate that has taken place on what is or is not permissible under the banner of contextualization. Throughout the Reformed community there is the same pressure which is being felt in society at large to lower standards. In our case the motivation is pragmatism. Lower the standards of Christianity in order to ‘prosper more’ in both home and foreign missions. In Spurgeon's day it was called ‘down-grading.’ In recent missionary buzz words it is sometimes called ‘contextualization.’ In the jargon of talk radio it is ‘dumbing down.’ We are told we must disrobe the Gospel from its ‘Western’ garb and reclothe it in our host culture. It all depends!

Everyone would agree, I suppose, that there is a proper kind of contextualization that does not compromise the Gospel. But we believe that creedal Calvinism, just because it is based on the inerrant Word of God, needs only to be ‘reformed’ from Scripture and not from culture. To quote an editorial on missions some years ago, it “does not need to be either detextualized, retextualized, or contextualized! What it needs is to be preached!” . . .

Whatever may or may not be intended in the PSI and the surrounding activity, whether we have been overly concerned about what may be behind the words, the fact remains that the words are open to a variety of interpretations. This problem in a document that is meant to clarify and bring unity to the church can hardly expect to achieve its professed end.

Part and parcel of this concern is the broader question of why we need this kind of document. The current constitutional documents of the PCA serve as a statement of identity. Our Westminster standards are acknowledged by most of us as the finest creedal documents available. They are a basis of unity, of consensus, and they define clearly the principles of the Great Commission. If we truly want a consensus and a bond of unity that will be blessed of God, then let us renew our vows already taken to receive and adopt our confessional standards. It does not matter how good our laws or constitution are if there is not the integrity to honor that to which we have subscribed.

There is a real danger that by a 50% plus one vote the PSI will become the de facto constitutional authority of the PCA. The precedent for this is already in practice with the Pastoral Letter Concerning the Experience of the Holy Spirit in the Church Today. I have just recently re-read that document. While it has many of the problems of the PSI and is thus open to misunderstanding, on the surface of it one may let it pass as a harmless and perhaps even helpful document. However, it is obvious that some who voted for it saw it as a defense of the continuation of the miraculous gifts. So repeatedly, when one tries to bring our subordinate standards to bear against such charismatic practices, elders immediately jump to their feet and yell, ‘foul,’ claiming that we settled this in favor of the charismatics in 1974. A simple majority action of a General Assembly has thus not only taken on confessional status, but in practice it has superseded the Confession in authority. It is surely a legitimate fear that if this PSI gains even simple majority approval from a General Assembly, it will henceforth be used in a similar way. At such a time, any confessional consensus will have become a fiction. ♦

The Blue Banner

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