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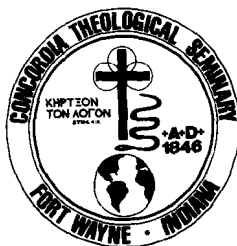
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Theological Observer

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7 AND TITUS 1:5-9 AND THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

I. Qualifications for the Office of Overseer

Not long ago I received a copy of *Different Voices/Shared Vision*, published by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau and written for members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with contributions justifying and promoting the ordination of women within the Missouri Synod.¹ While several thoughts came to mind concerning this publication which will not be explored here, one major thought came to the fore, namely, there is no reference to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 or Titus 1:5-9. How can this be? How can one endorse the ordination of women and make no reference to these texts? This lack seems peculiar as these passages speak directly about what we today would call the office of the public ministry, the office of pastor. Yet they are not mentioned. This oversight also seems to be a common one in the discussion of the ordination of women. Our Lutheran Confessions tell us that to settle theological controversies the problem must be stated precisely and then passages from the Bible which speak to the question must be sought in order to reach a God-pleasing conclusion. The question is "May a woman be a pastor?" or, even better, "What are the biblical qualifications for an overseer?" There are two Bible passages which specifically address this question: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Too often other passages are brought into the discussion which are secondary, such as 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-36. In her article on 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 Elizabeth Yates concludes: ". . . this passage cannot responsibly be used as a proof-text for anything as significant as the role of women in the ministry of the church."² We do not agree with most of her exegesis and conclusions but, even if we did, this passage is secondary to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Marva J. Dawn in her article on 1 Timothy 2:8-15 carries out her exegesis without the slightest hint that 1 Timothy 3:1-7 immediately follows.³ Others rely on Galatians 3:28 as their support for the ordination of women as pastors, even though the text has nothing to do with the pastoral office.⁴ It speaks about justification and thus may have something to say about the priesthood of believers, but not about the pastoral office.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are the *sedes doctrinae* for the office of pastor. The language is clear and straightforward in giving the qualifications for the office of overseer. These texts cannot be dismissed as non-Pauline. They belong not to the antilegomena but to the homologoumena. They may not be dismissed on the basis of the vocabulary used, since all the key words are found in such early writings as

Philippians (1:1, ἐπισκοπος), 1 Thessalonians (5:12, προσημα), James (5:13, πρεσβύτερος), as well as in Acts (20:28, ἐπισκοπος).

II. Eligibility for the Office of Overseer

Paul says that the overseer is to be a "one-woman man" (v. 2). Clearly he is referring to what we today would call the pastoral office. He alternately describes this office with ἐπισκοπος (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7) and πρεσβύτερος (Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5). The descriptions of this office are closely associated with the pastoral office today, consisting of the public oversight of God's people and their spiritual care by the ministers of the word of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; 1 Timothy 3:2, 4, 5; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:2, 24; Titus 1:7, 9; Hebrews 13:17; James 3:1; 1 Peter 5:2, 3).

Paul says that only males are candidates for the office of overseer. Whether the phrase "one-woman man" refers to how many wives the overseer may have at one time or whether the overseer is allowed to be married more than once is not germane to the issue of whether a woman may be an overseer-pastor. Clearly Paul is speaking with the assumption that only men are candidates for the pastoral office. This impression is reinforced as Paul compares the care of the church provided by the overseer with the care that a husband gives to his family (1 Timothy 3:4-5: "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" [NIV]; cf. Titus 1:5). Paul's use of προσημα ("manage") is worthy of note in verses 4 and 5. He uses this verb in reference to the husband's role in the family and, in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 (and possibly Romans 12:8), to the overseer's function in the church. In classical Greek προσημα was usually predicated of a position which involved the responsibility of protecting those over whom one was placed.⁵ In the Septuagint προσημα occurs eight times, rendering a Hebrew word meaning "to be the head of a household," "to govern the people."⁶ Thus, in the New Testament the word involves ". . . the picture of the patriarchal head of the household or father of the family. If he is capable of fulfilling this role well, he fulfills a vital qualification for being leader in the church."⁷ The biblical teaching which holds these concepts of home and church together is the male headship involved in the order of creation. Indeed, Paul lays the groundwork for 1 Timothy 3:2-5 at the end of chapter 2 (verses 11-13)

when he says: "For a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (NIV).

Clearly the existence of an order of creation is pivotal in the debate over the ordination of women. If one believes that the order of creation is a biblical teaching, not bound by time and culture, then the Apostle Paul is being scripturally and logically consistent in excluding women from the pastoral office even as they are excluded from being the head of the home. This is no isolated or obscure teaching. Paul makes reference to male headship not only in 1 Timothy 2 and 3 and Titus 1, but also in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:22, and Colossians 3:18. That the Apostle Peter is in agreement with the Apostle Paul is seen in 1 Peter 3:1-6. In 1 Timothy 3:2-5 Paul certainly makes the connection between the headship of the husband and the office of overseer in the church. If a woman is not to lead the family household, she is not to lead the household of God.

III. Culture and Time

Other than one's own cultural biases concerning the roles of men and women, there is no reason to believe that what Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 is bound to culture or time. How can one take only the descriptions of overseers as males as being culturally bound and not the other qualifications listed? In the greater context of the whole letter there is every reason to believe that what Paul writes in these verses is applicable in the church for all time. In 1 Timothy 1:13 he appeals to the account of the creation of Adam and Eve, which is something historically true in all times and places. It relates facts of history which cannot be changed: Adam was formed first, then Eve. At the beginning of 1 Timothy 3 Paul says, "Here is a trustworthy saying" (v. 1). He uses these same words in chapter 1 in reference to Jesus coming into the world to save sinners (1:15) and again in chapter 4 in reference to our hope in the living God who is the Savior of all people, especially believers (4:9). In chapter 3 Paul tells Timothy that he has given these instructions so that he would know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's "household," a word that would bring to mind again the office of overseer (3:5, 15). And in Titus we see that what Paul says to Timothy concerning the church in Ephesus applies equally to the church on the island of Crete. Such other passages as 1 Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3:18, and 1 Peter 3:1-6 support and are consistent with 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. In addition, Jesus picked twelve males to be apostles and

only a male was eligible to take the place of the Apostle Judas.⁸ There is a consistency here that cannot be overcome without resorting to "creative exegesis" or removing certain passages from consideration by claiming the existence of problems in interpreting them. One cannot simply by fiat bind a passage of Scripture to culture and time. There must be clear evidence; otherwise all of Scripture would be susceptible to such subjective eisegesis. And it is inappropriate to appeal to passages which talk about the equality of all Christians, that is, the priesthood of all believers. This priesthood is not the issue. Those who believe that only males are candidates for the pastoral office also believe in the priesthood of believers. The necessary questions are these: "What does Scripture say about women and the office of overseer?" "What are the biblical qualifications to be a pastor?" Both 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 answer these questions.

IV. Conclusion

The discussion of the ordination of women is only confused when the pertinent passages are ignored. It only confuses the issue when passages such as Galatians 3:28, dealing with justification and the priesthood of all believers, are used to affirm women as pastors. It will not do to call secondary passages such as 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 "obscure," ignore 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and then claim justification of the ordination of women. The gospel, the teaching of justification, does not tell us whether women may be pastors-overseers. To answer this question the pertinent passages of Scripture must be examined. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are such passages, and an overseer is to be a male who manages any family of his own well and likewise cares well for the household of God.

1. Meyer, Marie, et alii, *Different Voices/Shared Vision* (Delphi, New York: ALPB Books, 1992), 96 pp.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-25.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
5. Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, I (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 193.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

7. Ibid., p. 198.
8. In Acts 1:21 one of the qualifications for the successor of Judas was to be a male (άνήρ). In verse 23 two males are put forward for consideration.

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