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An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38

Walter A. Maier

In chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians Paul treats the matter of special spiritual gifts granted the church, a subject about which the Corinthian Christians had inquired of him.¹ The apostle describes the nature and purpose of these gifts, points to the benefits which the loving use of the special spiritual gifts brings the congregation, and urges the exercise of various of these endowments in the course of the congregation's public worship. The greatest gift of all, he explains in chapter 14, is the gift of prophecy, which enables the possessor to "speak forth" the word of God for the edification of hearers, for the growth of God's people in their knowledge, faith, and life. Paul refers to another of the spiritual gifts, the gift of speaking in tongues, of which the addressees apparently are inordinately enamoured, and shows the inferiority of this gift to that of prophecy. The speaker in tongues, while receiving some personal benefit, does not edify the church. The gift of prophecy ought, therefore, the more eagerly be sought after and employed.

Toward the conclusion of the fourteenth chapter Paul provides certain instructions for the God-pleasing, orderly conduct of the congregational worship service during which some of those in attendance will use their special spiritual gifts. He writes in verses 26-33a:

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace.²

Then, as an appendix, the apostle adds a word about an aspect of the conduct of Christian women at worship, supplying the instruction that women are not to use gifts such as prophe-

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syng or speaking in tongues, or to ask questions during the worship service. What he says on this subject, in verses 33b-38, is the teaching we wish to consider more carefully in this presentation. The instruction of this section pertains directly to the contemporary question of the permissibility of women to serve as pastors of Christian congregations. The present writer's translation of verses 33b-38 is as follows:

- (33b.) As in all the worshipping assemblies of the saints,
- (34.) let the women keep silent in your worshipping assemblies; for it is not turned over to [or allowed] them to speak; on the contrary, let them go on subordinating themselves, as also the law says.
- (35.) Now if they desire to learn about something, let them inquire of their own menfolk at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in a worshipping assembly.
- (36.) Or did the word of God go out from you, or did it reach you alone?
- (37.) If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or a spiritual person, let him acknowledge that what I write to you is the Lord's commandment.
- (38.) But if anyone disregards [this instruction], let him be disregarded.

Verse 33b

Paul begins the final admonitory portion of the fourteenth chapter with the words, *Hoos en pasais tais ekkleesiiais toon hagioon*,³ "As in all the worshipping assemblies of the saints."⁴ He means, "As is the case, or practice, in all these assemblies." He wishes to indicate that in giving directives to the Corinthians with reference to the silence of women in their worshipping assemblies he is urging upon them the practice which obtains in the worship services of all the congregations of Christendom at that time. It is certainly the same instruction he would give any of the other congregations regarding this matter. The church at Corinth is not singled out alone as the one congregation which ought to observe the requirement concerning women at worship.

The translation given for *ekkleesiiais* in verse 33b is "worshipping assemblies." Some versions render this word

“churches” here. *Ekkleesia* comes from the adjective *ekkleetos*, meaning “called out,” and refers in ordinary Greek usage to a gathering of citizens in a town or city called out from their homes into some public place, a lawful assembly of citizens. Compare the use of *ekkleesia* in Acts 19:39 as designating an assembly convened for the sake of deliberating and deciding an issue. In the Septuagint *ekkleesia* is used often as an equivalent to the Hebrew *qahal*, the assembly of the Israelites, especially when gathered for sacred purposes. In the koine, the word can also designate a gathering or throng of persons assembled by chance or tumultuously, as in Acts 19:32 and 41. In a Christian sense, the word refers to a local congregation as in 1 Corinthians 14:23, which speaks of the whole (local) *ekkleesia* coming together in one place for worship; or to the worshipping assembly itself, as in 1 Corinthians 14:19 and 35, where the reference is to the speaking, respectively, of Paul and of a woman to the church at worship. The selection of the rendering “worshipping assemblies” for *ekkleesia*s in the verse at hand, 33b, was made simply to have this translation parallel that of the same word in verse 34, where the reference is obviously to the gathering of the Corinthians at congregational worship. If the rendering “churches” in verse 33 is preferred, however, this may indeed be employed.

Paul calls the assemblies in question the worshipping assemblies *toon hagioon*, “of the saints.” According to the apostle, saints are gathered for worship in the various Christian churches then extant in the eastern Mediterranean world. A saint is a holy person; the English word comes from the Latin *sanctus*, “holy one.” A Christian is holy in these ways: Firstly, he is holy by God’s imputation to him of Christ’s righteousness and holiness, as soon as faith is created, and as long as it remains in the believer’s heart. A Christian is holy, secondly, because of the new man, or self, created in him the moment he comes to faith and is baptized, the new man who “was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). A Christian is holy, thirdly, because of the life of good works with which the believer serves the Lord after having come to faith. In the Christian worshipping assemblies of our day, too, God’s saints are gathered together to hear His word and sing His praises.

Verse 34

In verse 34 Paul proceeds to give his directives with regard to women at worship. Whether his remarks dealing with this subject were prompted by a general question regarding the matter raised by the Corinthians or whether there were women who attempted to speak in worship services we cannot determine from Paul's short discussion toward the end of chapter 14. He writes: *hai gunaikes en tais ekkleesiais sigatoosan; ou gar epitrepetai autais lalein, alla hupotasses-thoosan, kathoos kai ho nomos legei*, "let the women keep silent in your worshipping assemblies; for it is not turned over to [or allowed] them to speak; on the contrary, let them go on subordinating themselves, as also the law says."

*Hai*⁵ *gunaikes en tais ekkleesiais sigatoosan*, "let the women keep silent in your worshipping assemblies." This rendering has translated the article *tai*s as "your" and is permissible inasmuch as the article is frequently used as a possessive pronoun in Greek literature.⁶ Thus a note of contrast is introduced. The thought is: as is the case in the worshipping assemblies of all other churches (verse 33b), so let the women keep silent in *your* Corinthian worshipping assemblies.

Hai gunaikes signifies women of any age, especially adult females, whether unmarried, married, or widowed.⁷ *Gunee* may also be translated "wife" in certain contexts (compare the plural *gunaikes* signifying "wives" in Ephesians 5:22) but not here, there being no preparation for this restriction in Paul's discourse up to this point. That women in general and not wives only are referred to here can also be seen by consulting 1 Timothy 2:11-12. There Paul offers instruction similar to what he says here, and *gunee*, which appears with *aneer*, signifies any woman while *aneer* signifies any man; the reference is not to wife and husband.

As for women at worship, Paul directs: *sigatoosan*, let them "keep silent" in the church services. What precisely does this command mean? Is it to be taken in an absolute sense, so as to signify that women may not join vocally in liturgical response, confession of faith, prayer, and song during worship? Or, if not, in what way should this command be understood? The first thing that may be pointed out is that in various other New Testament texts in which a form of the verb *sigao* or of the noun *sige* appears total silence is not implied.⁸

Then it may be observed that, when these Greek words signify cessation from talking, in numerous contexts Jesus or an apostle or another Christian is communicating the word of God to a company of persons, and hearers become silent in order to apprehend what is said, or remain silent because of what has been said.⁹ Nothing is implied as to hearers' total silence throughout the period of their contact with the one who communicates the divine word on a given occasion. Thus also persons in attendance at church services in Paul's day kept silence when the word of God was read or preached, but they (women included) surely could and did participate in the worship responses, hymn singing, and offering of prayers vocally during congregational worship. The same thing is true of worshippers in our day. Paul writes in a passage parallel to the present one, 1 Timothy 2:11, *gunee en heesuchia manthanetoo*, "let a women learn in silence," that is, in the worshipping assembly. Here *heesuchia* is a synonym for *sige*.

The exact significance of women keeping silent at worship according to Paul's thought may be found by considering the Scripture section at hand in relation to the prior context. Keeping silent in the worship assembly is considered as the contrast to speaking in the assembly. Paul writes in verse 34: *ou gar epitrepetai autais lalein*, "it is not turned over to [or allowed] them to speak." In the previous paragraph verse 27 uses *lalein*. Paul states, *eite gloossee tis lalei*, "if anyone speaks in a tongue," and indicates that the tongue-speaker may do so in an orderly manner at public worship, providing that an interpreter is present to translate what the tongue-speaker has said, so that the congregation may receive benefit. Otherwise, according to verse 28, the tongue-speaker is to remain silent (*sigatoo*) in the assembly and speak (*laleitoo*) to himself and to God. Verse 29 begins: *propheetai de duo ee treis laleitoosan*, "let two or three prophets speak" in the course of the worship service, and let others possessed of the gifts of prophecy and discernment attest the truth of what each prophet sequentially utters. Paul adds in verse 30 that, if one prophet is speaking and something is revealed to another, *ho prootos sigatoo*, "let the first one keep silent." In this way the prophets can declare their messages in turn, and each edify the church. We see in these passages that the verb *laleoo* surely signifies special types of speaking in the worship service—in tongues or in prophecy—and that these kinds of speaking are placed in

contrast to the opposite of each, namely, to keep silent, a form of the verb *sigaoō* being employed. The significance, then, of Paul's directive that women keep silent in the worship services, is, according to the immediate and decisive context, that they not do a particular kind of speaking, that is, in tongues or prophecy; that they not, one after another, each be a separate tongue-speaker or be a separate prophetess who herself communicates the word of God to the others present at worship and serves as a teacher of the truth to men.¹⁰ Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:12: *didaskein de gunaiki ouk epitrepoo*, "I do not turn it over to a woman to teach," that is, in the worshipping assembly. The point is Paul does not turn this activity over to women, because "it is not turned over to them" (1 Corinthians 14:34), namely, by God who has expressed His will in this matter through Paul and other proclaimers of His truth.

With the next words in verse 34, *alla hupotassesthoosan*, "on the contrary, let them [the women] go on subordinating themselves," the apostle reveals what is involved in women voluntarily refraining from speaking in tongues or proclaiming the word in worshipping assemblies. This restraint represents and publicly exhibits on their part a subordinating of themselves to the men present at the church service, a subordination which, observes Paul, the law also says they should assume. *Hupotassesthoosan* is taken here as a present middle imperative, third person plural. In the parallel passage 1 Timothy 2:11-12 the apostle uses the noun *hupotagee*, as he directs: *gunee en heesuchia manthanetoo en pasee hupotagee*, "let a woman learn in silence, in all subordination"; and he adds, *didaskein de gunaiki ouk epitrepoo oude authentein andros, all' einai en heesuchia*, "I do not turn it over to [or allow] a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man." Here the *authentein* (a *hapax legomenon*) is to be regarded as explanatory of what the teaching of the word on the part of a woman involves or represents, namely, that in the process she exercises authority over a man. It is the opposite of her subordinating herself to men, here those gathered at worship.

✓ This charge to women to be silent at worship and not publicly speak or teach the word of God during a church service, as a reflection of their subordinating themselves to men present at worship, is not simply a Pauline mandate but is in harmony also with the instruction of *ho nomos*, "the law," says Paul.

The term *ho nomos* the New Testament at times, as here, applies synecdochically to the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. What may be found in the law which is harmonious with the teaching of Paul? Paul is careful to write *kathoos kai ho nomos legei*, "as also the law states," so that one need not search the Pentateuch for the record of the precise words employed by Paul in this verse 34. *Kathoos* allows for similarity of teaching. And what is this teaching and where is it to be found?

Paul's instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:11-14, parallel to what he says in 1 Corinthians 14:34, provides us with the clue. In 1 Timothy Paul gives two reasons, or points to two biblical bases, for his directive that a woman demonstrate a willing subordination of herself to men at worship by learning in silence and not teaching or exercising authority over the men. The first is the fact, revealed in the narrative of Genesis 2, that in the creation of the first human pair Adam was created first and then Eve; and the second is the fact, revealed in Genesis 3, that Eve fell into sin first as one utterly deceived by Satan and, in giving her husband to eat of the forbidden fruit, also set aside her divinely appointed subordination to man, whereas Adam fell thereafter as one undeceived by Satan and disregarding his superordination over Eve, when he took the fatal step into transgression.

The apostle provides additional information as to the law's instruction pertaining to the relation of the sexes to each other in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9. After stating in verse 3, "I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God," he writes (in verses 8-9): "For man [and the reference here is to Adam] is not from woman [Eve], but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man." Summing up we may say: In creating the first man and the first woman God thought it would be wise and beneficial for their relationship (which happened also to be that of husband and wife) to have one of his human creatures be superordinate and head over the other, with the other subordinate to the first. God expressed His selection of the man, Adam, to be superordinate with respect to the woman, Eve, in these ways: (1.) Adam was created the first of the two; (2.) woman originally was derived from man, from his rib, and not *vice versa*; (3.) woman was

originally created for man, to provide help suited to him, and not *vice versa*; and (4.) God confirmed this relationship when Eve sinned first and then Adam. This superordinate-subordinate relationship of the sexes, we see then, was grounded in the creative purpose and acts of God when he brought the first human pair into being. This arrangement was also his permanent will concerning the relationship of all males and females living in future times and generations since creation; so we learn from the Scriptures. It is not a matter affected by societal differences in the course of history, by changing customs or human ways of thinking about the relationship between the sexes.

In the interpretation of Paul's teaching regarding the relationship of the sexes, use of superordination-subordination terminology—that is, the designation of man as superordinate with reference to woman and woman as subordinate to man—is significant and important. It most clearly communicates what the apostle means when he writes in 1 Corinthians, *kephalee. . . gunaikos ho aneer*, literally, “head of woman is the man” (11:2) and *hupotassesthoosan*, “let them [the women] go on subordinating themselves [to men]” (14:34). The idea is simply that of God's positioning the one sex in a certain relationship with reference to the other, according to His gracious will and for their common good. The superordination of man with reference to woman is in no way an intimation of a greater worth or importance or higher standing of man in the sight of God in comparison with woman, or of an inferiority of standing or worth or importance on the part of woman with reference to man. In the matter of spiritual standing or worth in the sight of God both (believing) man and woman are on an absolute par, as Paul makes clear, for example, in Galatians 3:26-28, when he writes: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

In correspondence with this understanding, man in his superordinate position or headship is not to domineer woman or treat her as inferior; and woman is not to feel inferior to man in her subordinate position. Man is head of woman. The head, in the biblical conception, is that which determines, that which

begins, and that which leads, and thus that which exercises rule, as the physical head functions in relation to the physical body. A man functions as head over and superordinate with reference to a woman in the church when, for example, he (as the pastor) teaches the word at public worship and in the process exercises authority over the hearers, including women present; or when he takes the leadership in establishing or promoting the work program of the congregation. A married man provides similar leadership in the home, as "head" of wife and family. A woman's voluntary subordination to man as head includes her renunciation of such initiative and frequently of her own will, in favor of his volition and leadership.

The Lord Jesus Christ exercised His headship and superordinate position with reference to the church, not by dominating the church, but by lovingly serving it, giving Himself for it, through His instruction and the supply of the Holy Spirit guiding the church into the pathways of obedience to God's will and consequently to the reception of the divine blessing temporal and eternal which is attendant upon faith and godliness. In the same way men ought to exercise their headship with respect to women in the church generally, doing all in their power to promote the physical and spiritual welfare of female members of the body of Christ. Christian women ought gladly to live in a manner that evidences their subordinate relationship to men for the Lord's sake, honoring God's will in this matter just as they seek to carry out all other directions He gives them for His glorification and their well being.

Commenting on the concepts of superordination, headship, and subordination in the New Testament, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) made some helpful remarks in a report to the church entitled *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*:

The concept of headship is not only misunderstood, but it is also frequently abused. . . . The Scriptures teach that headship exists for the sake of serving others, of building up others. Christ taught that His followers are to be servants. Self-willed assertion over another for one's own personal advantage violates and perverts the headship principle of which the apostle speaks. . . .

All of the Scripture passages which speak of the subordination of the woman to the man, or of wives to their husbands, are addressed to the woman. The verbs enjoining subordination in these texts are in the middle voice in the Greek (reflexive). The woman is reminded, always in the context of an appeal to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, that she has been subordinated to man by the Creator and that it is for this reason that she should willingly accept this divine arrangement. . . . People can be subordinate by serving others, by cooperating with another's purposes, or by following another's teaching. The more love and commitment to the interest of others (Philippians 2:4) are present in the relationship of the man to the woman, the more this subordinate relationship conforms to the Scriptural ideal.

The report also notes that the biblical passages enjoining female subordination focus on the areas of marriage and the church.¹¹

Paul informs his addressees in verse 35 of 1 Corinthians 14 that what is recorded in Genesis pertaining to the creation of Adam and Eve and the implications thereof for their relationship of superordination and subordination have, according to God's appointment, a relevance to all their descendants and to the relationship of males and females in all future generations. The subordinate relationship of women to men is a permanent one and is to be observed in the Christian church throughout the New Testament era. Any act on the part of women today which sets this relationship aside is a violation of "the law," of the will of God expressed in creation and stated in His word. To speak in the public worship assembly in the sense that Paul indicates in verse 35 is an act of this nature. For this reason women now, too, should be silent in the worship of the church; certainly they should not serve as pastors of Christian congregations, all modern objections to this application of Paul's teaching notwithstanding.

Referring to some of the rationalistic views of objectors who support the practice of having women serve as clergy in the church, R.C.H. Lenski observes:

It is only an evasion to charge Paul with an inferior view regarding woman, because he himself was unmarried, and to assert that he voices only his own personal opinion

when giving such direction to the Corinthians. That would make him a miserable apostle indeed. Back of Paul is the divine *nomos* or Word. And that binds him as well as us. Equally shallow is the assumption that what Paul wrote was well enough for his time and age which assigned a different position to woman than does ours. If woman is assigned a different position now, this is done not by God but by man, and by man in contradiction to God. The claim that the sexes are equal collides with the simple fact that God did not make them equal; and no amount of human claiming can remove or alter the divine fact.¹²

All questions raised in our day regarding the place of women in the church should find their response in the teaching of "the law." Whatever position is assigned them must not conflict with the directives of the word of God.

Verse 35

To what extent women in the Corinthian congregation should demonstrate at public worship their acceptance of their position of subordination to the men is made clear by Paul when he writes in verse 35: *ei de ti mathein thelousi, en oikoo tous idious andras eperootatoosan*, "Now if they desire to learn about something, let them inquire of their own menfolk at home." It seems that in the course of early Christian congregational worship services time was set aside to ask questions, questions which probably had to do with new insights and understandings of the word of God which the pastors and teachers had shared with those present, or questions about other matters pertaining to congregational life. Some of the women may have thought about, or desired the privilege of, asking questions as the men did. Paul speaks of the matter and counsels against the practice. Women were not to speak in this manner at public worship. Paul's reasoning, reflecting the divine will, must have been something like this: speaking and teaching the divine word at worship was not to be permitted to women, for in so doing they would exercise authority over men and leave their subordinate position. Asking questions in the assemblies would also be inappropriate, since this activity would put women on a par with men; and in this way they would not give public

demonstration of their subordinate position in relation to men and of their acceptance of this status.

Therefore the Pauline counsel is given in verse 35a, "If they [the women] desire to learn about something, let them inquire of their own menfolk at home." The justification for translating *andras* as "menfolk" and not "husbands" (as some versions render this word) is simply that, as has already been pointed out, there is nothing in the context of the apostle's instruction here to indicate a limitation to husbands. Men, males, menfolk, as opposed to women, females, womenfolk are the referent in Paul's mind.¹³ The apostle conceives of the Corinthian congregation as consisting of families having husbands, fathers, sons, or other male relatives of the women, who would also attend worship services. Let the women ask their questions of them in the home; and presumably, if the latter would be unable to give the requested responses, the women could bring the questions to the expounder of the word or the congregational leadership privately and have them answered. The apostle is expressing a principle here. He therefore does not take into consideration the exceptional case of a lone woman who has no male relatives living with her. In such a situation the opportunity would likewise be there for such a woman privately to present her questions to the church leadership.

The violation of any of the foregoing directives of the apostle concerning women is a serious matter. Paul adds: *aischron gar estin gunaiki lalein en ekklesia*, "for it is shameful for a woman to speak"—and here included is the whole range of speaking discussed in chapter 14—"in a worshipping assembly." Hers is the shame, perhaps not in the general popular estimate, but first of all and fundamentally before God, who has clearly expressed His will in His Word, any violation of which is a shameful thing, indeed. Hers is the shame also before genuine Christians, who seek to do the divine will in their lives and desire to have it carried out in the Christian congregation.

The word *aischron* derives from *aischos*, meaning "baseness," "disgrace"; the adjective, accordingly, has the lexical meanings of "base," "shameful," "ugly," and "dishonorable." In other contexts Paul says, for example, that it is shameful for a woman to be shorn, having her hair cropped closely to

the scalp, or shaven bald (1 Corinthians 11:6). He writes with reference to the sexual filth and perversion of his day, "It is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (Ephesians 5:12). He refers to the *aischrotees*, "baseness," which is the abstract for the concrete word *aischrologia*, "obscene speech," in which worldly contemporaries of his engage (Ephesians 5:4). He scores mind-deceiving false teachers who subvert whole houses for the sake of shameful gain (Titus 1:11). These usages elsewhere in Paul give an idea of the intensity of the shamefulness which the *aischron* family of words connotes.

What the apostle says in verses 34 and 35 settles for the present writer any questions concerning the permissibility of women reading the Scriptures from the lectern in church services today, of women assisting in the administration of the sacrament of Holy Communion at public worship, and of similar activities. He knows of the differences that exist in the synod regarding these matters, but he registers his own view that these practices ought not to be.

At this point the question may be asked whether some women had actually spoken at worship services in Corinth and whether this action prompted Paul to issue the decided imperatives of verses 34 and 35. We may note that Paul nowhere employs the expression used in 11:18 to say, "I hear that your women are speaking in worship services." (One may also compare 1:11 and 5:1, where Paul states what actually happened in Corinth by virtue of having received a direct report.) Nor does the apostle indicate that the Corinthians in their letter to him have informed him to this effect. It is best to presume that he is saying what he does in verses 34 and 35 in order to ward off a danger rather than to correct a present abuse. It is preferable in exegesis as in human relations to follow the eighth commandment and put the best construction on everything. In the case at hand, as long as Paul does not explicitly state that female members of the Corinthian congregation were speaking in the worshipping assemblies, we should assume that such an action had not yet occurred, but perhaps had only been discussed.

Verse 36

Nestle-Aland has verse 36 conclude the paragraph begin-

ning with verse 33b and thus pertain particularly to Paul's directives recorded in verse 34 and 35. Verse 36 could be construed with the verses 37-40 following and constitute the opening sentence of the closing section of chapter 14, in which he refers to the divine authorization for all he has written in this chapter and sums up his instructions concerning orderly procedure to be followed in congregational worship services. Accepting the Nestle-Aland decision, however, we proceed with the exegesis of verse 36 as attached to the previous verses.

Paul writes: *ee aph' humoon ho logos tou theou exeelthen, ee eis humas monous kateentesen*, "Or did the word of God go out from you, or did it reach you alone?" Anticipating possible disagreement on the part of some in Corinth with what he has said concerning women keeping silent at worship services, the apostle counters such objection in advance by asking these questions. They contain a touch of irony intended to sting haughty objectors. The *ee*, "or," in both questions is elliptical, that is, the "or" precedes the omission of a number of words which Paul might have added to express the sense of what he writes. The thought is this: "Or if you in Corinth disagree with what I say, if you have another idea, is it to be presumed that from you (the Greek has this word toward the beginning of the sentence, in emphatic position) the word of God went out? Did you originate or author the divine word and send it out to the church and world, which would mean that you know the will of God better than anyone else, including me, Paul, His inspired apostle?" Of course, a positive answer to this question would be an utter absurdity, which every Corinthian Christian would have forthwith to reject.

The apostle adds another possibility, saying as it were, "or, if this is not the case, then is it to be assumed that the word of God reached you alone, as a kind of mother church, so that you are the first and authoritative communicators of divine truth in Christendom?" "What a preposterous idea!" every Corinthian would have to declare. The alternative to entertaining such folly is simply to accept the apostle's instruction as proceeding from God, acknowledging that Paul under divine inspiration was speaking the word of God. Such inspiration is precisely what Paul asserts in verse 37, when, referring to all his directives in chapter 14, he avers: "what I write to you is the Lord's commandment." It may be remarked that churches today which teach and practice otherwise than God's

word plainly teaches absurdly imply that they know the will of God better than God Himself. Such people imply, too, that their doctrinal views (which are in opposition to the divinely inspired Scriptures) are really God's truth that ought to be followed in the church and communicated to the world.

Verse 37

Verse 37 begins a final summary paragraph. Paul proceeds to say in verse 37: *Ei tis dokei propheetees einai ee pneumatikos, epiginoosketoo ha graphoo humin hoti kuriou estin entolee*, "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or a spiritual person, let him acknowledge that what I write to you is the Lord's commandment." Surveying all that he has written in chapter 14 (indeed, in chapters 12-14) and considering particularly the imperatives in this material, the evangelical directives he has issued the Corinthians, Paul urges that any member of the congregation who believes that he is a prophet (that is, one possessing the gift of prophecy) or a spiritual person (one who is spiritually knowledgeable and mature) bear witness to the fact that the apostle has communicated nothing other than God's will—indeed, the commandment of the Lord.

According to biblical usage, the term *propheetees*, "prophet," designates one who under divine influence speaks for God, one who is a recipient and then a "speaker forth" or proclaimer of the word of God. The message the prophet speaks is revealed to him by God's Spirit either directly and immediately or, on the other hand, mediately through the already existing and orally communicated or inscripturated word, which the prophet is moved to re-present and elaborate for the benefit of others. The contents of the message may be gospel, edifying historical or moral instruction, prediction, or application of the foregoing in discourse which is comforting, encouraging, hortatory, admonitory, and so on (compare 1 Corinthians 14:3). The word "prophet" occurs 144 times in the New Testament, ten times in Paul's writings.

The word "prophet" in verse 37 doubtless harks back to the functional usage of this designation in verses 29-32, where the reference is to various "prophets," members of the congregation who prophesied (spoke forth the word of God) at worship services, rather than to 12:28, where "prophet" is used to designate a person who had a position of ministry in the

congregation. A "prophet" in the latter sense was a person who belonged to the class of preachers who appear to have been somehow attached to certain congregations in the early church, like the ones in Jerusalem and Antioch, and to have assisted the pastors with the preaching of the word. They apparently also travelled occasionally to other congregations and rendered service in preaching and related ways (see Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10). It is better, however, as has been stated, to take "prophet" in the verse at hand in the sense of a (lay) member of the Corinthian church who was gifted with the charisma of prophecy and exercised this endowment at congregational worship. That understanding is preferable because of the usage of "prophet" in the immediate (preceding) context of verse 37 and because it is doubtful that there were numerous prophets in the sense of 12:28 who resided among the Christians in Corinth.

For the significance of *pneumatikos*, "spiritual person," it is best to revert to the substantivized *ho . . . pneumatikos* regarding whom Paul spoke in this same letter at 2:15 and the dative plural *pneumatikois* at 3:1. In the context of these verses Paul contrasts the spiritual person with the *psuchikos . . . anthroopos* (the "psychikal person" in 2:14) and with the people designated *sarkinois* (dative plural, "sarkinal" in 3:1) and *sarkikoi* (plural, "sarkikal" in 3:3). Opposed to the *pneumatikos* is the *psuchikos anthroopos*, the "psychikal person" in Paul's parlance (here the adjective *psuchikos* has been transliterated, since the English has no exact counterpart), the unconverted individual who is wholly controlled by his sinful, unregenerate psychical make-up (his unregenerate intellect, emotions, and will) which uninterruptedly leads him into the pathways of sin. The *sarkikos* ("sarkikal" or "fleshly") person, according to Paul, is a Christian who is to a certain extent directed in his living by his unregenerate nature, the flesh (which consists of his entire unregenerate psychical and somatic apparatus), and obeys its promptings. The *sarkinos* ("sarkinal" or "fleshy") individual is, as Paul says appositionally (3:1), a babe in Christ, in whom the flesh still predominates, because of the short period of time since he became a Christian; substantial spiritual growth has not yet been possible.¹⁴ Far different from the others, the *pneumatikos*, the spiritual man or "pneumatic" person, is the spiritually mature individual who in his regenerate spirit is

filled with the Holy Spirit, who has deep knowledge of God's word, and who is bent on following the leading of his regenerate spirit in order to carry out the instructions of the divine word.

Returning to the words of Paul in verse 37, Paul (who himself knows that the Lord through His Holy Spirit has prompted him as an apostle to write the Corinthians what he has in chapters 12-14) invites those in the congregation who are in the best position to do so publicly to pronounce the judgment that the things which Paul has told the church he has received from the Lord—that they are the expressions of God's holy will and are, indeed, the Lord's commandment. The person best equipped to make such a judgment is a prophet in the congregation who knows and speaks forth the word of God to the people, or a spiritual person, the spiritually mature Christian who is possessed of an advanced understanding of the divine word and will. Paul in verses 29-32 of chapter 14 has spoken of prophets who address the Corinthian worshipping assemblies. He now urges that anyone who regards himself to be a prophet acknowledge that what the apostle has written is the Lord's commandment. Such a prophet can prove that he is not mistaken in regard to himself, if he offers such acknowledgment. The same is true with regard to the person who believes that he is a spiritually mature Christian, a spiritual person. He should provide such acknowledgment and be assured with regard to his estimate of himself. If either fails to attest to the divine origin of Paul's directives, it will be evident that he is not a prophet or a spiritual person.

Entolee is a collective singular, referring to the information and especially the directives which Paul has given in the material of the chapter at hand. The Lord has caused Paul to write the things he has written as an expression of the divine will. This will includes, of course, Paul's directions concerning the silence of women in the Corinthian worship assemblies. These directives are, in composite, the commandment of the Lord, too. Throughout the New Testament an *entolee* of the Lord is a divine requirement—a commandment of the decalogue or any supplementary expression of the will of God in the form of a directive. Now Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). The apostle John writes: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His

commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:3-5). "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). God's people today will out of love for Him seek to keep all of the Lord's commandments, including the Pauline regulation proscribing women from speaking at public worship; certainly women desiring to obey God completely will have no wish to serve as pastors of congregations or in any way exercise authority over men in the church.

Verse 38

In verse 38 Paul adds a word as to what the Corinthian congregation's reaction ought to be to any person (such as a self-styled prophet or spiritual person) in its midst who takes issue with or rejects any of the Pauline instruction, which constitutes "the commandment of the Lord," in the section of 1 Corinthians before us. He writes: *ei de tis agnoei, agnoeitoo*, "But if anyone disregards [this instruction], let him be disregarded." It should be noted that Nestle and Aland have placed the indicative verb *agnoeitali* in the text as the second verb in verse 38, instead of the imperative reading *agnoeitoo*, which they have relegated to the apparatus. The present writer has come to the conclusion that the second verb in the text should be the imperative *agnoeitoo* and translated accordingly. Scholars differ in their decisions as to the correct reading here, as can be seen, for example, in the differing translations found in the modern English versions of the New Testament, their renderings reflecting acceptance either of the indicative or of the imperative reading for the second verb in this verse.¹⁵

If the indicative *agnoeitali* is accepted as the reading for the second verb of the Greek text, then verse 38 may be rendered: "But if anyone disregards [this instruction], he is disregarded." The significance would probably be "disregarded by God," with the implication being that such a person will then be disregarded, too, by the faithful members of the Corinthian congregation. The idea of the verse would be this: If anyone does not acknowledge that what Paul writes is the Lord's commandment, such a person is not acknowledged by God as

a prophet or a spiritual person, and so he will not be acknowledged by the congregation either; and surely, like his pretension, his disagreement with Paul's instruction will be disregarded.

Some scholars give a stronger significance to Paul's words in verse 38. The editors of the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (using the text of the New International Version, which translates the second verb of verse 38 with a future: "he himself will be ignored"), for instance, comment on this verse: "Paul and the churches will ignore such a disobedient person, and so he will be disregarded as an unbeliever."¹⁶ Again, the editors of the *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (following the Revised Standard Version text, which translates the second verb thus: "he is not recognized") explain: "that is, not recognized by Christ as His own. If he continues in disobedience to the apostolic Word, he must expect to hear his Lord say to him on the Last Day: 'I never knew you'" (Matthew 7:23).¹⁷ These interpretations, however, do not seem to fit well into the context of Paul's discussion here.

The present writer has opted for the imperative *agnoeítoō* as the reading for the second verb of verse 38 on the basis, firstly, of the textual evidence. The imperative is supported by the important third-century Chester Beatty papyrus 46, the second corrector of the fourth-century majuscule Codex Sinaiticus, the first corrector of the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus (A), the fourth-century Codex Vaticanus (B, probably the best single manuscript of the New Testament), the second corrector of Codex Bezae (D), majuscule Psi, the Majority Text, and all the Syriac witnesses. In favor of the imperative reading, then, are important papyrus and majuscule manuscripts, the significant agreement of B and D, and wide geographical distribution of the reading. Also a momentarily inattentive scribe could inadvertently change the ending of an imperative verb to an indicative ending, an *oo* to an *ai*. The imperatives preceding and succeeding the second verb of verse 38 suggest, too, that the latter verb, which stands in series with the others, is likewise an imperative. In support of the indicative reading *agnoeítai* are the original scribe of Sinaiticus, A (as it appears), D, four other majuscules, three minuscules, a few other minuscules not cited, Itala manuscript b, and the manuscripts of the Coptic tradition. It also has considerable geographic distribution.

The present writer has concluded that, while the textual evidence is almost evenly divided for the imperative and indicative, the edge belongs to the imperative. He has accepted the imperative reading on the basis of the textual evidence and the application of text-critical canons, but also on the basis of the flow of Paul's thought in the context. Paul has given the Corinthians detailed instructions concerning spiritual gifts (especially prophecy and speaking in tongues) in the first twenty-five verses of 1 Corinthians 14. Following this instruction, beginning with verse 26 and continuing to the end of the chapter, Paul employs a string of imperative verbs (in verses 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34, 35, 37, 39, and 40) to give the Corinthians directions as to what they ought do in their worship services so as to use these spiritual gifts in an orderly way and the most beneficial way possible. It would seem natural for the apostle in the final hortatory paragraph (verses 37-40) of the chapter, a paragraph which concludes his whole discussion of spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14, to continue in the imperative with the second verb of verse 38, as he uses imperatives in the rest of the verses of that final paragraph. According to the present writer's determination, verse 38 should be translated: "But if anyone disregards [this instruction], let him be disregarded." The significance of the imperative clause, then, is this: let such a person's claim to be a prophet or a spiritually mature person be disregarded by the Corinthian congregation, and so, of course, let his objections to Paul's teaching likewise be completely disregarded by the church.

So then, what Paul wrote in the fourteenth chapter of his First Letter to Corinth was the Lord's commandment and had application to the regulation of procedures at first-century Corinthian public congregational worship. This instruction included the requirement that the women keep silent in the worship assembly (in the manner explained above) with the evident implication of excluding them from the pastoral office. While the Pauline directives relating to certain features of the Corinthian worship services have no pertinence to the manner in which Lutheran worship services are conducted today, since prophesying and speaking in tongues are not a part of these services, the prohibition of speaking by women during public worship (again, in the manner previously explained) still has applicability in our day; and those who fear and love the Lord in our churches will seek to observe His will in this matter as

in all others. By the grace of God there has never been a woman pastor in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. This situation will remain true as long as our church body continues to believe, teach, confess, and adhere to the divine inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of all of Holy Writ, including 1 Corinthians 14.

ENDNOTES

1. That the Corinthians had inquired of Paul concerning spiritual gifts is suggested by the phrase *peri de toon pneumatikoon* in 12:1, at the beginning of the three-chapter section, 12-14, dealing with this subject. This phrase is similar to ones found in 7:1 (see also 7:25), 8:1, and 16:1, all of which indicate that in the verses following each introductory phrase the apostle responds to questions on different matters which the Corinthians had submitted in a letter brought him presumably by the visiting Corinthian delegation of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:17. The first of the *peri* phrases, at 7:1, reads: *peri de hoon egrapsate*, "Now concerning the things of which you wrote." It is the presumption of scholars generally that *hoon egrapsate* is to be understood with the succeeding *peri* phrases also and that these phrases introduce Paul's reply to matters about which the Corinthians inquired of him in a letter. The entire letter of 1 Corinthians is written in response to conditions in Corinth reported by Chloe's people (1:11) and the three-man delegation mentioned above and in response to the specific questions addressed to Paul in the congregation's letter to him.
2. Bible passages cited in this paper are quoted from the New King James Version, unless otherwise specified. The present writer has provided his own translation of 14:33b-38, the verses which are under exegetical study in this paper.
3. The Greek text on which this investigation is based is Nestle-Aland: Eberhard and Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland, *et al.*, editors, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, twenty-sixth edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979).
4. It may be noted that most ancient exegetes connected these seven words with the preceding sentence, while Nestle-Aland and modern scholars read them with the sentence following, as also the present writer does and indicates in his translation. The

reason for doing the latter is that the previous statement of verse 33a, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace," appears to be complete in itself. What takes place in other congregations need not be pointed to for corroboration of this fact. On the other hand, the reference to women keeping silent in all other worship assemblies of Christendom serves as an encouragement to the Corinthians to follow this practice at their public worship services, too.

5. We encounter the first sign of a variant reading (in the verses at hand) treated in the Nestle-Aland apparatus before the *hai* at the beginning of verse 34. Additional signs of other variant readings appear in the Greek text of verse 34 and in succeeding verses of 14:33b-38 and are dealt with in the apparatus. Since, with the exception of the variant in verse 38, these variant readings, upon examination of the evidence given in the apparatus, have insufficient attestation for them to be considered as preferable to the readings presented in the text, they will not be discussed in this paper.
6. Compare Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 148.
7. *Gunee* may refer to a woman in either of these categories; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:2, Romans 7:2, Luke 4:26.
8. Compare, e.g., Luke 9:36, where it is reported that after the transfiguration of Jesus the watching disciples "kept quiet [*esigeesan*], and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen" (but certainly they spoke of other things); also Luke 18:39; Acts 12:17; 21:40-22:2. Nor is absolute silence implied by *heesuchazoo* and *heesuchia*, synonyms of *sigao* and *sige*, in Acts 11:18; 21:14; 22:2; 1 Timothy 2:11-12.
9. Compare Luke 20:26; Acts 12:17; 15:12-13; 21:40-22:2; 1 Corinthians 14:28, 30.
10. A glance at any Greek lexicon or concordance will show how frequently, in scores of New Testament passages, *laleo* is used of teachers—of Jesus, the apostles, and others.
11. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985, pp. 30-32.
12. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, n.d.), p. 627.
13. Stephen B. Clark comes to the conclusion that all women are included in the apostle's directive in another way. He writes: "The rule is intended for all women, although the passage sees wives as the model. To use an analogy, if Paul had forbidden children to speak in public as an expression of their subordina-

tion to their parents, no one would hesitate to apply the rule to orphans as well as to children with parents. The parent-child relationship would be the normal case, but the rule would also apply to children with surrogate parents. Similarly unmarried women would be expected to adhere to a rule for married women." *Man and Woman in Christ* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980), p. 187.

14. The distinction between *sarkikos* and *sarkinos* is clarified by the following helpful comment of Lenski, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125: "He [Paul] makes a fine distinction when now [in 3.3] he calls the Corinthians *sarkikoi*. Once, in their early days, they were *sarkinoi*, still largely made up of flesh, because their spiritual part was still in the infant stage. They could not then help it; they were 'fleshly' in heart, mind, and life, yet giving promise that they would soon outgrow that stage. But something has interfered with their development. Paul finds that now they are *sarkikoi* (*kata sarka oon*), 'fleshly,' people who ought to obey the true spiritual norm, and yet who by a choice of their own obey the norm of the flesh. The difference between the two terms is: 'fleshy,' and you cannot yet help it; 'fleshly,' and you can but you do not help it. 'Fleshy,' you carry a bad load, but will soon be rid of most of it; 'fleshly,' you follow a bad norm, and refuse to get rid of it. Paul approves of neither condition, but he cannot especially blame them for the former, whereas he must decidedly blame them for the latter. Our versions erase the difference by using one word, 'carnal,' [the King James Version, e.g.] for translating both Greek terms."
15. Some examples of English versions with varying translations of the second verb are listed below. The entire translation of verse 38, as found in the texts of the versions consulted, is given to show also other differences in the understanding of what Paul is saying in verse 38. Among the translations reflecting acceptance of the imperative reading for the second verb in verse 38 are the following:

New King James Version (following the KJV): "But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant."

An American Translation (Beck): "But if anyone ignores this, he should be ignored."

God's Word to the Nations (now called *New Evangelical Translation*): "But if anyone ignores this, just ignore him."

Today's English Version: "But if he does not pay attention to this, pay no attention to him."

Weymouth New Testament: "But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant."

The Complete Bible (New Testament, translated by Goodspeed): "If anyone pays no attention to it, pay no attention to him."

The New Testament in the Language of the People: "If anyone ignores it, let him ignore it."

The Epistles of Paul (translated by Conybeare): "But if any man refuse this acknowledgment, let him refuse it at his peril."

New English Bible (1961, first edition): "If he does not recognize this, he himself should not be recognized."

Letters to Young Churches (translated by Phillips): "As for those who don't know it, well, we must just leave them in ignorance."

Among the translations reflecting acceptance of the indicative reading for the second verb in verse 38 are the following:

Revised Standard Version: "If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."

New American Standard Bible: "But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized."

The Berkeley Version: "But if anyone disregards it, he is disregarded."

New English Bible (1970, second edition): "If he does not acknowledge this, God does not acknowledge him."

The *New International Version* offers this free translation, employing a future tense (unattested textually): "If he ignore this, he himself will be ignored." Similarly, *The Living Bible Paraphrased* translates with a future tense: "But if anyone still disagrees—well, we will leave him in his ignorance." However, a footnote reads: "Or, if he disagrees, ignore his opinion."

16. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, edited by Robert Hoerber *et al.* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 1767.
17. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, edited by Walter Roehrs and Martin Franzmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 157 (New Testament section).

The Department of Exegetical Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary has requested the editors to append the following lines to the article printed above: The department commends this essay to the careful study of the church of God and unanimously concurs in the conclusion drawn herein that verses 34 and 35 clearly require a negative answer to any question of the permissibility of women reading the Scriptures to the congregation at worship or assisting in the administration of the sacrament of the altar; the department, accordingly, beseeches all the churches of Christ by the mercies of God to remain faithful to the necessary implications of the divine word.