

# THE ORDERS OF CREATION AND THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps a brief summary of the theological concept of 'orders of creation' might be helpful as a background to our discussion.

Lutheran theology speaks of the 'usus politicos of the Law. This represents God's way of preserving this world in its sinful state so that it can become the sphere of operation for his redemptive purposes. Lutherans therefore see human life in this world as ordered by certain structures God ordained and implemented so that there may be good order in society and not chaos which results from sin. Although 'order' was implicit in the perfect world before the fall (eg, marriage and the family; work and the care of creation), these structures now relate to a sinful world and could perhaps better be known as 'orders for the preservation of society'.

What is meant is well summarised by Carl E Braaten:

The point of this doctrine is to affirm that Christians, like all other human beings, exist in a framework of universal structures that are prior to and apart from the fact that Christians believe in Christ and belong to his Church. God has placed all human beings in particular structures of existence - such as nationality, race, sexual identity, family, work, government - that in some form or other are simply givens of creaturely existence. The law and commandments of God are revealed through these common created morphological structures of human existence and function apart from and in tension with the special revelation of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*(No Other Gospel, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1992, p. 120)*

The various orders under the law, therefore, point to the intrinsic nature of human beings as created for fellowship, to live in society.

We could make the following points:

- The orders stem from God's love for us so that we can live in good order, peace and safety. They help make life in fellowship possible despite sin.
- All of us are involved in several orders at one and the same time.
- Some important orders we can think of are: marriage and the family, work and the economy; schooling; government.

The Church, as God's 'order of redemption' is not simply another of the created orders. However, since it is also in this world and, in its visible expression, has the nature of an organisation gathered around the means of grace, God himself has given it an order, a structure which enables it to function 'decently and in order'.

- The orders are stable and lasting, but their nature is flexible and developing. In answer to the critics that this concept presented too static a picture of creation, Lutheran theology these days has infused 'historical relativity' into

this concept so that there can be a more dynamic understanding of its operation.

- All of us are called on faithfully to fulfil our particular roles in the orders in which God has placed us. We are responsible and to be submissive according to the particular vocation God has given us and the authority under which he has placed us, (eg, the government).

## RELATIONSHIP TO OUR TOPIC

How does this concept relate to the question of whether women should serve as pastors? We have just indicated that men and women have particular roles to play in the orders in which they are called to live, and this may involve submission. The question is whether or not the call of Paul for the subordination of women in the churchly ordering is related to some kind of abiding created order of things.

One tradition in theology interprets the accounts in Genesis as implying a created order in which the woman, Eve, although completely equal with the man as made in the image of God, is to submit in love to Adam for the well-being of their relationship. This is then interpreted to mean that the man can claim authority over the woman. By extrapolation, it is then inferred that submission of woman to man is something abiding for all time since it is rooted in the very nature of God's original creation. This, it is then suggested, is the background and basis for Paul's call for women to be subject in the churchly ordering. With this view, it is evident that female submission and the order of creation have become integrally related. We need to consider the weight of this argument and whether it has significance for our decisions about women and the office of the ministry.

## SUMMARY OF THE CREATION ACCOUNT

The report provides a fine overview of various ways in which the Genesis account of creation is understood with regard to order and male authority and female submission. Perhaps a brief summary here might be helpful. The pro and con arguments go as follows:

- a. The man is created first. Theological significance is seen in this in view of I Timothy 2:13. Others, however, dispute whether the Genesis account intends to teach any authority of the man over the woman due to the prior creation of Adam and claim that the woman was actually created as the climax of the creation - the 'greatest' as it were.

Further discussion, however, is warranted on this point. The issues seems to be, not that the woman is somehow the pinnacle of creation, but whether being created 'first' has any theological significance. Later light may be thrown on this, as the Report also mentions, by the special authority and blessing of the first born in Israelite society. Even more has been made of this. A religious significance comes to be attached to the concept of the firsts born as dedicated

to the Lord for his service. This relates to Israel itself, (Ex 4:22; Jer 31:9). Ex 13:11-16 takes this further where the emphasis is clearly given to the first born males. Those pursuing this argument then see significance in the consecration of the Levites for ordering God's service in the worship of Israel in lieu of the first born (Numbers 33:12-13), where only males served as priests, and ask whether this is the theological significance behind Paul's reference in I Tim 2, rather than this being merely a trite reference to a chronological fact.

- b. 2.18. The woman is to be the 'helper (ezer) of the man' and this implies submission. An OT authority such as Westermann agrees with this. He claims that while the mutuality of the relationship is presented in the passage this complementarity of companionship does not exclude a relationship of subordination. 'One could not say in 2.18 that man is created as a helper for the woman' (C Westermann, Gen 1-11, p. 262).

Others, however, point out that the term is fifteen times used of God who is the 'helper' of his people and this can imply no subordination.

- c. 2.23. Adam names the woman. This implies authority over her. The Hebrew text uses the same word for Adam's naming in v. 19 ('whatever the man called each living creature. ..') as in v.23 ('she shall be called...'). But others see in Adam's words only joyful response to her as his complete equal rather than a 'naming'.
- d. 3.9 After the fall into sin, it is Adam who is held responsible and who is challenged, not the woman. God deals with Adam as the federal head of the race who is responsible for the fall. This implies that he is the authority to be dealt with. Since this occurs after the fall however, others do not see any significance in this in terms of a created subordination and believe that we now face a quite different situation because of Christ's atonement.
- e. 3.16. The question of the curse at the fall also needs to be discussed. Some suggest that the dominance of man over woman is only the result of sin and the curse. The words concerning the dominance of man over the woman is descriptive, not prescriptive. For those in Christ this unfortunate dominance has been removed. Hence, woman's submissiveness to the man can also be removed. Those who believe there is a subordination before the fall at creation also propose that this curse is descriptive, not prescriptive. Ie, Eve is not being subjected to Adam here but the sad fact of the evil result of the fall is that woman will be dominated and treated as inferior by men. However, the fall does not mean the ending of God's prior ordering. God's call for those in the redemptive order is for the sublimation of relationships in terms of Christian love, where respectful submission may continue. (Cf. Eph 5).

### SOME SUMMARY COMMENTS

We could make the following observations on the relationship of the orders of creation to the issue of women serving as pastors:

There surely can be no general subordination of women to men as though this were an original 'order of creation. The creation of man and woman as integrally sharing the image of God in complete equality makes this impossible. There is no general 'order of creation'. Rather, there are particular orders, ie, the structures God appointed for the orderly and communal relationship of human beings in community. The context makes it quite clear that the references in Gen 2 are to a particular structure in which God placed the man and woman, where a submissive role is assigned the woman. The specific structure is that of marriage, which God here institutes. This is clear from Adam's reference to marriage, to the woman's name as Eve, ie, 'mother', and the man and woman being 'one flesh'.

The subordination of woman to the man, then, should not be seen as a general 'order of creation' but rather refers to a vocation within an order. Here we need to think of the differing roles within the relationship: the man's as that of responsible headship and the wife's as that of loving submission for the good of the relationship.

This seems an important distinction if the concept of the orders of creation is to have any value in our discussion of women's role in churchly leadership. Subordination is a role which exists only as specified by God within an order, not an essential general order of creation. In Genesis we appear to be dealing with a particular structure. The question at issue is whether a relationship of submission for the good of the whole relationship is also specified for the other structure, ie, the church.

The traditional view has been that God has given women a submissive role in the ordering of churchly worship, and the passages in I Cor 14 and I Timothy 2 have been interpreted as teaching this. Equality of status does not imply identity of role. In this particular order or structure it is a man's vocation (if he receives a 'call') to be a pastor. This is a call to be a responsible leader of the congregational community at worship. It is the woman's role to support this ordained ministry with a submissive attitude of loving service as modelled on Christ.

- The position taken by some who support the traditional view assumes that the OT ordering of worship is reflected in the NT injunctions re women's subordinate role. The OT order and forms for public worship distinctly reserved leadership to males. Although there is a radical discontinuity between the OT priesthood and the NT pastoral office some see in the NT passages a continuance of God's ordering so that leadership in communal worship is reserved for males.
- Others do not accept these arguments and believe that the apostle's injunctions concerning the submissive role of women need to be viewed from the quite new situation which has arisen with Christ. Men and women are completely equal in him and Christian women are free to exercise their talents to God's glory. So, it is proposed, in I Timothy and I Corinthians Paul is speaking from the point of view of the old order because of disorder which has arisen. But the abiding

truth is that the church is to set an example in the world and demonstrate in society this equality and the freedom the gospel brings as both men and women carry out the ministry of the Word to the glory of God. Hence, according to this view, the submission of women to men in the worshipping congregation is not to be viewed as an abiding ordering. There is a new order which flows from the gospel so that the old ordering is transformed.

- In considering this view a few points need to be made. This position seems to ignore the fact that, so long as this world lasts, the orders of creation also stand else there would be chaos. When people come to Christ through the gospel this does not mean the end of their roles within the orders. This is precisely Paul's teaching in I Cor 7:17-24. But does a different situation prevail in the church, particularly with regard to the office of the ministry? One asks where in the NT there is any indication that a 'new order through the gospel' has superseded the order to which the apostle refers? As we saw last time, Gal. 3:28 can hardly be drawn in as evidence for this. Certainly, the early and late Church Fathers generally did not think the order established by the apostle was superseded. It must be remembered that most of them spoke Greek and were much closer to apostolic times than we are. For them the apostolic injunctions were an abiding order and they referred to 1 Cor 14:37 as indicating this was 'the command of Christ'. Augustine even speaks of the upholding of a female priesthood as 'heresy'. We may want to discuss what weight should be given to these Fathers, but their evidence can hardly be simply ignored (Cf Manfred Hauke: *Women in the Priesthood?* pp 404-444 and his study of this period and many of its representatives).
- I could summarise my view as follows: There is a new order in Christ as he transforms all relationships and there is equality status for men and women in the church as they worship and serve the one Lord. But the gospel does not abolish the structures God has given for good order, both in society and in the church. The different ordering of the priesthood of all believers and the ordained ministry must be preserved as God has ordered it through the apostolic Word.
- God's institution of the Office of the Ministry in the NT is a primary way in which he orders his people for worship. We cannot therefore really separate the question about the orders from our understanding of the nature of this ministry. It is not within the scope of our present discussion to deal with this. However, one comment is pertinent. The Report in 4.7.3 indicates that 'the characteristic way of speaking about ministry in the NT is not to speak of authority' but rather to see it as service. Certainly, the leadership role of a pastor is to be located in the function of administering the Word and Sacraments as the humble servant of Christ. However, is it possible in practice to separate that function from the personhood of the one who does the ministering? It seems simplistic to claim that because the service of the ministry deals with diakonia of the word (a function) it therefore has nothing to do with the person per se. Lutherans who see an ordering of God in this service, whereby the person of the ministrant is reserved for males, are not seeking to ground this ministry on ontology (the person of the pastor) but on functionality (ministry with the means of grace).

Nevertheless, they would ask whether the question of ontology is not inevitably also involved since you cannot really separate the ministry with word and sacraments from the person performing the action. This means that the question of gender of the celebrant becomes part of the issue of how God has ordered his community at worship.

- In 5.1.3 of the Report it is stated that if the subordinationist position is assumed it creates an anomaly for those holding this view since then women should also be subordinate in government and business. But it should be noted that this argument follows only if the subordination of women is thought to be based on some kind of general order of creation which subordinates women to men generally. If the submissiveness of women is seen as a vocation within a specific order as clearly enjoined by God himself, eg, within the marriage order or the public leadership of the church at worship, the conclusion does not follow at all that women should be barred from positions of leadership in business or government, etc.

Noel Weiss