

**THE MINORITY REPORT OF A MEMBER OF THE CTCR IN RESPECT TO
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

February 1999

The last LCC convention directed that both the majority report of the CTCR on The Role of Women in the Church and my minority report be distributed to the church at large for study and response. The chair of the CTCR accepted responsibility for preparation of a statement that summarized the feedback from the church at large and articulated the CTCR response to that feedback. This statement concludes with these observations:

"Overall, the commission stands by the report as originally submitted, with but a few changes in wording, since the responses have not convinced the commission that the clear words of the text which maintain different roles for husbands and wives in the family and males and females in the public assembly of the church are to be reinterpreted."

The report also states that *"going against the clear Word of God is a serious matter, in all areas of faith and life including this one."*

The only conclusion one can reasonably draw from these statements is that the majority position of the CTCR is the only possible interpretation of God's Word on this issue, and that anyone who differs from this view is "going against the Word of God."

Because I could not, in conscience, endorse the first iteration of the majority report and since there has been no substantive revision of that report, it should come as no surprise that I must remain in dissent from the majority position.

In doing so, I wish to affirm that I accept and embrace the Word of God as the norm and reference for all aspects of our lives as God's redeemed sons and daughters. I do not take lightly the inference that any position other than that reflected in the majority view "goes against God's Word." I have no desire or intent to go against the Word of God. I simply cannot find in the Word of God convincing evidence in support of the position articulated in the majority report of the CTCR.

I accept the Bible in its entirety as the true and inerrant Word of God. I accept in faith the mystery of divine inspiration through which God used sinful human beings as the authors of the Bible and allowed them to retain very distinctive personal writing styles while collectively recording all that God wished to communicate to His people for all time.

I also believe that the Holy Spirit works in every believer to assist sinful human beings in their understanding of God's Word. I believe the Holy Spirit is capable of and does lead believers in their understanding of God's Word without distinction in respect to gender or station in life. I do not believe that this working of the Holy Spirit is inherently more powerful in men as compared to women or in clergy as compared to laity. I do not believe that God has selected and set aside from all other believers any particular person or persons to be infallible interpreters of His Word to others. When it comes to interpretation of God's Word we are all fallible and at risk of error. We need to humbly acknowledge this reality.

One of the most central themes of the Reformation was a rejection of the doctrine of papal inerrancy in the interpretation of God's Word. We need therefore to be very careful that we do not supplant the doctrine of papal inerrancy with CTCR inerrancy.

The truth is that each of us, man or woman, clergy or laity, is subject to competing influences upon our interpretation of God's Word. In each of us there is a continuing battle between the Holy Spirit and our sinful self-serving nature. And, overlaid across this spiritual battleground are the influences of history and culture.

Are we to assume that clergy are uniformly less sinful and more Spirit-led than laity? I think not. Are we to assume that theologians and scholars are uniformly less sinful and more Spirit-led than parish pastors? I think not. Are we to assume that men are uniformly less sinful and more Spirit-led than women? I think not.

So, we are left with the inescapable reality that we are all imperfect interpreters of God's Word. Given all of the division, conflict, and even bloodshed that has occurred through history as a consequence of different interpretation of God's Word, it is truly amazing that God did not establish on earth an ecclesiastical Court of Appeal or Supreme Court that could issue definitive rulings on these troublesome issues. He did not and we ought to be careful that we do not cast the CTCR in such a role.

In my capacity as a member of the CTCR, I acknowledge that that my interpretation of God's Word is influenced by His Spirit, my sinful nature, my ancestral history, my life experiences, the culture in which I live, and my self-awareness of all those influences. I believe the same set of variables impact on all of us.

In large measure I believe that my disagreement with the majority position of the CTCR on the role of women in the church flows from a differential understanding of the impact of history and culture on interpretation of God's Word. I will cite just one example.

In his letters to the early church in various locations, Paul gives guidance in respect to their form of worship. He was particularly critical of the disorderly nature of worship at the congregation in Corinth. He also gave some very explicit advice about women in the context of worship. That advice touched upon their attire and the propriety of their "speaking" during the services.

The challenge in rightly applying the will of God, spoken through Paul, is to differentiate between the specifics (which are more likely to require interpretation within the cultural context) as opposed to the principles (which are more likely to be applicable in any culture or age). The CTCR majority opinion acknowledges that Paul's admonitions regarding head covering and Peter's reference to wearing jewelry must be taken in the cultural context of the day and ought not to be interpreted literally. However the principles embedded in this advice do apply over time, even to this age. I agree.

However, I believe the very same principles can and should be applied to the admonition to women "to be silent in the Church." Allow me to explain my perspective.

Women in Eastern cultures at the time that Jesus came to this earth were considered and treated as inherently inferior to men. Women were considered by many to be like chattel or property. Indeed, one of the prayers that Jewish men prayed included an expression of thanks to God that they were not born a woman! Women had no participatory role in worship in the synagogue. However, as early Christian worship forms emerged, women participated in the worship. This new found emancipation was likely quite intoxicating and some of the women may have become rather more exuberant than Paul considered appropriate. His call to these women for "silence" is quite reasonably viewed as an appeal to orderly worship rather than an absolute prohibition against women speaking whatsoever during worship services. I can readily understand and accept the principle of orderly worship, but I think it most unlikely that God does wish women to "remain silent" while men worship in the public assembly.

If we are to take Paul's words literally, should women join with men in the singing of hymns, in prayer, and in speaking the liturgy? The majority position of the CTCR clearly interprets Paul's words in a manner that welcomes women's full participation in these elements of the worship service, yet would preclude a woman from reading the scripture lessons. I fail to see how Paul's message can be interpreted in this manner. Most of our liturgy involves direct quotes from the Word of God and many hymns contain extracts from the scripture. How can it be right for a woman to "speak the Word of God" at some points in public worship and not at others?

From the text of the majority report and from dialogue within the CTCR it is my understanding of the CTCR position that it would be within God's will for a woman to serve as congregational chair or chair of any committee, teach the Word of God to both women and men outside the context of a public worship service, attend either of our seminaries, receive a degree from either of our seminaries, be a member of the teaching faculty at either of our seminaries, be the president of either of our seminaries, but a woman cannot read the lessons during public worship or assist a pastor in the distribution of the elements during communion.

On the later two points, I must part company with the CTCR majority view. So long as readers of the lessons faithfully and clearly read the Word of God as it is recorded, I can see no reason why a woman should be excluded from service in this capacity. Equally so, I see no justifiable reason for not allowing women to assist in the distribution of communion. The blessings we receive through the Lord's Supper are not dependent in any sense upon the gender of the hands through which we receive the elements.

I believe that some of the policies and practices of our church, which have excluded women from service in such roles are driven by history and culture rather than by the Word of God. We ought not to impose such limitations upon women when the Word of God does not. That is the fundamental theses in my dissent from the majority position of the CTCR.

There are also some observations which I feel compelled to offer in respect to attitudes and values reflected in the language of the CTCR "Response to the Responses" document. In dealing with the relationship between men and women in marriage, the CTCR suggests that the differential roles of men and women should be viewed as "merely [a] difference in a chain of command." The concept of a "chain of command" is drawn from military life. I see nothing in God's Word to suggest that husbands and wives ought to relate to one another in a militaristic model.

In the military, when the commanding officer issues a command, the foot soldier is to snap to attention, respond with a crisp, "Yes, Sir!" and carry out the command. This is the very antipathy of God's message for husbands and wives. From my understanding of God's Word, husbands are to show love to their wives in a sacrificial manner even as Christ sacrificed Himself for us. Our love for Jesus springs from His sacrificial love for us rather than from our fear of His authority. So to in a marriage, love of a wife for her husband ought to flow from her husband's love, rather than fear of authority.

I cannot conclude this report without some observations about the process for involving the church-at-large in dialogue about issues such as the Role of Women in the Church. I was very pleased with the decision of the last LCC convention to have the church-at-large consider both the majority and minority reports on this issue. I very much appreciated the effort taken by individual members to provide feedback to the CTCR and/or me personally.

While the CTCR "Response to the Responses" document does well summarize the range of issues addressed in the responses, it gives no indication of the balance. In fact, responses in support of the minority report significantly outnumbered those in support of the majority report. While this exercise was, in no sense, intended to be a polling exercise, I do feel that the CTCR was to readily dismissive of feedback that disagreed with the original majority paper.

Perhaps the saddest part of this exercise for me was reading the letters of support and encouragement that I received from pastors of our church who concurred with the position expressed in my minority report but were disinclined to make their views known to the CTCR. On the one hand I was reassured that clergy who have substantial education and experience in hermeneutics share my understanding of God's Word on this issue. However, I was saddened by the realization that some pastors seem fearful to be open about their views lest they be branded as heretical.

At the last meeting of the CTCR we received word that the CTCR of The Lutheran Church of Australia (with whom LCC has fellowship) has found that, on balance, the Scriptures do permit the ordination of women. Rather than serving as an impetus for serious reflection on the appropriateness of the majority position of our CTCR, this news prompted the creation of a "statement of concern" to our sister church in Australia.

In closing, I am pleased that the chair of the CTCR has drafted a Bible study guideline that will assist congregations, Bible study groups, and individuals in their search of the Scriptures for God's will on this issue. I regret that the CTCR never took the time to collectively work through a comparably systematic study of the Word on this issue. I sincerely pray that, as members of the LCC delve into God's Word as it speaks to this issue, the Holy Spirit will lead them to God's truth.

This minority report is respectfully submitted to Lutheran Church-Canada in convention in 1999 and to the church-at-large,

In Christ,
Dennis A. Kendel
CTCR Member
February 1999