

The Status of Woman in the Public Life of the Congregation

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[Translated by Max N. Herrmann.]

Apart from recent times, the question as to what status woman is to have in the public life of the congregation has never really been discussed in the Lutheran Church. Even though it belongs to those questions which have to do with the application of a Word of Scripture to the continually changing relationships of life, and for whose answer therefore some leeway is permitted to unreliable reason, it has nevertheless received the same judgment from almost all the teachers in the Lutheran Church, without doubt because the opinion was held that it is clearly answered in Scripture. *Mulier taceat in ecclesia*, let woman be silent in the Church. This axiom of the old church our theologians in the church have confessed again and again because they considered it to be Scriptural. In recent times, however, repeated doubt has been expressed in Lutheran circles on the Scripturalness of the above principle. Indeed, within the Synodical Conference there are already congregations whose practice no longer conforms to it. What now! Has the position of our church on this question up till now been wrong? That this is out of the question cannot be maintained. Formerly the status of woman in public life generally was such that the question about her God-pleasing status in the public life of the church was of no practical interest and scarcely could become acute. But experience teaches us that a question of doctrine is not thoroughly searched and its full scope considered until a strong practical interest compels such a consideration. There have been doubts expressed among us with regard to our former position toward the question of woman in the Church, and we cannot simply dismiss them by referring to the position of our fathers. The whole question must rather be considered anew and judged in the light of Scripture. We shall do this in the first part of our essay. In the second part we shall show how to go about persuading our congregations to let the will of God prevail in this phase of the Christian life.

I.

What pleases God is revealed to us in the moral Law, which is in force for all time. Self-evidently the moral Law does not and cannot deal specifically with every concrete case that comes up in life. The Scripture gives us a summary of the holy will of God in the words: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God and thy neighbor, and in the light of this Word one can understand the will of God in all situations of life. From here one could try to find the right position over against our question. It would, however, be strange, even presumptuous, to do that, if the Scripture itself has applied the general command of love to our question about the status of woman in the public life of the congregation. Is this the case? There are indeed passages in the New Testament in which the women *of that time* are given a definite status in the public life of the congregation. These passages are I Corinthians 11:3–16; I Corinthians 14:34–36; I Timothy 2:11–15.

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man has long hair, it is a shame unto him? But

if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” (I Corinthians 11:3-16)

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?” (I Corinthians 14:34-36)

“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” (I Timothy 2:11-15)

From all these passages it is clear that Paul assigns to the women of his time a different status in the public life of the church than to the men. This status is to find expression in the outward conduct during the worship services. According to the first passage man should appear with uncovered head but woman with a covered head. According to the last two passages man should teach and speak before the assembled congregation but woman should be silent. That Paul wants to make this difference between the men and women known in his congregation is positive; about that there can be no difference of opinion.

The question now is whether what Paul says to the women of his time is applicable to the women of all time, or, in other words, whether this has to do with a moral precept or not. So much is certain from the very start, that what Paul here prescribes to the women in his congregations in the last analysis has its root in the moral Law, so that it must be an expression of the attitude of the heart, which the moral Law, valid for all time and founded on the holiness of God, demands. For Paul would really be the last one to try to gain authority in the New Testament Church for law of any kind besides the moral law. Therefore the only question is this: Was the conduct prescribed to the women of those times in itself moral, or was it only the expression of a God-pleasing mind demanded by the custom of the time? Was participation in divine worship with uncovered head and speaking before the assembled congregation on the part of woman in itself wrong, or only with respect to the meaning that the custom of that time gave to these actions? Are the Apostle’s precepts only according to their sense and spirit or also according to the letter of a moral nature? When, for example, the Scripture says, “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head,” according to its sense this is a moral law, but not according to the letter. In itself rising before an old man is neither good nor bad. However, it comes under the 4th Commandment when according to custom the rising before somebody is considered a testimony of respect.

Now certainly everybody will at once agree with me when I say that the precept given in I Corinthians 11:10 in itself is not moral law according to the letter. Whether a woman appears in the divine service with a covered or uncovered head is in itself neither good nor bad. But the custom at that time gave the appearance of a woman with an uncovered head a meaning that made it wrong. Which? The Apostle speaks of this in I Corinthians 11:5-10. He says first: A woman with an uncovered head in a public assembly is the same as a woman with cropped hair. She gives the impression that she is a loose woman. Then, however, Paul carries out the thought that woman should testify by the covering of her head that she stands in a definite relationship to man. Her head covering should symbolically show that she “has a power upon her head,” that is, that she stands under the might, the power, and the authority of man. But does man have authority over her? Is he placed over her? Certainly, says the Apostle, and for three reasons. First, man is God’s image and glory, but woman is the glory of the man (vs. 7). God created man in His image that he would be His honor and portray His glory, reflect His virtues. In the same sense woman is the glory of man. Created from his rib, she should, as woman, be a picture of man, who has been adorned by God with glorious gifts. Again, man is not from woman, but woman is from man (vs. 8), made of his flesh and bone, formed according to his being. Man was first, then woman. Finally, man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for man’s sake (vs. 9). Woman was to be a helper to man, a “help-meet for him.” To these historical facts, to the order of God’s creation, the Apostle traces back the demand of the Law that the woman should be subject to the man and insists on it, that she should wear the symbol of authority under which she stands, namely the usual head-covering, in the assemblies. But now since women in our time by their head-covering have no more “a power upon their head,” since their head-

covering is no more a symbol of the authority of the man, this precept in I Corinthians 11:10 concerning the conduct of women in the divine services falls away. Today's women are no longer bound by it. But their subordinate position to man is not removed, because it does not have its root in a custom which is subject to change, but it is founded on the manner and the way in which God created man and woman and, according to Paul, is commanded in the Law.

Now how about the second precept which is given in I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:12, that woman should be silent in the church? Is this a precept that is valid for all time? Paul bases it on the due subordination of woman to man: "For it is not permitted unto them to speak;" he says, "but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will know anything, let them ask their husbands at home." Then he appears to add a second reason with the words: "For it is a shame for women to speak in the church." In so far as the Apostle forbids that women speak in public because in the light of the custom of the time that appeared disgraceful, his command no longer applies; custom today looks at the matter differently. However, in so far as the speaking of woman before the assembled congregation actually cannot be reconciled with her subordinate position to man, it is forbidden to women of all times.

A further reason against the public speaking of woman Paul adduces in the passage from I Timothy with the words: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and introduced the transgression." This translation of Luther does not clearly stress the point in question to which this applies. The passage reads word for word: "And Adam was not deceived but woman being deceived (that is, through deception) fell into transgression." Adam was deceived, not, however, through deception, but through persuasion; he listened to the voice of his wife (Gen. 3:17). Eve talked him into it, and he did not resist her urging. He did not fall into sin directly through the sly deception of the devil but through the powerful influence of the already deceived woman on his senses. To what extent now is the prohibition of Paul, that woman should not teach publicly, based upon this historical happening? It has been said that he does not offer reasons for this prohibition, but for the precept, the woman should not be the lord of the man. One must, they say, in verse 14, supply the word "first" from verse 13: And Adam was not first deceived by the devil, but the woman was first deceived and thus came into transgression. And because she sinned first and so has the greater guilt, her punishment is that she should be subject to man. But for one thing the word "first" does not appear in verse 14, and besides, when we translate thus, the addition, "and so fell into transgression," does not make good sense; the Greek words show that what is emphasized is that woman, unlike man, was deceived through deception. The thought that the woman on account of her greater sin should be subject to man is completely foreign to the Apostle; as shown, he does not trace the subordination of woman to man back to the fall into sin, but to the creation. And if Eve was made to fall through deception and Adam by persuasion, his sin is certainly not the lesser, but, should one want to make any distinction at all, the greater; in spite of clearer understanding he transgressed the same command of God as Eve did. It is therefore clear that the Apostle does not forbid woman to teach publicly and to rule because she has committed a greater sin in Eve than man in Adam, but because from the beginning she showed herself to be "the weaker vessel," because in the area of understanding she is not equal to man, because she is more easily deceived and therefore not qualified for ruling and authoritative teaching.

Now let us apply these Scripture truths to the present-day condition in the church. What limitations have been set for the activity of woman which do not apply to man? May woman participate actively in the meetings of the congregation, join the discussions, vote, be a chairman, etc.? I answer: she may not, if the subordination under man, which is commanded in Scripture, would thereby be suspended. God does not want man and woman to face each other as authorities of equal rank. He does not want woman to assert her will in opposition to the will of man, nor does He want a woman's vote on a question of church affairs to make itself felt in contradiction to that of her husband. If a congregation, however, consists only of women or if the men at hand are neither capable nor willing to take care of church matters, then the women step into their place. Or if a congregational meeting is considering things that the women understand better than the men, it would be foolish if the women were not asked for their advice. It is not the final aim of the Apostle to assure the men of certain rights, to place limitations upon the women, but to protect the congregation from harm, to edify the Kingdom of God. And how is it in regard to the teaching activity of woman under our condition? May she serve in the ministry, lead in

public prayer, give confirmation instructions, etc.? I answer that, as a rule, this is even less permissible than her speaking in the congregational meetings, for public teaching is denied her not only for one but two reasons. It would violate her subordination to man, and she does not possess the necessary teaching capabilities. It is self-evident that also this rule has exceptions. Necessity knows no law. When there is no man at hand who possesses the necessary teaching ability, the preaching of the Gospel should not be discontinued on this account; and when man neither can nor will fulfill the duty which God had intended for him in His Kingdom, then woman is to take his place and do the work as well as she can.

Perhaps someone may say: Many objections can be raised against your arguments. You yourself admit that in some cases women may take an active part in the public life of the church, yes, may even teach publicly. How then can the word of Paul “I forbid the woman to speak in the church” be a part of the moral Law? Surely the moral Law may under no circumstances be broken! I answer: The command of Paul, in so far as it is of a moral nature, does not read: Woman shall under no circumstances speak before the assembled congregation, but: She shall not by her speaking violate her submission to man. Where man cannot be considered at all for the office of preaching the Gospel because he is a heathen, or has as good as no Christian knowledge, there woman by her public speaking does not become guilty of an infraction of the command to be subject to man. *Salus populi summa lex*—the welfare of the people is the highest law. *Where it is clear* that the welfare of the Church demands it, we may set aside a precept of the moral Law; certainly not in the sense that the end justifies the means, but in the knowledge that not the letter, but the sense and spirit of the law are decisive. But, someone else may say, biblical examples can be cited showing that women not only in cases of necessity but also at other times stepped forward and taught publicly in the church and obviously with God’s consent. Thus we read in Acts 21:9 that the evangelist Philip had four daughters who prophesied. And in I Corinthians 11:5 Paul himself speaks of women who prophesied and prayed and did so before the assembled congregation. Luke 2:38 tells of a certain Anna that she was a prophetess and at the presentation of Christ in the temple stepped forward and spoke of Him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. In Joel 3:1 the Lord promises the members of the New Testament Church that their sons and daughters shall prophesy. Is God contradicting Himself? Does He sanction in one place what He forbids in another? If what Paul prescribes for the women in Corinth were a moral law, then God could certainly nowhere have sanctioned the transgression of it. To that we reply: God repeatedly made exceptions to the moral precepts. He forbids killing in the Fifth Commandment and then commands Abraham to slay his son. He forbids stealing in the Seventh Commandment and commands the children of Israel before they leave Egypt to demand of the Egyptians gold and silver vessels and to take them along when they leave. He forbids the marriage of in-laws and commands it in certain cases. On this account He is not in contradiction with Himself. The moral Law, which flows out of God’s unchangeable holiness, reads, “Thou shalt love.” The individual moral precepts—the Ten Commandments—show how I should practice this love in the different situations of life. When the omniscient God sees that in a particular case the command of love would be better served in another way, then He does not contradict Himself if for this case He sets the commandment aside. If God Himself in our time would inspire a woman and would charge her with a special message to the Church, then Paul’s precept with regard to the silence of women in the Church would in this case fall away. Incidentally we do not exactly know in the cases referred to above (except for the one mentioned in I Corinthians 11:5) whether public teaching was involved. In the Corinthians passage, on the other hand, it is not clearly stated whether it involves an actual or a supposed case. If an actual case is involved, it by no means has the approval of the Apostle, for how could he otherwise say three chapters later: “Let the woman be silent in the churches”? Anyway, it is bad practice to cite examples in order to annul a clear Word of God.

Someone perhaps will raise a third objection: But the Scripture itself teaches that in the New Testament Church there are no ranks nor other differences among the believers. And is not our attention directed especially to this that before God there is no difference between the believing man and the believing woman? Does not Galatians 3:28 say: “There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”? Answer: It is true, in a certain sense there is no difference between the members of the Church, also not between man and woman. Before God they are all equal. They are all one in Christ Jesus. By faith they are all Jesus’ members, His body. In the Beloved they are all equally pleasing to God. All therefore have the same spiritual rights and blessings.

All have the spiritual priesthood. All may come before God without any mediator and from His hand receive grace for grace. All are children of royalty and rule over sin, death, and the devil. Before God neither race, nor nationality, nor age, nor calling, nor position in life, nor knowledge and education, nor honor and esteem among men counts for anything, but alone that faith by which we are in Christ Jesus, or to put it better, Christ, with whom we are united by faith. But from the equality or equal worth of the individual members of the Church before God the conclusion may not be drawn that their status and their task in the public life of the congregation is the same. We are all members of the body of Christ, but from this it already follows that we do not all have the same duties to perform. Paul writes Romans 12:4–6: “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.” The body of Christ needs for its edification different services, and each member should render that service for which he is best suited. By continued practice a person could get to the point where he could walk tolerably well with his hands. But the feet by nature are much better fitted to render that service, and therefore it would be foolishness to turn this job over to the hands. Man is by nature better suited for ruling and teaching than woman. Therefore God wants the latter to be subject and keep silence and leave the ruling and public teaching to man. This has nothing to do with rights and privileges but with a careful utilization of the gifts which grace has given us. But, one may object, it is not true that woman is inferior to man in the gifts of teaching and ruling. There surely are women who are more able to rule than men. And how many sensible, educated women there are today in all the countries of the world! For example: Is not the average American woman better educated than the average American man? In answer, there have been some women who were able to rule, but in general that is not the case. When it comes to ruling, a woman is too impulsive. She lets herself be controlled too much by her emotions. She lacks the necessary objectivity, realism, prudence, calmness; she cannot separate between persons and things. Even in the faculty of perception and competence to pass judgment she is not equal to man. She may be quick of apprehension and easily acquire an abundance of information; but perception, the ability to comprehend the essence of things and to cling firmly to such acquired knowledge in spite of all attacks from within and without is not her forte. And it is just these things that make for a capable teacher in the church, one who produces results. He must know in their full depth the truths that he wants to impart to his hearers. He must understand how to apply them to all of life’s situations and have a courageous heart; he dare not let his judgment be blurred by a sudden surge of emotion; he must hold to the Word which is certain, even if a thousand voices want to lure him from truth’s way. Woman has not the required ability to be that kind of teacher. Her judgment is too easily confused, not deeply and firmly enough established. A classic example of this is the woman who is held by many to be the first campaigner for the rights of woman: Anna Maria von Schuermann. A descendant from a family of patricians in Antwerp, and born in Cologne in 1687, she at an early age showed exceptional gifts. At three years she could read fluently. When she was six years old she began the study of Latin. Later because of her interest in theology she learned Greek and Hebrew and, following her inclination toward the study of languages, also Arabic, Syriac, Coptic, Spanish, Persian, and Turkish. She occupied herself with history, geography, mathematics, science, philosophy, and especially with theology, in which the apologist for reformed orthodoxy, Boetius, exercised a determining influence upon her. She was pious and orthodox. But after she was of mature age she learned to know the Frenchman Labadie and his writings. Originally Catholic and educated by Jesuits, he had later joined the Reformed Church. But he did not remain faithful to it and founded a new communistic, fanatic, ascetic sect that lasted only a short while. And this sect Anna von Schuermann joined and for it sacrificed everything that she had. Her comprehensive knowledge, her exceptional education, her understanding of the orthodox-reformed theology could not protect her from the errors of Labadie. In spite of all her education she lacked sound judgment. Because that is characteristic of the world of women (there are, of course, exceptions), God does not want woman to hold the public office of teaching in the church.

But perhaps another will object: If that is so, then we are already going contrary to the will of God. We permit women to teach in the school. We appoint, yes, train women teachers. In fact, at present we are training more women than men teachers. If now women may teach in the school, why not also in the church? Whoever

asks thus, first of all disregards that not all teaching, but only public teaching, is denied to women. But isn't teaching in school public? That is not worth arguing about. When I speak in this essay about public teaching, I understand by this a teaching by the commission of the congregation, to which every church member has access and which is meant for all. Teaching in school is meant for only one class of church members, for the children. He who makes the above objection forgets the reasons why Paul forbids women to teach. Woman is not to teach publicly because one who teaches is recognized as a person of authority. The Bible says Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you (Luther: teachers), and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Such teaching would give woman authority over man, whereas she is to be subject. But by teaching in school she does not exercise any authority over man but only over children. And she is not to teach because she does not possess adequate ability to teach. Her teaching capability is adequate for a school where there are children, especially for the early elementary grades. In these grades, religious instruction has to do primarily with imparting the facts of salvation and teaching the catechism and therefore is not to be thought of as independent, authoritative instruction. It cannot be denied that this exposes us to dangers. Like the coeducation or common education of both sexes in high schools, which is coming into common use, so the education of boys and girls in elementary schools by men and women teachers has the tendency to confuse our judgment as to what is fitting for man and what is fitting for woman, what task is assigned by God to the former and what to the latter. It is to be feared that we shall soon lose sight of the subtle differences in the talents and gifts and individuality of woman, that we shall entrust her with the task of educating the young men in our high schools, even as we already often let them teach in the upper classes of our elementary schools, while it is established that only in rarest cases, if at all, can they educate older boys. As I see it, we are threatened with still greater danger by the tendency that is closely connected with the education and appointment of women and which in the last years has come to full flower. I refer to the joint teachers' conference attended by both sexes. These do not concern themselves with the teaching of elementary skills as is the case in the lower grades of the school, but with the establishment and advocacy of basic educational precepts for which deeply rooted knowledge and mature judgment are necessary, judgment that is objective and does not let itself be influenced by prevailing modes of thought. When one considers that our women teachers for the most part are in the 18–25 age bracket and that men teachers to all appearances soon will constitute a small minority, without doubt there is reason to fear that woman's influence in our elementary school system will soon assert itself unduly and bring a one-sided, unhealthy trend into our education. The difficulty in balancing this trend only intensifies the potential problems. There are certain reasons that make the attendance of our women teachers at conferences desirable, and the welfare of the school almost demands it. Not the joint conference but the spirit in which it is conducted is the deciding factor. Therefore whether these joint teachers' conferences will lead to an unscriptural, unhealthy position of woman in the public life of the church will depend in great measure upon our men teachers. But considered by itself, the engaging of women teachers in our elementary schools is not in contradiction with our view on the question of woman's status in the church.

A further objection that is often raised against our view is that of unfairness. Women, who as a rule are known to be a more zealous and more faithful church members than men, yes, who often have to persuade them to join a Christian congregation, should not have rights inferior to his. Yes, it is considered sheer injustice that the men of the congregation should expend monies for the church, which unmarried women, who have no voice in making the appropriations, must help raise. Even the world in its blindness sees an injustice here! For that reason in the state the rule applies: No taxation without representation. This objection, for one thing, reveals a completely wrong attitude of which we shall speak later; then too in the last analysis it is not based on the facts. In the church there is no taxation. No congregation prescribes to her members that they must give so and so much for a definite purpose. All gifts for God's kingdom are free gifts of love; only as such do they have worth in the eyes of God.

A further objection is made: In those places in which the Apostle prohibits woman from stepping forth publicly in the church he is expressing his personal judgment, which was influenced by the thinking of his time; he is not here the mouth-piece of God; here he is not speaking by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. That occurs, it

is said, also elsewhere in I Corinthians. In I Corinthians 7:8 he says: “I say to the unmarried,” and then continues in verse 10: “But the married I do not command, but the Lord.” There he is supposed to make a difference between the Word of the Lord and his own judgment. He is to have shown clearly that what he says in chapter 11:1–15 about the relation of man to woman was not spoken by inspiration, for at the conclusion he adds: “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” Here he is supposed to admit that the things that he has presented are subject to argument; but, he adds, he does not intend to argue. It is not his, nor the church’s practice to cause strife and conflict over externals. In chapter 14 again he adds to his exposition the note: “What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?” Thereby he is supposed to want to say that since other congregations had had the Word of God before they did, modesty demanded that they conform to these in outward practices. In the Timothy passage, it is said, he again emphasizes that *he* does not permit women to speak publicly: “But I suffer not a woman to teach” (I Tim. 2:12).

Of all the objections mentioned this one is the least tenable. When Paul says in I Corinthians 7:8: “I say therefore to the unmarried” and then continues in chapter 7:10: “But unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord,” he does not in any way say that his judgment rests only on human opinion and is not inspired. For he adds in verse 40: “I think also that I have the Spirit of God.” This rather is all he wants to say: About the right position toward divorce Christ has already spoken and about that I need not speak further. But about the question whether one should marry or stay single I now want to speak and, to be sure, as someone who has the Spirit of God and is moved by Him. The words in I Corinthians 11:16 (“But if any man seem to be contentious, etc.”) in no way indicate that the former statement is not inspired. Paul is fully certain that his demand that a woman should appear with covered head in the divine service is according to the will of God. But it is a matter of outward behavior because of which he wants no strife. The remark in I Corinthians 14:36: “What? Came the word of God out from you?” is not intended to remind the Corinthians that as former heathen they had reason to follow old Jewish congregations in custom and usage, but is intended to chastise the wiseacres in Corinth who figured that they knew God’s will better than congregations who had had the Word of God much longer. Finally when the Apostle says in I Timothy 2:12: “But I suffer not a woman to teach,” the word “I” is not at all emphasized. In the Greek it is not expressed by the pronoun but only in the verb form; there is also no contrast, just as little as in many other places where he speaks similarly, for example Galatians 5:16: “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, etc.” That Paul is not at all thinking about presenting his judgment about the God-pleasing status of women in the public life of the congregation as an uninspired private opinion follows especially from the fact that he finds this judgment expressed in the Law of God. For he says in I Corinthians 14:34: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, *as also saith the law.*” And the demand that women should be subject is not only found in the writings of Paul but elsewhere too, for example in I Peter 3:1: “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands.”

A last objection. It is said: We grant that woman is to be subject to man. But does it follow from this that she may not join in discussions and voting in the congregational meetings? If this would follow, then also sons, who surely owe obedience to their fathers, could not be permitted to speak and vote in the congregational meetings where the latter exercise their rights as members of the congregation. To this we answer first of all: The conclusion that women should be silent in the assembled congregation because due subjection demands it—is not made by us, but by the Apostle himself in I Corinthians 14:34. But, one may object, the meetings of which Paul here speaks are not our congregational meetings. He is speaking about divine worship services, not business meetings. Answer: Our congregational meetings are not business meetings except in the sense that in them the business of the kingdom of God is discharged. In our congregational meetings such “business” matters are taken care of as Christ entrusted to the congregation with the words in Matthew 18:17: “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” In these meetings brethren are reprov'd, admonish'd, instructed. Christian education, Christian schools, missions, and a hundred other questions pertaining to the kingdom of God are discussed; and even when the salary of pastors and teachers, the building of a parsonage, and similar things are

being considered, these are no ordinary matters of business, but involve teaching, concern themselves with the clear presentation and application of basic truths as Paul presents them in Galatians 6:6; I Corinthians 9:14; II Corinthians 8:12; I Timothy 5:17. Such teaching on the part of women in the public meeting certainly contradicts the relationship between man and woman as willed by God and is included in the commandment of Paul in I Corinthians 14:34. But also when a congregational meeting is considering purely outward affairs, for example the question as to where the new church shall be built, how the new school shall be equipped, it would still militate against the required submission if a woman were permitted to vote and thus bring her will to bear against that of man. We naturally do not want to speak in behalf of a narrow mechanical application of this principle. There certainly could be certain cases where one could let the women speak and vote without overthrowing the sense and spirit of I Corinthians 14:34. We only want to establish that the giving of the right to vote to women in principle annuls her subordination to man. But will not also the granting of the right to vote to the son who belongs to the same congregation as his father annul his obedience to his father? Certainly, that is just the way it is. No reasonable father demands of his son lifelong obedience or submission in all areas of life. When he dismisses his son from the parental home so that he may establish his own, he in effect says: You shall now be your own master, set up your own household and have the rights and responsibilities of the head of a house. And when a congregation grants voting rights to young men of 21, every consenting father is thereby declaring his son of age, saying to him: From now on you are an independent member of the congregation and in congregational matters shall deal according to your own judgment. Could not then a man grant his wife the same rights as his grown son and declare her to be autonomous and independent? No. God indeed wants man to leave his mother and his father and found a new home; but He does not want woman to stand next to man as an independent power but as his help-meet, and God took this into consideration at her creation.

There is therefore no doubt that Scripture assigns a different status to woman in the public life of the congregation than to man. That her relationship to man is not one of equality but one of subordination should find expression also in the congregational life. Therefore she is not to rule, nor to join in ruling in the church, nor is she to teach publicly unless urgent necessity demands it so that the principle established in I Corinthians 14:34 is not violated according to its sense and spirit.

II.

How then shall we gain currency in our congregations for this Christian practice? I take for granted that no one considers it unimportant whether this is put into practice in our congregations or not. Matters of importance are at stake. The point in question is first of all the authority of Scripture. Without a doubt our Lutheran church in America has seen its best days. The time of decline is here. Everywhere before our eyes are the signs of incipient decay. But up to now we have held firmly to the infallibility of Scripture. Will we also do that in the future? The apostasy from Scripture among us obviously will not begin in this way that one or the other openly attacks its authority. It will most likely come in this manner that one shakes his head in doubt over one or the other passage of Scripture and disregards it. When called to account, one will first hide behind exegetical artistry and take refuge in an exposition which removes from the Scripture passage whatever is offensive to the flesh, but which does violence to the words themselves. After one has gradually freed himself inwardly more and more from the authority of Scripture, the outward apostasy will follow. Let us beware of beginnings! If what we have just heard about the God-pleasing status of woman in the public life of the congregation is doctrine of Scripture, then we shall not wish to consult with flesh and blood, least of all with the wicked and corrupt wisecracks of our generation; but we shall simply do the will of God and bear in mind that in the last analysis the point at issue is not woman suffrage, but the authority of Scripture.

By this we do not mean to say that the question itself is of no importance to us, that it is all the same to us whether in our church woman joins in the ruling and teaching or not. This question involves an ordinance which God made already at creation and which has its foundation in the very nature of man and woman. This cannot be reversed without bitter results and evil consequences for family, state, and church. We indeed are witnesses of the unhappy consequences that the change in the divinely willed relationship between man and

woman has already had. When one looks at the “modern” woman, how she, although basically different from man according to body, spirit, and disposition, is nevertheless concerned to wipe out the differences between him and herself; how in spite of the difference in endowments she demands complete equality with him in all the situations of life; how she imitates him in clothing, hairdo, smoking, drinking, sports, coarse talk, and other things; how she is concerned to put aside that which good men treasure and admire in her, namely, feminine grace, and then again puts forth every effort to attract man and to bind him to herself; when we read the sad accounts of divorces in our large cities, how so many young marriages go on the rocks because woman does not want to be man’s help-meet, but his mistress for whose wishes and whims and for whose insatiable lust for pleasure he must bring one sacrifice after another; when we hear how women especially also in the so-called “better circles” put away the thought of motherhood and would rather bring up a dog than a child, then one might despair of the future and realize that it is no little thing but a great obligation to put into practice in our midst the will of God with regard to the relationship between man and woman and so be a salt to the world. And wouldn’t the church suffer considerable harm if woman were to go beyond the bounds which God has set for her and not only take part in the discussion of questions of outward management but also join in admonishing and reproving in cases of discipline, in advising about and voting upon the calling of pastors and teachers? Let no one be a blind optimist here! Let no one think that the participation of women would indefinitely improve the tone of the discussions, would further peace, and would cause monies to flow more plentifully into the congregational and Synod treasuries. That certainly would not happen in the long run. For the salutary management of the outward and inward affairs of the congregation one needs, besides love for Christ and His kingdom, above all calmness, prudence, capable judgment, objectivity. The love for Christ and His church among women is certainly not inferior to that among men; but calm discussion, a careful weighing of pros and cons, strict objectivity that is not disturbed by personal likes and dislikes are not a woman’s forte. If it is the case already with us men that our personal inclinations often cloud our judgment so that we have to exercise stern discipline if we want to judge objectively, then that is the case with woman to a still far greater degree. It is much harder for her to overcome likes and dislikes, and so she is more partial than man. She prefers looking at the person to looking at the facts. Party spirit, which already is a worm that is gnawing at the inner life of our Synod, would without doubt grow worse with the introduction of woman suffrage. Many a family quarrel would be fought out at the congregational meeting. And the calling of pastors would be determined even more than is unfortunately the case already by nonessentials like physical build, a pleasing personality, fine manners, etc., while ability and faithfulness would be valued too little. The advantage that woman has over man in the area of perception, namely, that she is more intuitive than man and therefore arrives more quickly at a decision, which, in certain areas of life is more sure and dependable than the judgment of man attained through logical deliberation, does not come into consideration in the congregational meeting. Here it is not enough to have found out merely what is right; the reasons on which the correct views are based must be given and one must also take into consideration the opinions of others. Woman is not very able to prove and defend her position. If that which she feels to be right is attacked, she easily becomes uncertain and not infrequently lets herself be led astray by reasons that only appear as such. And why should the gifts for God’s kingdom increase if woman joins in the discussion and voting at congregational and Synod meetings? Whatever she wants to give out of love for Christ and His kingdom she can give also without being a voting member. But the offerings she is prepared to bring only if she is given equal rights with man she does not bring to Christ but to her vanity and pride, and they are therefore no blessing for God’s Kingdom. Gifts that do not flow out of sincere love have no value in God’s eyes. So for the sake of clinging firmly to the principle of the authority of Scripture, and also for the sake of the thing itself we must be concerned that the Scripture teaching about the subordinate status of woman under man continues to prevail in our church.

Shall we succeed? To a great extent, success will depend upon the way in which we handle this matter in our congregations. He who proceeds in a legalistic way will accomplish little. If a pastor perhaps says to the women in his congregation: “God has set us men as lords over you women and has given us rights in church and home which you do not have; when we speak, you must be quiet; when we decide upon something you must not interfere but in awe marvel at our wisdom; you are lowly vessels; but we are the pride and glory of the

human race”—if a pastor opposes woman suffrage in such a manner in his congregation, he will accomplish little. The Law, which in itself works wrath, would by this one-sided presentation certainly work wrath. It would embitter; it would provoke women to resist. And even if the pastor would succeed in suppressing theft resistance with legalistic threats, little would be won and much lost. No, with legalistic demands and threats nothing is accomplished, least of all in our times. The fact that the question about the rights of woman in the church arises in some of our congregations, the fact that some women are bent on winning increased rights in the church is a symptom of the legalism that has engulfed them. Why do they demand the right to vote? Perhaps because they think that they can serve the church better as voters and are better able to further the course of the Gospel? Hardly! The matter has become acute since the state has granted woman the right to vote and since the secular papers, magazines, and books discuss and plead for the rights of woman in so superficial, rationalistic a way. They want the same rights in the church that they have in the state. For many the church already has become a kingdom ruled by laws, where there are rights and duties as in secular organizations; where rights are granted in proportion to performance; where the rights of the individual are precisely defined by law. Whoever opposes this legal conception of the kingdom of God in a legalistic way will gain nothing. You cannot drive out the devil through Beelzebub. You cannot drive out a legalistic disposition through legalistic demands and threats. Only the preaching of the Gospel can change the enslaved disposition of one who operates with the law. Only an evangelical treatment of the problem of the status of women will produce salutary results.

To deal with this question evangelically requires first a factual presentation of it. Whoever presents it in a legalistic way immediately creates a false conception of the divinely ordained status of woman in the public life of the congregation. He will emphasize the prerogative of man, which as such is of no concern to God. Before God there is neither male nor female, but we are all one in Christ Jesus. Neither men as such nor women as such please Him. God is pleased by whoever is in Christ through faith, regardless of sex. He who preaches legalistically will prefer to extol the superiority of man. That is again factually wrong. Scripture, generally speaking, knows nothing of a superiority of man and an inferiority of woman; Scripture hasn't given man the public office of teaching and ruling in the church because he perhaps is a nobler, more capable, and more worthy creature than woman. God has assigned to man a different position in the public life of the congregation than to woman because their gifts differ, and both should be good stewards of their gifts. They should use them where they can accomplish the most with them and work the greatest blessing. The gifts of both are precious and given for the Gospel's sake; therefore they should not be wasted but used, each one directed to its fitting sphere of activity. What Scripture teaches about the duty of woman in church life is an elaboration and practical application of I Peter 4:10: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." And so this also belongs to the evangelical treatment of our question, that one preaches that the instructions which Scripture gives to woman for her church activity only wants to show her how she can attain the goal which she, as a Christian, has according to the new man set for herself, namely, to serve God in His kingdom there where she can accomplish the most with her gifts and produce the most fruits.

The evangelical treatment of the problem of the status of woman above all requires reference to the magnitude, the importance, and the glory of the duties assigned to woman in the church and to the blessing of God that has hitherto been granted to her activity. Man has the duty of ruling the church outwardly. It is the responsibility of man to consider and decide upon the erection of churches, schools, and parsonages, etc., to determine the salaries, to find ways and means of meeting the financial needs of the congregation, to choose men to manage the property of the congregation, etc. That in itself is certainly no exalted duty, no more so than that assigned to woman; those are tasks of common laborers in the kingdom of God. It is the duty of man to fill the office of the public ministry in the church, to teach, to rebuke, to admonish, to comfort. That is a great, important and glorious task, for its purpose is to edify the body of Christ, to gather and preserve a Church for Christ that exalts His blood and proclaims His praise to all eternity, to save lost sinners and lead them to eternal salvation. But doesn't also woman have this office of teaching? Not, to be sure, in the congregation, but, nevertheless, in the family. And what a precious duty has fallen to her lot! She is to be the first one to plant the word of truth in the souls of the young children whom God has given to her. From her lips they are to hear the

first news about the Savior, who loved them and purchased them with His blood. She is to teach them to fold their hands and pray to Him who is the true Father of the whole family in heaven and earth. She is to turn their thoughts in the right direction, to look after the wonderful, new, mysterious life that has been created in them by baptism, to help it develop to full, God-pleasing maturity. She is to lay the foundation for the building of character and to work unceasingly so that her children grow into Christian individuals who do not live in vain, but who find their soul's satisfaction in the knowledge of life's true goal as revealed by God's grace, in the knowledge of Christ their Savior, and who become, as the light and salt of the earth, guides and leaders to their fellowmen on the way to heaven.

And not only to the smaller children, but also to her whole household she should by her entire behavior be a preacher of righteousness. Peter writes in his First Epistle, 3:1-4: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." Woman is called to be the guardian of good Christian conduct. Paul admonishes her in this when he writes in Titus 2:3 that the women should be "teachers of good things," of that which is fitting and proper for a Christian. Her prime responsibility is to see to it that the members of her household, both old and young, encouraged by her good example, may do according to Paul's words in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Can there be a more noble, a more precious task than to bring the Gospel in full measure into her home, to help bring it about that a Christian spirit pervades the entire house, that old and young are seized by the Gospel and without hypocritical piety serve God in a child-like spirit and find joy in their faith? Can there then be a more important and more richly blessed activity than the one to which the Christian woman has been called? How little would even the public preaching accomplish, to which Christians come once a week and many by far less often, if the preachers did not have the Christian mothers as helpers, if the latter did not daily apply what the preacher proclaims once a week and daily continue to build upon that foundation. One cannot say what a stream of blessing has been poured out upon the church, yes, upon the whole world, flowing from the Christian home, whose spirit in most cases quite naturally is influenced more by the mother than by the father. How many a man whom no preacher could win for Christ has been won for the Gospel by the conduct of his wife, by her trust in God, by her rejoicing in hope, by her patience in suffering, by her readiness to serve the members of her family and make daily sacrifices for them, by her modesty, by her selflessness, by her faithfulness, by her quiet, gentle disposition! How many a person who belongs to the great kingdom of God and has shown many the way to heaven would have, humanly speaking, belonged neither to the great nor to the small in the kingdom of God if he had not had a pious mother who brought him up as a Christian, who by her life exemplified the Gospel truth, taught him to pray, and prayed for him until her lips were sealed in death! Woe unto the Church, the State, the whole human race, when the Christian home fails; when genuine piety is no longer fostered in the home; when the women forget their special task and instead pursue after vain things; when mothers no longer teach their children to pray, no longer tell them stories of the Savior, no longer educate them in Christian customs and discipline, but let a heathen spirit rule in their home! Yes, woe to the world when also the women sink back into heathenism and have no more concern for God, His word, and His Church! Then nothing will delay the complete bankruptcy of culture, the complete ruin of the human race; then the world is ready for God's final judgment.

Such conditions we are approaching with giant strides, and everything that draws the woman away from her family, that prevents her from seeing her special task, that belittles her natural calling as wife and mother and causes her to dislike it, hastens the tempo with which ruin approaches. When the suffragettes demanded the right to vote in the State, they told us that woman was necessary in public life, that only her participation could save the world from moral bankruptcy. They said woman would make politics respectable, would provide for honest government, would put an end to social injustice, and bring about an eternal peace among the peoples of

the earth. And how are things today, after woman has gained voting rights and rules the world with man? True, there are people who maintain that the world has improved since then. But either they must live in another world than we do, or else they are wearing blinders. To the extent that woman has taken part in public life, the family life, upon which the wellbeing of State and Church depends, has suffered. The investigations in Washington, with which all the papers are filled, have exposed conditions in the state that reek to high heaven. There certainly also is no evidence of a world peace, and no one during the war and even after it has stirred up race hatred more zealously than emancipated women. Public morality has reached a depth that causes earnest souls grave concern. The daily press in no small measure is paid to lie. The theater and the present day literature are stamped by sensuality as never before. The battle for the almighty dollar becomes more and more intense. The desire for pleasure has seized all classes of society. But youth presents the saddest picture. Its only remaining interest is to enjoy itself and find distraction. Only joys of a material kind have an attraction for them, while the inner life decays. Only the outer man is important to them. The young girls foolishly spend large sums to cultivate and improve their beauty. In cities both large and small, women and girls of every social class visit beauty parlors. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But all this pomp and all the lipstick and rouge, however thick they are put on, do not hide the inner shallowness. The young men are no better. They find delight in these made-up dolls. Whether the girls they associate with and choose as life companions have heart and soul is of secondary importance. They look at the sensual charms. They become slaves to sensuality. All association between young men and women of today follows this pattern. And so immorality is gaining ground. The mayor of one of the largest cities in Wisconsin recently announced that he would arrest all the young people of both sexes who after 9 p.m. go joy riding together in the city. He said that immorality among the young people had reached such a point that a stop had to be ordered. He regretted that he had to step in; it was really the responsibility of the parents to watch over their children. But when the parents obviously did not do their duty, the government dared no longer look on quietly but had to step in because otherwise the nation would finally go to ruin.

Therefore let us preach to the women in season and out of season how badly the Christian home needs them and how irreplaceable they are as the educators of their children, as the guardians of pious customs, and as an example for the members of their household. Let us show them how great, how precious, and how glorious is the blessing which they can work in the calling that God Himself has set for them, and how unspeakably great is the harm which they bring to their family, their congregation, church, and the whole human race, if they withdraw from their special calling. Let us point out to them that there are sufficient men who can perform the tasks of public life just as well and better than they can, but that no one can completely take their place in the home and in the family, and that they therefore transgress the greatest of all commandments, the moral law in its essential meaning, the command of love, when they seek another sphere of activity than that which God has ordained for them, or when they fail to dedicate the greatest possible time and effort to it. When you convince Christian women that the calling which they have as wives and mothers is tremendously important, necessary, and precious, and that no one is better fitted for it than they, then they will let themselves be convinced by the love of Christ to show all faithfulness in their calling and not to aspire to the fleeting honors of public life. Of course there will also be women who, when they hear my dissertation, will say: What a dreadful old fogy! Not a bit progressive! Hopelessly old-fashioned! Such women I would answer: Pardon me for taking up your time. That was not my intention. I addressed my words to the wrong people. I did not intend to speak to women who judge the holiest and the most serious matters from the viewpoint of fashion. To them I surrender; they have fashion entirely on their side. They may, without further thought, continue to concern themselves with playing a role in public life. They are unfit for anything better anyway, and one does have to devote his life to something.

But how should a person deal with congregations that have granted women the right to vote? The same as we do with all those who go astray in some phase of Christian life. We educate them; we try to convince them. But what if you cannot convince them? Then it depends upon whether they do not want to let themselves be convinced or whether they lack the necessary understanding. In the latter case one has to bear with their weakness, since it does not pertain to an error that directly endangers the existence of faith.

But what if such a congregation applies for membership in the Synod? Since in our Synod 99 out of 100 congregations are convinced that according to Scripture woman should be silent in the church, the acceptance of such a congregation could easily cause confusion and offense. Brotherly love as well as discretion should move them either to do away with woman suffrage, of whose necessity for the welfare of the church they cannot be convinced, or to withdraw their application for admission until they have come to an understanding with their brothers in the faith on this question in controversy. To them the word of the Apostle also applies, I Corinthians 14:36: "What! Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?" And in I Corinthians 11:16: "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."

May God grant us to stand in awe before His Word and to have love for His kingdom and the brethren; then we shall know and do also in this matter that which is pleasing unto Him and live in peace in one spirit!