

The Ordination of Women

by Gordon H. Clark

The Synod of 1976 of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod considered a *Report* advocating the ordination of women as deacons. Its non-controversial first half had been distributed some weeks in advance; but the second half was not made public until Synod convened. Since the commissioners had had no opportunity to study it, they wisely took no action on the second half.

After Synod adjourned, a paper was written analyzing the arguments of the *Report*. The committee prevented this paper from being included among the reports distributed before the Synod of 1977. To date no analysis of the controversial second half of the 1976 *Report* has been published. Therefore the author of the paper now makes it public on his own responsibility.

Since the Synod of 1977 decisively rejected the ordination of women as deacons, some persons may think that the present publication is superfluous. The author disagrees.

First, shortly after the Synod of 1976, the *Presbyterian Journal*, without identifying its sources, reported that the advocates of ordination of women predicted that they would push their program through within four years. Hence in spite of the 1977 action, future Synods may have to face the question again.

Second, before the 1977 Synod met, one minister, with the prior approval of the Midwestern Presbytery, the Presbytery within whose bounds Covenant Seminary is located, actually ordained one or more women. This of course was a deliberate violation of our *Form of Government*. It indicates that illegal actions are considered appropriate to attain the end in view.

Then third, since as yet no formal analysis of the original *Report* has been published, the present paper is not altogether superfluous, at least in the opinion of the author,

Gordon H. Clark.

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The 154th Synod of the R.P.C.E.S. (May 1976) received and included in its minutes the *Report* of a Study Committee on the Role of Women in the Church. It recommends the ordination of women as deacons. The matter at hand is not a matter of deaconesses. For years the P.C.U.S.A.* and the Reformed Church in America cooperated in supporting a Deaconess School in Philadelphia; and its graduates served in those denominations. The matter now at hand, however, is not to acknowledge this Presbyterian practice, but the quite different and novel proposal to ordain women as deacons.

Although the Study Committee does not advocate the ordination of women as elders, it advocates the ordination of women. Because of our contemporary situation, most recently the actions of the Episcopal Church, it is unrealistic to think that a church which begins with ordaining women as deacons can long deny them ordination as elders. This paper will indeed consider the office of deacon, but the underlying question is the ordination of women, as the title of this paper indicates.

Since this is a modern proposal, the burden of proof falls on the innovators. A short note on history will clarify this point. Hebrews 5:1-4 shows that the Jewish High Priests were ordained: they were all men. A companion paper on *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Ordination* will also mention the ordination, usually by anointing with oil, of lesser Old Testament officials. The Jewish restriction of such ordination to men has only recently been questioned by liberal Judaism. The Roman Catholic church ordains men only. One of the arguments of the high churchmen in the Episcopal Church, relative to its alteration of its government this year, was that the ordination of women would hinder ecumenical reunion with Rome. The Protestant Reformation, for all its opposition to Romanism, never questioned the practice of ordaining men only. Now, if this practice has continued from the time of Abraham down to 1960 or thereabouts, those who are innovators surely must bear the burden of proof. The Westminster Confession indeed says, "All Synods . . . may err, and many have erred." Therefore, it is theoretically possible that the Reformed Presbyterian Church is in error. But when the agreement is worldwide over 4,000 years, it is, I repeat, extremely improbable.

Therefore a mountainous burden of proof rests on those who advocate the ordination of women. Suppositions of possible meanings of *gunaikas*, for example, even if "likely," are not enough. What the denomination needs, before it can have the authority to discard the historical concept of ordination, is compelling proof.

The present paper, in contrast with the *Report*, maintains that the historical Presbyterian procedure is required by Scripture. In conformity with the third ordination vow of the R.P.C.E.S., our ministers "accept the Presbyterian

form of *Church Government as derived from the Holy Scriptures*" (*Form of Government* V., 1, 1). Therefore, the conclusion here will be that Scripture definitely forbids the ordination of women.

To this end it would be possible to examine the *Report* paragraph by paragraph. But there may be a more orderly way. Of course the readers of this paper should have the *Report* before them; and references to it will be frequent enough. But the outline, after these introductory lines will be:

- I. The Question at Issue
- II. The Basis of Debate
- III. Peripheral Material
- IV. The Main Passages.

I. The Question at Issue

As the introductory remarks have already said, and as the *Report* makes clear, the issue is not that of unordained deaconesses. The issue is the ordination of women as deacons. Now, whether such is permissible depends on the doctrine of ordination. Is the Reformed Presbyterian doctrine of ordination Scriptural, or is it not and should it therefore be changed?

It is strange that the *Report*, lengthy as it is, pays so little attention to the doctrine of ordination. Since the ordination of women depends on some view of ordination, a view in conflict with Reformed principles, the *Report* should have included a massive defense of its underlying premise. This it did not do.

Section F (p. 132) is about the most the *Report* has to say. It begins with a statement relative to the official position of the R.P.C.E.S. However, it does not state that position correctly; and insofar as the *Report's* conclusions depend on this inaccuracy, they are to be rejected. The *Report's* statement is: "This denomination . . . has seen one of the distinctive elements of the elder's role *as distinguished from that of deacon* to be the possession of ecclesiastically binding authority." This statement contradicts the *Form of Government*. Since the immediate aim of the *Report* is to defend the *ordination of women as deacons*, three subject-matters need attention. Ordination is the inclusive one. It is the *Question at Issue*. The subordinate points are *deacons* and *women*. What does the *Form of Government*, in its authoritative definition of Reformed Presbyterian polity, say on these points?

To quote, *F. O. G.* V 5 says, "The formal steps by which a young man becomes an ordained minister. . . ." It does not say "a young person," and it does not say "a young man or woman." Since even a few years ago, no one advocated the ordination of women, this reference to a man rather than a woman was neither emphasized nor repeated. At V 8 *F.O.G.* simply says, "The qualifications of both teaching elders and ruling elders . . ." "Laymen, ordained to the eldership" is another phrase. It is also said that these elders have "a certain ruling or governing authority." The section on deacons is not so explicit. Had women been envisioned as possible candidates it would have had to be explicit. The *Report* takes the position that Scripture allows the ordination of women as deacons but prohibits their ordination as elders. If this were the Reformed Presbyterian position, *F.O.G.* would have had to state the difference explicitly, clearly, and emphatically. It does not do so. What is explicitly said is, "The minister shall then propound to the elder or *deacon* elect the following questions: See Section 3 of this chapter."

Thus, pastors, elders, and deacons all take the same vows, with the one exception that pastors assent to question 8, while other ministers—not pastors—elders, and deacons, assent to question 9. None of these nine vows explicitly mentions authority to teach. But if this authority is assumed for an elder, it is also assumed for a deacon, because ruling elders, deacons, and non-pastoral ministers are treated as a single class. Then further, in V 9 C, the minister makes the ordination prayer. Note that this is not an ordination of deacons elect by previously ordained deacons, with the idea that elders are ordained by elders. Such might indeed greatly distinguish elders from deacons. *F. O. G.* does not make it clear who gives and who does not give the newly ordained deacon the right hand of fellowship.

But the clinching formula is that which the *Form of Government* imposes on the congregation: "Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive the *brother* as a ruling elder (or *deacon*) and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement, and *obedience* in the Lord to which . . . the Constitution of the Church *entitles* him?"

At this point it seems proper to conclude that the *Report* bases its thesis on a mistaken view of Reformed Presbyterian government. The R.P.C.E.S. does not distinguish between an elder and a deacon by the latter's lack of ecclesiastical authority. On the contrary it explicitly asserts this authority. The application to women—in the light of Scripture yet to be discussed—is automatic. Ignoring our constitution the *Report* continues, "If this distinction is maintained, there need be no question of setting women in authority over men by ordaining them as deacons." But if this unconstitutional distinction were maintained, there would be no need or reason to *ordain* either men or women deacons. Ordination is induction into an authoritative *order*. This now returns the discussion from the ordination of *women as deacons* to the fundamental question of *ordination*.

There are several views as to the nature of ordination. The one acknowledged by the largest group of people is that of Romanism. At the Reformation Luther clearly, Calvin more clearly, and a great section of the European populace perceived that the elaborate Roman hierarchy with its awesome claims contrasted sharply with the simplicity of the church as the apostles had organized it. The Romish claims depended largely, perhaps almost entirely, on the premise that ordination confers a special rank of *priesthood* for the purpose of repeating Christ's sacrifice in the mass. In their opposition to the mass all the Reformers abominated the papal hierarchy and rigorously defended the equal priesthood of all believers. Yet they did not for that reason abolish the ordained ministry.

There were some who did. The radical Anabaptists denounced all church government and civil government too. Later, and continuing to the present, the Quakers and Plymouth Brethren rejected an official ministry. Even more recently in opposition to organized religion some groups would shut down the seminaries, close the church doors, sell the real estate, and, unlike the anarchism of the Anabaptists, spend the proceeds to establish socialism.

Since the *Report* does not discuss these movements, since indeed it makes no effort to explain its new view of ordination, it is not possible to be sure of what direction this movement in our denomination may later take. It is clear, however, that the modern temper among religious people is rather inimical to "organized religion" and favors some form of pietism rather than the Presbyterian position.

Neither Luther nor Calvin accepted this left wing position. Calvin (*Institutes* IV iii, 2) says, "By the ministers to whom [Christ] has committed this office, and given grace to discharge it, he disperses and distributes his grace to the Church. Whosoever therefore studies to abolish the *order* and kind of government... or disparages it as a minor importance, plots the devastation, or rather the ruin and destruction of the churches." These words show how highly Calvin esteemed ministerial order.

That this includes the deacons also a later paragraph (IV iii) makes clear: "The qualifications of. . . bishops are stated at large by Paul in two passages. . . The same rule is laid down for the deacons and governors."

There are other historical documents. The French Confession of 1559 says, "We detest all fantastic people who greatly desire ... to abolish the ministry" (Art.xxv).

The *Second Book of Discipline of the Scottish Kirk* says, "There are four ordinary functions or offices in the Kirk of God, the office of pastor, minister, or bishop; the doctor; the presbyter or elder; and the deacon." In Reformation days the main object was to reject the papal theory of hierarchy, and to insist on the priesthood of all believers. Our Scottish forebears also refused to acknowledge the Anglican ordination of deacons because this was part of the hierarchical scheme. But they ordained deacons, and they had strict views of the significance of ordination. They rejected the "indelible character" imposed by ordination as the Romanists understood it; but they did not object to an "indelible character," a life-long authority, as they themselves defined it.

It is strange, and perhaps one may be so bold as to say significant, that the *Report* in advocating the ordination of women has so little to say about ordination. Since the *Report*, in order to allow women to be ordained as deacons, excludes from ordination the conferring of authority, no one can be sure what theory of ordination the *Report* wishes to introduce into our denomination. One can be sure, however, that its view of ordination is destructive of Presbyterian polity.

During the Reformation the controversy centered chiefly on the ministry, less on the elders, and least on deacons. Yet the Reformers did not pass over the latter in complete silence. Luther in his *Address to the Nobility*, June 1520, said, "He [the minister] should have as assistants several priests [the term *priest* continued to be used for a time] and *deacons* who should help him to *govern* the people and congregations with sermons and the administration of the sacraments." The French Confession of 1559 (previously alluded to) also says, "It [the true church] ought to be *governed* according to the policy which our Savior Jesus Christ has established, that is, that there be pastors, supervisors, and deacons." Note that deacons form a part of the governing body. The Genevan *Ordinances* of 1541 state something similar: ". . . let the minister distribute the bread in good order and with reverence, and let no others give the cup except the ones appointed or the *deacons* with the ministers." The *Ordinances* of 1576 make the same statement about the deacons. Again, what Calvin says about women who perform baptism is surely applicable to women who might act as deacons. In his *Tracts* he says, "Even in the minutest matters, as meat and drink, whatever we attempt and dare with a doubtful conscience, Paul plainly denounces as sin. Now, in baptism by women, what certainty can there be, while a rule delivered by Christ is violated? For that office of the Gospel which he assigned to ministers, women seize for themselves." Further, Calvin's reply to the Synod of Lyons in 1563 (compare Quick, *Synodicon* I, p. 53) says, "*Deacons* and elders, being the arms and hands of the Pastor . . . may also distribute [the bread and cup] to those who are remote from [the pastor]."

In these passages the mention of deacons is noteworthy because there was a widespread disinclination to allow deacons and even elders to assist in the communion service. Calvin obviously regards deacons as having authority

by virtue of the ordination. They are no doubt subordinate to the minister. Ordination confers on the minister the authority to preach the Word, and, since the sacraments require the Word, ordination confers the authority to administer the sacraments, and also, in conjunction with other ordained men, the authority of the keys. But though the deacons are subordinate to the minister, they participate in that authority. The ordination questions are the same; the minister receives the deacon as taking "part of this office with us;" and the congregation promises obedience to the deacon.

II. The Basis of the Debate

The issue has now been clearly stated. It is the Reformed doctrine of ordination. This doctrine is not the prelatial and hierarchical theory of Rome, nor is it the anarchical chaos of the Anabaptists. But which of the three views is correct? Obviously the Reformed Presbyterian Church forbids the ordination of women. Since, however, "All Synods and councils since the apostles' times . . . may err, and many have erred," it is theoretically possible that Reformed Presbyterian government is in error. But it is highly unlikely that Presbyterianism is in error on this particular point. The believing Jews before the coming of Christ, as well as the unbelieving Jews afterward, had no women as priests. Neither does Romanism.

Neither does Lutheranism. Among these groups there are differences regarding the nature of ordination, its validity, its authority, and more; but all agree that it is wrong to ordain women. Now, where Rabbis Eliezer and Agiba; Popes Leo and Gregory; and Luther, Calvin, and Knox agree on a particular point, it requires overwhelming argument to prove them wrong. On what basis could anyone construct such an argument? There is only one such basis, the Bible.

The *Report*, be it not only cheerfully but also gratefully acknowledged, appeals to Scripture alone. Were it otherwise they and we would have no common basis of argument. However much the present paper regards the *Report's* exegesis poor and its argument invalid, the *Report* is to be highly commended for its repeated rejection of the idea that parts of Scripture are not binding today because they were culturally conditioned. Since this rejection is not the contemporary stance of the religious community, a short paragraph or two stressing the contrast is pertinent.

Dr. Paul King Jewett is a particularly good example, for he has recently argued for the ordination of women. He has no trouble with the Scriptural material; he even agrees substantially that the view defended in this paper is Scriptural; but he simply rejects the Apostle Paul's mistakes as culturally conditioned. The seminary too, in which Dr. Jewett teaches, is also a good example. Several of its members have publicly engaged in controversy against Scriptural inerrancy. The more conservative faculty members resigned and left the seminary some years ago. Yet the seminary claims to be evangelical. They should call themselves modernists, for their position is very much the same as that of the modernists early in this century. Their tactics are also similar, for in debasing the language so as to empty the term *evangelical* of its historic meaning, they repeat the earlier modernists' debasing of the term, the *divinity* of Christ, to accommodate Homer and Shakespeare, if not the divine Sarah. This pervasive influence of liberalism is most clearly seen in the large apostate denominations. In them a minister can be ejected or a candidate can be refused ordination because he disapproves of women's ordination. But liberalism's influence can also be seen, though it may be in modified form, in more conservative churches. Even in our church we must regard it as short-sighted to discuss an issue such as ordination without taking into consideration the conditions that press upon us from every side. Since liberal ideas pervade the entire religious community, Reformed Presbyterians will do well to combat them even in their incipient forms. Too many seminaries and denominations slip into apostasy almost imperceptibly. Let not the heirs of Covenanters meet this fate.

One recent, small, but encouraging sign on the horizon was the 135 to 74 vote against women's ordination in the 1976 General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. They even voted down a motion to distribute the advocates' *Report* to the session "for prayerful consideration."

The successful introduction of the ordination of women into liberal churches is one with the general outlook of Women's Liberation. Apart from the excesses of left wing philosophy, the permissiveness of parents and society, and the stress on women's alleged rights even to permitting a teen age girl to get an abortion in defiance of her parents—apart from this sort of thing it is doubtful that anyone would have agitated for the ordination of women. The mention of Women's Lib and the exceeding great immorality of our times is not intended to cast aspersions on the authors of the *Report*. No one accuses them of sitting enthralled at the feet of Bella Abzug. On the contrary, the procedure of the *Report* explicitly and throughout appeals to Scripture. In this it differs completely from the usual procedures. Is there any instance, in any denomination, of this sort of agitation on strictly Scriptural grounds? The present *Report* seems unique. For its reliance on Scripture, we are grateful. Nevertheless the present sociological propensities tend to produce a more favorable reception of this proposal than the Scriptures warrant. With the *Report's* explicit basis this paper fully agrees and urges all readers to consult the Scripture alone.

III. Peripheral Material

Some Scriptural material, however, bears on the main topic only to a small degree. Other passages relate more directly. And a few may be decisive. The first class cannot be completely omitted, for the *Report* contains a considerable amount of it, but perhaps in this reply brevity will be acceptable.

One such peripheral point is the matter of women praying in the public church service. The *Report* discusses this at some length. The reason is clear. If Paul has actually forbidden women to pray in public, he certainly would not have permitted them to be ordained. Hence the *Report* must combat this interpretation. On the other hand, if Paul permitted women to pray in public, it by no means follows that he would have ordained them.

This point of logic is sufficient to show the futility of several pages of the *Report*. However, a word in favor of the more obvious interpretation will count against ordination. The verses read, "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak. ... It is a shame for women to speak in church" (I Corinthians 14:34-35). The *Report* (p. 116) notes an "apparent conflict between the prayer of women in chapter 11 and their silencing in chapter 14."

Can ordination solve this apparent conflict? Is it not possible, and much easier, to use another method? Since the later Corinthian reference commands silence, and hence rules out ordination, the only problem is that of contradiction. On this point two things may be said. First, as the *Report* itself acknowledges, the prayers of women that Paul permits may have taken place in informal prayer meetings. Or, what the *Report* does not consider, the prayers may have been made in women's own homes. Of course, as the *Report* says at the bottom of page 115, "These texts clearly presume that women did pray and prophesy." But the point at issue is where and when? The text does not say "in the church." Therefore these words should not be inserted. Then when another text says explicitly, Let women keep silence in the church, it follows that I Corinthians 11 *cannot* mean "in the church." It must refer to some informal gatherings, such as one of our women's missionary societies. The *Report* acknowledges that this solves the problems of alleged contradiction. But it rejects the solution because "it is doubtful that the case can be sustained exegetically" (p. 116).

Doubtful? Not very. The clarity of chapter 14 and the absence from chapter 11 of the words "in the church," seem to be exegetically sufficient. Furthermore, so far as the main question of ordination goes, it is not necessary to sustain this interpretation exegetically. The immediate point is the solution of an apparent contradiction, and even the *Report* agrees that the interpretation given here is satisfactory. On the other hand, the *Report's* interpretation cannot be sustained exegetically. How can one extract from the verse the words that are not there? Yet the *Report* should provide exegetical certainty because it bears the burden of proof.

But that there were, actually and historically, occasions of prayer and prophecy other than the regular church service, and that therefore the present interpretation does not depend on unsupported assumptions, is clear, if not from Acts 11:28, at least from Acts 21:9-11. What Agabus did hardly fits into a worship service; and exegesis cannot deny that Philip's daughters prophesied, like Agabus, when no church service was in progress.

The result of this analysis is (1) that pages 115-117 of the *Report* hardly bear on the question at all; (2) that the solution rejected on page 116 remains satisfactory; and (3) that the *Report's* "Conclusion: I Corinthians 11:5 probably refers to public worship services" is not more than possible, and probably less compelling than what the *Report* rejects as a "weak possibility." It must be insisted that the advocates of women's ordination, not those who defend the official Reformed Presbyterian principles, must produce the "compelling external evidence." The burden of proof rests on the innovators, not on those who maintain the actual standards.

Another peripheral matter concerns Paul's stylistic abilities. In order to substitute its interpretation for the more obvious one, the *Report* argues in several places that there cannot be a "violent break" in the subject matter between the two verses in question. There must be a smooth transition. Now, admittedly, most verses connect logically with their preceding and succeeding verses. Otherwise there could be no continuous discussion. Nonetheless, paragraph breaks occur; and sometimes there are two or more sudden shifts within a very few lines.

A major example is the well known passage, Romans 5:12-19. There, the passage has a single theme; but Paul mixes together many strands of a complex subject. There are parentheses within parentheses; and the sentence becomes so complicated that Paul breaks it off and begins over again in verse 18.

Active minds like Paul's are apt to write intricate sentences, including parenthetical remarks. And they jump back and forwards as their thoughts come in profusion. Note therefore another example: I Timothy 5:17 and the following verses, an epistle if not a chapter that occupies many pages in the *Report*. After discussing the plight of widows in the first half of the chapter, Paul turns to the Old Testament admonition that congregations should support their pastors. Then come directions concerning judicial cases. Then a warning against ordaining young men, or newly converted Christians. Then some medicinal advice to Timothy. Finally two verses, which do not connect with medicinal advice, are vague enough to make any connection uncertain. In view of such examples as these, and

there are others, this paper will not relinquish its interpretation when the argument for its alternate depends so heavily on the assumption that Paul must write as smoothly as the *Report* expects. In fact the *Report* itself (p. 83) has to adjust itself to an "abrupt transition."

Under the rubric of "Peripheral matters" there are distinctions in degree. A not so peripheral matter is the use of the term *deacon* in the New Testament.

If the New Testament contained even a single instance of the election and ordination of a woman as a deacon, the fact would be conclusive. Without an example, however, the argument can never be conclusive. The best that can be done is to refer to Romans 16:1, where Phoebe is called *diakonon*, and from this infer that the church members had elected her and that the apostles thereupon ordained her.

Such an inference is invalid. Note that in Acts 6:1 there was a daily *diakonia* before "deacons" were elected and ordained. The word originally was not the name of an ordained officer, but designated anyone who served the needs of others.

In John 2:5, 9 it refers to those who were serving the marriage banquet. Compare Matthew 22:13. In John 12:26 it refers to any faithful servant of Christ. Thence the term can be applied to Phoebe, or to any other Christian, without implying ordination.

In fact, so far as the term itself goes, it even refers to servants of Satan (II Corinthians 11:15).

In I Timothy 4:6 Timothy is called a servant, a *diakonos*; though he was an elder or bishop and not a "deacon." So too the apostles themselves are called servants: Acts 6:2 says that the apostles had been serving (*diakonein*) tables, but henceforth they must drop this task and give themselves to the ministry of the word (*diakoinia tou logou*). When it is noted that the seven chosen were not called "deacons" in this passage, and that the verb *diakonein* applies to the apostles, must we conclude that Phoebe was an apostle?

Quite the contrary: The term *diakonos* was a name given to any servant. Its application to Phoebe in Romans 16:1 carries no implication of ordination. The *Report* tries to dispose of this contention on page 134. "Because the word *diakonos* can be translated either 'deacon' or 'servant' it is important to note that Paul *did not choose to use the feminine form of the word but rather broke gender to identify Phoebe with the masculine form of the noun* [italics in *Report*]. This very strongly suggests that he was not simply calling her a servant . . . but was rather using a formal term identifying her as a deacon."

But where in Greek literature does such a feminine form of the word occur? Neither Liddell and Scott nor Arndt and Gingrich lists any feminine form. On the contrary, they both cite passages in which the masculine form applies to women.

With respect to the masculine and feminine forms of Greek nouns, another point deserves mention. The *Report* is unique in that it recommends women for deacons but forbids their ordination as elders. Proposals and their adoption in other denominations include and indeed stress ordination as ministers. This is because these other denominations have little regard for Scripture, while the *Report* desires to follow the Bible. The *Report* has no inclination to argue that the Bible allows women to be ordained as pastors. Nevertheless one can wonder whether or not the ordination of women as pastors can be prevented once the momentum has begun in their ordination as deacons. Indeed it is possible to guess a part of the future argument. It will be pointed out that if we now ordain women as deacons, although there is no such form as *diakonē* in the New Testament (or elsewhere?), we ought all the more to ordain women as pastors because I Timothy 5:1, 2 explicitly mentions *presbuterai* (women elders) as well as *presbuteroi* (men elders).

The words *diakonos* and *presbuteros* are not the only examples of words used colloquially, which we almost without exception use technically. The word *church* (*ecclesia*) is another example. In Acts 2:47 the Lord added converts to the "church" daily; and the context shows what church was meant. But the tumultuous assembly of heathen in Ephesus is thrice called the *ecclesia* (Acts 19:32, 39, 40). Hence the term *diakonos*, applied to Phoebe, is no evidence that she was ordained.

But it is said that Phoebe was not merely a servant of the Lord, she was also a *prostatis* of many. The argument is that *prostatēs* (masc.) and therefore *prostatis* (fem.) meant ruler, authority, defender, guardian, presiding officer, patron, etc. Thus Phoebe was a regularly ordained officer with authority over many people.

Unfortunately the masculine form does not occur in the New Testament, and the feminine form only this once. The verb, however, occurs about seven times and certainly indicates authority and command. To those who advocate the ordination of women, this one word seems to be strong evidence, and perhaps conclusive. But surely one ought to have more than a hapaxlegomenon to overturn thousands of years of ecclesiastical procedure. Nor is this all that can be said. For the verse itself says that Phoebe was a *prostatis* to Paul himself. Thus Paul must have been an inferior member of the order over which Phoebe was president and ruler. Contrary to these unacceptable inferences, this paper concludes that Phoebe was a faithful servant who had been of great help to many people and to Paul himself, as Peter's mother in law served (*diakonei*) Christ in Matthew 8:15.

This section on *Peripheral Material* has now canvassed the topic of women praying in church, Paul's stylistic peculiarities, and the usage of the term *deacon*. But as the discussion now continues, the material bears more and more directly on the main issue.

IV. The Main Passages

I Timothy 2 is surely one of major importance. Upon first reading it seems definitely to rule out the ordination of women. Indeed a second and a third reading confirm this impression. In fact the chapter goes further than forbidding such ordinations: It even forbids women to pray in the public services.

Against this clear statement the *Report* struggles at some length (pages 79-90). It first notes that the subject of the chapter is "prayer in the church." This of course is true; but it can lead to a misunderstanding. Chapter two is a subdivision of the epistle as a whole, the subject of which is broader than prayer. I Timothy covers the general subject of worship, and hence Paul can pass from prayer to other phases of worship. By narrowing the subject to prayer, the *Report* wishes to avoid an alleged violent break supposedly required by the usual interpretation. The *Report* is extremely detailed and should be consulted. It would be unreasonably burdensome here to examine every line. But in general the *Report* argues that on the usual interpretation, there would be an impossible break "because it does not actually present Paul's intended contrasts but treats v. 8 (men praying with holy hands) as if it stood next to vv. 1 Iff. . . ." (p.80). The *Report's* argument seems to depend on the assumption that Paul could not have considered, in the same verse, two related subjects, here in fact one main subject and a subordinate part.

The argument of the *Report* is defective at several points. Paragraph (1) on page 80 says, "If the intended comparison is the sex roles, the comment on holy hands . . . seriously obscures Paul's central but *unspoken* point that women should not pray." To this one can reply that there is not just one "central" point in the passage, unless it be the general topic of orderly worship. Many verses in Scripture contain several distinguishable points. Here, in addition to *holy hands* and *modest apparel*, the "sex roles" can hardly escape notice. Far from being "unspoken," as the *Report* strangely repeats three times over, verse 12 says, "she must be silent." This silence is consonant with the progression of thought in verses 8 and 9: Men are to pray [in the church], women are to dress modestly, and learn in silence and subjection. Verse 10, not verse 9, may be a parenthetical aside, for such are not absent from Paul's style, but there is no violent break or "parenthetical aside which seriously obscures Paul's central. . . point."

The *Report* makes much of the word *hosautos* in verse nine. The *Report* admits that it would be wrong to translate the verse as "Similarly also I want the women to pray" (p. 80). This is a welcome admission, but the *Report* apparently fails to see how it undercuts its own continuation. First, it must be insisted upon that the prohibition of public prayer by women is not "unspoken." The *Report* at least three times asserts that it is unspoken; and upon this erroneous assertion builds part of its argument. Second, *hosautos kai* admittedly draws some kind of parallel. But the *Report* has already admitted that the parallel is not "I want men to pray . . . I also want women to pray."

For this reason the parallel can as little be, "I want men to pray with holy hands and I want women to pray in modest dress." And for this reason the argument of pages 80-82 ought to be adjudged a failure.

Someone now is sure to ask, But then what is the parallel? This is a legitimate question, but it is permissible to decide that the *Report's* view is impossible without being able to answer this question. The *Report's* view is impossible because of the *spoken* (written) command of silence. However, a plausible answer to the question is at hand, which the *Report* itself vaguely hints at (page 82, last paragraph of the section). Briefly it is this: Paul's ideas came to him in profusion, the general subject here is public worship and not prayer alone; therefore one may accept the words, if not the intention of the *Report* (page 82 end) "a continuation of Paul's discussion of prayer . . . understood as discussing. . . worship." If so, Paul has said, "Men are to worship by lifting holy hands in prayer, *likewise also* women are to worship by dressing modestly and remaining silent."

Such is the conclusion proposed here. But a further point is that the wording of the *Report* is most misleading when it says, "we must question whether it is at all a tenable inference that women were silent at all times in the Pauline assemblies" (p. 82). Of course it is not a tenable inference. The inference is exactly the opposite: Women were not always silent in the Pauline assemblies; that is why Paul wrote to correct the disorder. A similar peculiarity occurs on the next page also: "Why did the problems of prayer, prophecy, and teaching arise, if he never permitted women to speak in the churches?" (page 83, last line). One might as well ask about I Corinthians 7, Why did the problem of incest arise, if Paul had never permitted incest in his churches?

Since the remainder of Part I (pages 84-90) is interesting, instructive, and substantially acceptable; in fact since this material agrees more with the Reformed Presbyterian position and less with the *Report's* conclusions; and again since its firm rejection of "cultural limitations" is so gratifying, it may not be altogether improper to skip to pages 132ff. on I Timothy 3:8-13. That the *Report* on this page does not accurately state the Reformed Presbyterian position has already been made clear. But the "exegetical debate over I Tim. 3:11," on which "hangs the

demonstration of biblical warrant" for the ordination of women, "centers on the meaning of the word *gunaikas*."

Therefore the *Report* must *demonstrate*, by strictly valid implication, or as the Confession says, "by good and necessary consequence," that "gunaikas" must mean "women deacons," and cannot possibly mean wives of deacons or elders.

Far from being a necessary deduction, the *Report's* argument is deficient both in premises and procedure. Note its starting point on page 133: "We may *confidently* dismiss [the view that *gunaikas* means either women in general or that it means wives of elders and deacons]." This confidence, however, is based on the assertion "that it would not be *probable* that Paul would break his train of thought. . . ." But, first, probability is not demonstration. Second, we have already seen how frequently Paul "breaks his train of thought." And third, he does not really break his train of thought, though he may put a coach or dining car between two Pullmans. Hence the *Report's* "probable" and "unlikely" (page 133) have no force in proving its conclusion.

It is here true that if Paul had inserted a *tas* (article) or an *auton* (pronoun), there could have been no doubt as to the translation *wives*. But then Paul frequently enough omits the article where English requires it. The *Report* asserts that the King James translation "gratuitously" supplies the word *their*. But if neither Paul nor the congregation had any idea of ordaining women, the article or pronoun was unnecessary. The *Report's* argument tends to circularity: *Their* is gratuitous because Paul meant women deacons, and he meant women deacons because *gunaikas* does not mean wives, and *gunaikas* does not mean wives because the King James *their* is gratuitous. Hence Paul approved the ordination of women.

The *Report* next reverts to what is "unlikely": "It is unlikely that he would carefully comment on deacons' wives and neglect those of the elders." But this too is rather circular. How does the *Report* prove that Paul neglected to speak of elders' wives, if he actually spoke of deacons' wives? Only on the ground stated above that "it would not be *probable* that Paul would break his train of thought concerning deacons." On the contrary, it is quite possible, and by the text quite probable that, after Paul had spoken of elders (3:1) and deacons (3:8) he inserted a parenthetical remark (3:11) concerning their wives, elders' wives as well as deacons' wives.

The *Report* takes notice of this latter interpretation. But it claims that its own view is "more likely." Now aside from the fact that the present article does not think the *Report's* interpretation is more likely, in fact considers it less likely and even quite improbable, one must insist that the *Report's* conclusion requires necessary consequence and valid argument. A doubtful likelihood about a single verse is not sufficient to overturn the Presbyterian view of ordination.

The *Report* continues with an argument about Phoebe; but this was disposed of a few pages ago. Phoebe was never "Madame President" (page 134) to Paul.

This is the end of the *Report's* argument. "Conclusions and Recommendations" follow. This is also the end of this paper's argument. Its conclusion can easily be anticipated.

Using the wording of the *Report* (*Diakonate*, page 135), but contradicting its sense by switching positives and negatives, the conclusion is:

The office of deacon is an office which involves the exercise of ecclesiastical authority. In the Pauline churches it was closed to women. It therefore must be closed to women in our churches.

And furthermore, with the Pope, John Knox, the Scottish Kirk, and all Christendom, we believe that the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in refusing to ordain women is solidly Biblical, against which likelihoods have no logical force.