

WOMEN AND THE NATURE OF MINISTRY

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The question of women's ministry has been addressed in recent years from opposite sides with increased intensity.¹ As is typical in such discussion, each side begins with its own assumptions drawn from a complex of Biblical texts and personal convictions. There are some conciliatory contributions, but most investigations are openly tendentious. What is sometimes lost in the discussion is a clear understanding of what is meant by "ministry." This sometimes results in confusion or in inconsistencies that can be embarrassing to both sides.

Questions are often asked that involve not only specific Biblical texts but the whole matter of a theology of ministry. Sometimes the simple questions are the most difficult to answer principally: What renders preaching inappropriate for women, while books or tapes by women that offer opinions on Biblical interpretation are considered acceptable? What changes the rules regarding women's ministry when the scene moves from a simple celebration of the Lord's supper in a hut on the Amazon to a worship service in a structure with a tall, white spire? Perhaps the most frequent question is why women can "share" but not "preach," even when the audience and content would be the same. While some do have clear principles in mind that govern such situations, others have only a vague fear that for women to engage in certain public activities in certain circumstances is somehow against Biblical principles.

I propose, therefore, that the topic of theology of ministry ought to be addressed as one crucial aspect of the whole discussion on women in ministry. I would like to suggest a methodology that might be useful when a proposal concerning the full ministry of women is countered by reference to one or more of the restrictive passages. The procedure could be followed in reverse order, of course—for example, when a position based on the restrictive passages is countered by an affirmative passage such as Gal 3:28. I emphasize this interchangeability to make it clear that the purpose of this paper is to open discussion and probe new avenues, not to argue against one side or the other. We need a more conciliatory approach to this intense issue.

I would suggest that whenever a claim that Scripture accords women full ministry is met by the counter-claim that there are specific passages denying this, four probing questions should be asked. These questions should be integrated into the whole exegetical and hermeneutical procedure. The first three

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¹For a survey of recent literature and ideas on the subject see R. A. Tucker and W. L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), chap. 11.

questions are often asked in some form, but the fourth less so. The first three ask what Scripture says about women, the fourth asks what Scripture says about ministry.

(1) If an argument against women's full ministry rests on one or more specific Biblical texts, have all exegetical issues been defined to the satisfaction of both sides, and is the nature of the prohibition clear and established beyond all reasonable doubt on accepted exegetical and hermeneutical principles? This is a question of *definition*.

(2) Has it been satisfactorily demonstrated that such texts are timeless and universal in their application, even in circumstances that are substantially different from those to which the text is directed? This is a question of *application*.

(3) If there is evidence elsewhere in Scripture that women did actually perform the ministries that seem to be prohibited in the verses in question, has there been a satisfactory resolution of the apparent conflict between these Biblical texts? This is a question of *resolution*.

(4) If women are being prohibited from the exercise of a specific ministry today on the basis of a particular Biblical text, has it been established that the contemporary ministry at issue is truly identical to that prohibited in that text, and is our contemporary practice of that ministry truly Biblical as regards (a) its nature, (b) the qualifications required for its exercise, (c) its scope, and (d) its form? This fourth question involves what I would like to call *reverse contextualization*, a term I shall explain shortly.

Since we will be dealing with the theology of ministry under question four, I have chosen several aspects of 1 Tim 2:12 as a relevant passage from which to select examples of the first three questions.

I. QUESTION ONE

This question pertains to definitions. The issues regarding 1 Tim 2:12 have recently been coming into ever clearer focus.² One issue is whether Paul was issuing a command or just stating a personal practice. The idea that the present indicative, *ouk epitrepō*, "I do not permit," rather than an imperative, "Do not permit," suggests the latter—that is, a personal practice—seems to be gaining more acceptance.

Another issue pertinent to our present study is the relationship between *didaskēin*, "to teach," and *authentēin* (a disputed term having something to do with authority; see below). Are these separate activities, both of which are forbidden to women, do they constitute a hendiadys (therefore representing the

²A significant contribution to this has been a discussion between D. J. Moo and P. B. Payne: D. J. Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11–15: Meaning and Significance," *Trinity Journal* 1/1 (1980) 62–83; P. B. Payne, "Libertarian Women in Ephesus: A Response to Douglas J. Moo's Article, '1 Timothy 2:11–15: Meaning and Significance,'" *Trinity Journal* 2/2 (1981) 169–197; D. J. Moo, "The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15: A Rejoinder," *Trinity Journal* 2/2 (1981) 198–222. A surrejoinder by Payne has now been issued entitled "The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15: A Surrejoinder" (1986). It is available from the author at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, or from the Ministerial Association of the Evangelical Free Church of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

same idea in this context), or are they overlapping in some way (so that, e.g., only teaching that involves authority is forbidden)? Does the fact that *andros*, "man," is widely separated from *didaskein* in the clause, while clearly related by proximity and by case to *authentēin*, mean that Paul is not dealing at this point with whether women can teach men but with whether women can teach at all? I am not implying an answer by the way these questions are framed but simply reviewing some of the issues that need further definition and assessment.

The definition of *didaskein*, "teach," needs more precision. In the NT the word covered a broad variety of ministries, including (1) informal mutual instruction among believers, (2) the instruction contained in prophesying, (3) doctrinal instruction, and (4) the proclamation of the apostolic tradition of the teaching of and about Jesus. (These are not mutually exclusive.) Is Paul prohibiting all forms of teaching or only one or more specific forms?

We need to recognize that the teacher (cf. *ho didaskōn* in Rom 12:7 and *ho katechōn* in Gal 6:6) occupied a unique and highly visible place in Judaism and in the Greco-Roman world, a place that was considered inappropriate for women. (1) One of the reasons that Moses was thought of by some ancient writers as a divine man was his role in mediating the law of God.³ (2) Jesus noted that Scripture itself referred to judges "to whom the Word of God came" as "gods" (John 10:34–35). (3) Women were accepted as prophets but not as teachers in classical Greece.⁴ (4) The role of the itinerant teacher was that of a witness to the truth, and women were unacceptable as witnesses. (5) Itinerant teachers, and in this case prophets also, enjoyed such high esteem that the Didache had to instruct the churches to esteem also their own local leaders.⁵

All of the above suggests that the position of the teacher was inappropriate for women but that this was not a permanent situation. This affects our theology of ministry, since it is precarious to equate the status of teachers in the early Church with that of teachers today.

A perplexing issue for all is the meaning of *authentēin*.⁶ Over the course of its history this verb and its associated noun have had a wide semantic range, including some bizarre meanings, such as committing suicide, murdering one's parents, and being sexually aggressive. Some studies have been marred by a selective and improper use of the evidence. Attempts to show that in Paul's day

³D. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (SBLDS 1; Missioulia: SBL, 1972) 101–240. Note even the reference in Exod 4:16 where, referring to Moses conveying God's words to Aaron for the people, "it will be . . . as if you were God to him."

⁴J. Sigountos and M. Shank, "Public Roles for Women in the Pauline Church: A Reappraisal of the Evidence," *JETS* 26 (1983) 283–295.

⁵*Did.* 15.

⁶For two opposing positions see on the one hand C. C. Kroeger, "Ancient Heresies and a Strange Greek Verb," *Reformed Journal* 29 (March 1979) 12–15; "1 Timothy 2:12—A Classicist's View," in *Women, Authority and the Bible* (ed. A. Mickelsen; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986) 225–244; on the other hand G. W. Knight III, "AUTHENTEO in Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12," *NTS* 30 (1984) 143–147.

it meant merely to have authority are not convincing.

My own tentative conclusion is that at the time of the NT the word had an inceptive sense, describing the initiation of an action, or (one might say) an autonomous sense, describing action taken on one's own prerogative. Usage close to the time of the NT suggests two meanings in particular: "to take charge" and "to originate." If this is the case, *authentēin* does not describe the mere exercise of authority but rather the way authority is gained—that is, by arrogating it to oneself, not just by receiving it. If this is accurate, can 1 Tim 2:12 still be used to restrict women from having any positions of authority in the Church?

I have sought to demonstrate elsewhere that Paul governs the public appearance and behavior of women not only to avoid any blurring of sexual differences but also to avoid the shame that disregard of conventional morality would bring on the woman's head, on her husband and, consequently, on the the gospel.⁷ If this is the case, it would be understandable if Paul were willing for both women and men to have authority but considered it inappropriate for women to arrogate authority to themselves. This would explain why Paul did not use the common word for having authority, *exousiazō*, in 1 Tim 2:12. It would also be consistent both with the quiet demeanor Paul wanted women to have while learning and with the citation of Genesis 3 about Eve. The restrictions Paul placed on women may not have been so much on what they did as on how they did it.

Whatever the correct answers may be to the above questions, to review them in this way may help to sharpen the identification of exegetical issues and consequently to determine the nature of the ministry that Paul did not permit to women.

II. QUESTION TWO

This is the question of applicability. Several recent significant articles have seriously challenged the assumption that Paul intended that passage to apply beyond the specific circumstances of women either locally at Ephesus or, more generally, at a certain state in their spiritual development, doctrinal stability, and demonstration of Christian character. Although scholarly opinions differ as to what those circumstances were, it would seem that the questions raised have been sufficient in number and in weight to require caution before making sweeping prohibitions today on the basis of that text.⁸ This is not to question the applicability of the principles taught in the passage but rather to emphasize the importance of carefully determining the appropriate time and place for the application of the specific elements cited in the text. Some passages in Scripture are descriptive rather than normative, and it may be that Paul's choice of the

⁷W. L. Liefeld, "Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Corinthians," in *Women* (ed. Mickelsen) 134–154.

⁸Kroeger, "1 Timothy 2:12"; D. M. Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9–15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in *Women* (ed. Mickelsen) 193–224. See also A. B. Spencer, *Beyond the Curse* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985) 71–95.

present indicative, "I do not permit," places this passage in the descriptive category.

III. QUESTION THREE

The next question inquires whether there has been a satisfactory resolution of any tension that may exist between a passage that restricts women from a specific ministry and a passage describing a woman who is actually performing that ministry. An obvious example of this is the apparent tension between 1 Timothy 2 and Priscilla's teaching of Apollos. This is a good test case, because Apollos was "a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:24-25). Furthermore it would seem to be special pleading to argue that when Priscilla and Aquila "explained to him the way of God more accurately" they were not doing any teaching. The grounds offered for that argument are the use of the broad, nontechnical verb, *ektithēmi*, rather than *didaskō*. *Ektithēmi* was used to describe laying out or explaining the truth of a matter; *didaskō* was the usual word for teaching content. The observation is accurate, but does the more general idea of explaining truth rule out or make it unlikely that Priscilla conveyed Biblical truth? The Biblical text goes on to say that Apollos then taught that the Messiah was Jesus, certainly an essential Biblical doctrine.

A satisfactory resolution of this apparent tension certainly bears on the theology of ministry. Did the fact that the teaching took place in a home informally, rather than formally in church, affect matters? One would think that spiritual ministry and the truth of God's Word do not depend on location or circumstance for validity. Did the presence of Aquila make the difference? If so, why did Paul not specify that women were forbidden to teach only if their husbands were present? This kind of probing is necessary to deal with the apparent tension between the two passages.

IV. QUESTION FOUR

The fourth question involves what I am calling "reverse contextualization." Merely to ask a conventional contextualizing question—such as "How do we apply Scripture in our own patterns of ministry?"—leaves unaddressed the issue of the validity of our patterns of ministry. Our concern ought rather to be: "How can we make our patterns of ministry more Biblical?" With this concern in mind it may be suggested that if a Biblical text is being used to prohibit women from the exercise of a specific ministry today it is imperative to ask whether the contemporary ministry at issue has been proven to be identical to that prohibited in that text. The issue can be divided into four parts: Is the ministry in question truly Biblical as regards (1) its nature, (2) the qualifications required for its exercise, (3) its scope, and (4) its form?

1. *The nature of ministry.* Jesus made it powerfully clear that ministry is servanthood. "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles

lord it over them (*katakryrieuousin*) and their high officials exercise authority over them (*katexousiazousin*). Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

The idea that the ministry is a power base giving an incumbent authority over the church is a common though happily diminishing assumption. My observation has been that one of the main reasons why many Christians feel uneasy about allowing women into the ministry is that they think this would give them power or authority that they think the Bible denies to them.

If one obstacle to understanding the nature of ministry as servanthood is a wrong concept of and preoccupation with authority, another obstacle is our confusion over the English terms "ministry" and "office." We shall consider these terms and then return to the matter of authority. The very word "ministry" has suffered an unfortunate development of meaning. It is derived from Latin terms relating to service or assistance.⁹ This original simple meaning of service is similar to that of the Greek *diakonos*. But from that humble origin the word "ministry" today has come to signify something far more than service. Ministry has become "the ministry," a class of persons, the clergy.

This misconception is further fostered by the *KJV* translation of Rom 11:13: "I magnify mine office." This mistranslation has been used more than once to bolster the status of a pastor. The word is *diakonia*, "service" or "ministry." The idea of "office" is absent. In Rom 12:4 the *KJV* reads: "All members have not the same office." Here the word is *praxis*, "function." A similar unfortunate translation has had a corresponding effect with regard to ecclesiastical leadership. That is the rendering "office of a bishop" in 1 Tim 3:1. As in Rom 11:13; 12:4, the word "office" is introduced into the text by the translation. There are only two other instances of "office" in the *KJV*, both referring to the Jewish priesthood. It is easy to see how the *KJV* with its ecclesiastical terminology has greatly affected thinking on the subject.

We must ask, therefore, whether there was such a concept as "office" in the NT. "Office" in contemporary English can denote a duty or service, but it more commonly denotes a specific position, often with authority. One simple way to illustrate the difference between "office" and "ministry" is that an office exists even when there is no incumbent. No such term exists in early Christian literature before the time of Cyprian. The question of "office" has been discussed freshly in recent publications, especially by Bengt Holmberg.¹⁰ Building on Brockhaus he cites several elements that he considers characteristic of "office."

⁹Terms such as *minister*, *ministrator* and *ministro* referred to serving, assisting, serving food, being an inferior officer, etc., the idea of governing being a secondary transferred sense. Even the terms *administrator*, *administratio* and *administro*, which figuratively were applied to management, still literally denoted service.

¹⁰B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

These include permanency, recognition, authority, and commission, among others.¹¹

It is not hard to see how complex a matter it is to apply such criteria developed by twentieth-century scholars to various ministries in the NT Church. Certainly some of the elements cited by Holmberg are present in the NT, but if the term and therefore the concept as we understand it today is of doubtful existence in the NT, how can anyone define it?

The fact that certain individuals in the NT Church were duly commissioned for particular ministries—for example, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—and financially supported does not prove the existence of a single overarching “office.” It is not to be denied that there was a plurality of governing elders. What is being questioned here is the idea of a single identifiable office of ministry whose incumbents had, solely by virtue of their office, certain privileges and authority, and from which women are by definition excluded.

Furthermore we need to achieve a greater precision in our understanding of what spheres of influence the NT refers to when it does speak of authority. The term “authority” is often used in the discussions about women as though it pertained only to teaching or church government. But authority in the NT relates to (1) the right of Jesus to forgive sin (Matt 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24); (2) the teaching of Jesus (Matt 7:29; Mark 1:22, 27; Luke 4:32); (3) the disciples casting out demons (Matt 10:1; Mark 3:15; 6:7; Luke 4:36; 9:1); (4) healing (Matt 10:1; Luke 9:1); (5) the activities of Jesus in the temple, and, in comparison, the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt 21:23–25; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8); (6) authority over snakes, scorpions, and all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19–20); (7) the authority God gave to the Son to judge (John 5:27); (8) power to cast into hell (Luke 12:5); (9) the “rights” Paul had as an apostle (1 Cor 8:9; 9:4–6, 12, 18; 11:10; 2 Thess 3:9); (10) the apostolic authority to build up the Church (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10); and (11) the right to eat at the altar in contrast to those who ministered at the tabernacle (Heb 13:10). To these may be added the problematic matter of the keys of the kingdom, although the word does not occur there (Matt 16:19). Also Jesus said that all authority was given to him, on which basis he gave the great commission. We generally apply the commission to all believers, not just to the apostles. In that case should we not assume that whatever kind of authority is thereby conveyed to those who go, make disciples, baptize and teach is given to women as well as to men?

The question to be raised at this point is this: If one takes the position that women cannot exercise authority, how is it decided which aspects of authority women can or cannot exercise? Is there a scale of importance? In current discussion much is made of what is called “teaching authority,” yet (1) apart from the debatable passage in 1 Timothy 2 and those passages that speak of the teaching of Jesus and of the apostles, there is no Biblical passage that equates pastoral or teaching ministry with the exercise of authority; and, conversely,

¹¹The specific elements in Holmberg’s list are, in his order of importance, (1) the element of permanency, (2) the element of recognition in the Church (including titles), (3) the position apart (*Sonderstellung*), which includes the idea of dignity or authority, (4) the regular commission (imposition of hands), and (5) the legal element. Two other criteria cited later by Holmberg from Brockhaus are legitimation by letters of recommendation and payment; Holmberg, *Paul and Power* 109–110.

(2) most of the passages that do refer to authority have nothing to do, as we have just seen, with teaching or pastoral ministry. Unless one accepts the idea of apostolic succession and a teaching magisterium in the Church, the exclusion of a woman from the ministry on the basis that she should not exercise authority may founder on a wrong attribution of authority to ministry, which in turn reflects a wrong understanding of ministry.

Regarding the sociology of authority, Holmberg and many others have used and modified Weber's threefold typology of authority.¹² I would suggest that there are three types of authority, somewhat similar to but not identical to Weber's, that we can observe in evangelical churches today. I shall call the first a *de jure* authority—the authority often assigned, for example, to elders, to a bishop, or to the official congregational meeting of a Baptist church.

Second, I suggest that there is a *de facto* authority that accrues to those with strong influence. This may be because of their long association with a movement, perhaps as one of the founders of a church or sect, or because of their known adherence to cherished distinctives of the group. Those with *de facto* authority often have strong personal qualities, which may or may not include genuine outstanding spiritual gifts.

The third type of authority is subtle but very important for our consideration of the ministry of women. I shall call it a *de senso* or perceived authority, an important category that seems to be overlooked. Let me illustrate: If a Baptist church follows normal congregational polity, the congregation has the authority to call and to discharge a pastor. Yet anyone sitting in a Sunday service and listening to the pastor perceives him to be the chief authority figure in the church whether or not he has any authority of the other two types. In such a situation those who interpret 1 Tim 2:12 to deny women any exercise of authority at all will naturally find it unthinkable for a woman to be a pastor, especially a senior pastor.

What has happened is that we have (1) confused ministry with authority, instead of identifying it with servanthood; (2) sanctified the idea of "office" and assumed that anyone who teaches or preaches, in particular those who have had the imposition of hands, are thereby the incumbents of an office that is assumed to carry authority; and (3) allowed the phenomenon of perceived or *de senso* authority to make the public (specifically, pulpit) ministry of women seem to be a usurpation of *de jure* authority. (At the same time women often have considerable *de facto* authority.)

One problem with the assumption that there is a "ministerial office" is that it obscures the fact, so widely recognized today, that Biblical ministry is not monolithic. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 teach that God has distributed his gifts and responsibilities among various people in the Church. To restrict women from ministry wholesale and without discernment of gift denies this. If ministry is by nature varied rather than monolithic, then we are obligated to consider each ministry individually to see if women qualify Biblically, rather than issuing a blanket rejection. We shall consider this further under the scope of ministry.

¹²See *ibid.*, pp. 125–135, and the ensuing discussion. The types of domination may be classified as (1) legal or rational domination, (2) traditional domination, and (3) charismatic domination.

The nature of ministry, in summary, is servanthood. It is not intended to be a power base. There is no authoritative "office of ministry" as such from which women are by sex excluded.

2. *The qualifications for ministry.* It is largely (though not entirely) because of the assumption that there is an office of minister with special authority and privilege that a specific rite—ordination—is used commonly to demarcate those who do and who do not occupy that office. The rite of ordination rests on rather slender evidence from the NT, and it is becoming recognized that ordination as we know it is developed over the first three Christian centuries. The usual passages cited in support of ordination are the instances of the laying on of hands, in particular Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:7. Of these the Acts 6 passage relates to the seven who were chosen to serve tables, Acts 13 relates to Paul and Barnabas, who had already been in a teaching ministry and were now commissioned to missionary work, and the Timothy passages relate to the conferral of a spiritual endowment on Timothy with no reference to induction into any office. These latter passages are customarily interpreted against the alleged background of Jewish ordination of rabbis by the laying on of hands. This is an immensely complex subject. Both Jewish and Christian scholars now consider it anachronistic to postulate a Jewish laying on of hands as background for the Timothy passages.¹³ Evidence from that period for a Jewish laying on of hands for rabbinic ordination is simply lacking. In addition, the kind of authority that ordination came to confer on the rabbis was judicial and quite different from that which ordination is supposed to confer on Christian teachers and preachers.

Unfortunately the increasing restriction of certain spiritual ministries to those who were officially ordained not only led to the exclusion of lay people from active participation, as we shall note shortly, but also discouraged learning. The lay person came to be thought of as untutored and incapable. It is not hard to see a parallel between the role of the layman in the Middle Ages and the role of church women in more recent centuries.

What should qualify a person for ministry? Many would say, first of all, a call to the ministry. Such questions as the nature of God's call, how one recognizes it, and the relation between the individual's inner awareness of a call and the approval of the church community are among the many issues that have been the subject of discussions over the years and still demand attention. There have been notable instances of women who were certain that God had called them, only to be rebuffed by a church or hierarchy saying that it is impossible for a woman to be called to ministry. To be sure, subjective factors enter in, as they do with men. But today's Church has to face the question of the sovereign call of God to women more realistically than it has before.

¹³Jewish scholar L. A. Hoffman writes: "In modern times, the analogy with Christian ordination has led to a search for something comparable in Jewish tradition. So scholars have built an elaborate structure of notions presumed to correspond to early ordination ceremonial. There is no evidence to support any of this." "Jewish Ordination on the Eve of Christianity," *Studia Liturgica* 13 (1979) 35. Much scholarship on this subject needs to be revised, having been based on older research. See also M. Warkentin, *Ordination: A Biblical-Historical View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

Another qualification for ministry is the divine bestowal of spiritual gifts. There is absolutely no differentiation made in Scripture between men and women in this regard. The gratuitous intrusion of male terms in English translations is to be deplored. The words "If a man's gift is prophesying" in the *NIV* translation of Rom 12:6 represent such an intrusion. No masculine term, nor any term that could be so understood, appears in the Greek. If spiritual gifts are indeed essential for ministry and if women have them, should not the burden of proof be on those who would restrict women from ministries for which God has qualified them by the bestowal of these gifts?

In summary of this section, the following question may be asked: Are the receiving of God's call and the possession of the requisite spiritual gifts, along with the necessary spiritual character, personal maturity and training, sufficient qualifications for a woman to minister?

3. *The scope of ministry.* We noted earlier that ministry in the NT is not monolithic. One advantage of the contemporary growth of multiple church staffs and team ministries is that the scope of each person's ministry can be clearly defined. This opens up the way for a woman to function, say, in a pastoral ministry even in a church where she would be barred from teaching. But the matter of scope arises also with regard to the question of teaching and authority. We have seen that the nature of ministry is not ruling but servanthood. However, do certain ministries necessarily include the exercise of authority within their scope? Specifically, does the scope of teaching always include the exercise of authority? This question is not limited to the particular wording of 1 Tim 2:12 discussed earlier. It has to do with our understanding of the teaching ministry both as portrayed in actual NT situations and in particular situations today.

Does the fact that Jesus was perceived to have taught with authority show that some, such as the scribes, taught without authority? Obviously it was not necessary to be ordained to teach, for even if Acts 13:3 describes an ordination (as some argue), Paul and Barnabas were teaching prior to that, both outside and inside the church (Acts 11:26; 13:1). Of course, as all branches of Christendom agree, Paul had apostolic authority. That authority does not automatically pass on to teachers *pro forma*, however, unless one accepts the idea of apostolic succession, the authority of bishops and, in the case of Roman Catholicism, the concept of a teaching magisterium. Even Paul himself was subjected to questioning by the Bereans. Clearly those Jewish believers accepted God's Word when they recognized it, but they did not accept it on Paul's authority. Rather, they searched the Scriptures to see if what he taught was so (Acts 17:11).

While James exercised leadership at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), the decision was made "because it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (plural, v 28). Teaching in the NT Church was not the exclusive ministry of certain classes, nor did it imply personal authority on the part of the teacher. John said that his readers had an anointing of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27). He did not rely on personal authority over them. The stress in the pastorals is on the norm of the teaching, not of the teacher. Although the verbal form describing

leadership, *proistēmi*, is used in the NT, no teacher is individually called a *prostatēs*.

As early as the time of Jesus it was apparently the custom to ask a rabbi to make a decision concerning property rights, as seen in the request made of Jesus: "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). Jesus refused to accept that judicial authority. The right to render such decisions was bestowed in later times through rabbinic ordination, as noted above. Judicial authority came to be ascribed to bishops during the Church's early history.

Edward Schillebeeckx observes that during the Middle Ages "preaching became a form of rule, *praedicatio* and *praelatio*, i.e., preacher and prelate."¹⁴ Women were restricted from preaching, yet an abbess could preach even to men within her community. He notes that in the twelfth century preaching became even further "clericalized." Not even all those who had the care of souls could preach, only the consecrated priest. "The immediate result was that someone who was not consecrated, a lay person, was declared *per se* incompetent to preach."¹⁵

This narrowing of the scope of lay ministries to exclude preaching and, conversely, the rigidifying of the scope of the ordained ministry to include and restrict preaching within the privileges of the clergy established a precedent that not even the Reformation was able to shake. It is one of the reasons why today there is so much discomfort, perhaps subconscious, over the idea of a woman preaching.

The effect of this process was to focus increasing attention on the preacher and less on the Scriptures. But for evangelicals authority is in the Word itself, not in the proclaimer of that Word. There is a subtle and dangerous shift from this basic belief among those who would elevate the authority of the teacher or preacher. When the focus begins to move from the Word to the preacher or teacher, the locus of authority gradually becomes that individual's interpretation rather than the Word itself. The insistence of the Reformers on the *sola Scriptura* principle constituted a rejection not only of tradition but of the magisterium of the Church. (Within Catholicism today there is renewed discussion on the distinction between the work of the theologians and the authority of the bishops.) Is it possible that to reject the ministry of women as teachers on the grounds that they would thereby be given authority over the Church could unwittingly embody a defection from the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*?

In summary, the scope of the teaching ministry does not include the exercise of personal authority on the part of the teacher. Another issue is whether the scope of ministry includes the celebration of the eucharist. This is an important question because from the post-apostolic period to the Reformation the celebration of the sacraments was considered within the scope of the ordained ministry and the exclusive right of that ministry. Women, largely because their monthly period was thought to render them impure, were excluded from presiding at the eucharist. Since ordination authorized the ordinand to preside over that sacrament, it was generally agreed that women could not be ordained.

¹⁴E. Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face* (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 175.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 178.

One sometimes hears that women were ordained in the early Church, but the meaning of ordination in such instances was not the same as ours.¹⁶ This position has been maintained in the Roman Catholic Church to this very day. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith stated in 1976 that women are excluded from leadership in the Church because they are excluded from presiding at the eucharist.¹⁷

While a church may understandably assign the celebration of communion to a minister for the sake of order, one would look in vain for evidence in Scripture that this right should be restricted to a minister for theological reasons. Biblically, therefore, the celebration of the Lord's supper seems not to belong to the scope of ministerial functions as much as it belongs to the entire kingdom of priests, which of course includes women. What are the implications of this? Yet in many churches women are not even allowed to pass the communion trays.

The above observations may be sufficient to raise the possibility that some ministries are denied to women because it is wrongly assumed that they contain within their scope elements or activities from which the Bible excludes them.

4. *The form of ministry.* It should be kept in mind that ministry, especially that of teaching and preaching, is a public activity. As such its form is perceived differently in different circumstances. It would be difficult to maintain that a woman in the pulpit is perceived in the same way today, when women are physicians, professors, corporation executives, and college administrators, as it was in the first century when Plutarch considered it as shameful for a woman to speak in public as it was for her to have a bare arm.¹⁸

The results of recent inquiries into the form of early Christian worship need to be applied to the issue of women's ministry. It is clear from current research in NT, Church history and social history that the earliest form of the Church was along the lines of the *oikos*, the extended household, with intermingled elements from other social configurations such as the *collegium* and the synagogue. Whatever way one may reconstruct the developing relationships between function and office, charismatic and institutional forces, prophet and elder, itinerant and resident teacher, and so forth, there was a vast difference between the mutual ministries of the early Church and our contemporary polar structure of preacher and audience. The implications of this for the form and perception of preaching are obvious.

It would help our discussions considerably if, instead of charging that schol-

¹⁶*Declaratio* of 15 October 1976, AAS 69 (1977) 98-116, cited in E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 162 n. 25 to pp. 96-97.

¹⁷Among the many recent historical and Biblical studies on the subject of the ordination of women are *The Ordination of Women: Pro and Con* (ed. M. P. Hamilton and N. S. Montgomery; New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1975); P. K. Jewett, *The Ordination of Women* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (ed. L. and A. Swidler; New York: Paulist, 1977); H. van der Meer, *Women Priests in the Catholic Church? A Theological-Historical Investigation* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1973).

¹⁸*Moralia: Advice to Bride and Groom* 31.

ars who introduce the cultural factor are minimizing Biblical commands, we all acknowledge that the form that ministry takes is inevitably to some degree a public and therefore a cultural matter. It was partly concern with public perception that led Paul to adopt methods of financial support that differed radically from those of his non-Christian contemporaries, many of whom were itinerants who combined entertainment and begging with their preaching. No passage, of course, is to be dismissed because it is culturally related. What is needed is to determine from the text the principles being taught that are to be applied appropriately to different cultures. Scripture is not culturally relative, but it is culturally relevant.

Paul's heavy use of the language of contemporary conventional morality, especially in the sections of 1 Corinthians that deal with the public participation of women, suggest that he was intensely concerned with the way women's ministry was perceived by moralistic pagan and Jewish onlookers. The message of these passages is, in my judgment, not so much the specific form that women's ministry is to take as it is the principle that the form adopted must not alienate hearers from the message of the gospel. That is in accord with the burden of the several preceding passages in 1 Corinthians that illustrate Paul's principle of being all things to all people, Jew and Gentile, in order to save some. In many parts of the Roman empire in the first century a ministry that included the public participation of women, especially without appropriate head-covering or hairdo, would have been rejected. Today a ministry that excludes the public participation of women is likely to be rejected by the people we are trying to win. While we are worrying about a *de senso*, perceived, authority being ascribed to a woman in the pulpit, visitors to our churches may be scandalized by a perception that the church demeans women. To adapt the form of our ministry with a view to reaching today's woman follows Paul's wise modification of his apostolic rights in order to identify with the Jews or Gentiles he was trying to win.

In summary, consideration of question four has shown us the importance of a theology of ministry in addressing the issue of women's ministries. "Reverse contextualization" is a useful process with regard to the nature, qualifications, scope and form of ministry. Some adaptation seems necessary in order to bring our contemporary practices closer to those of the NT Church.

V. CONCLUSION

Issues have been raised about approaches to the interpretation of Scripture and the theology of ministry that seriously affect the ministry of women. Certain assumptions, interpretations and conclusions have resulted in the needless restriction of women from ministries that are Biblically appropriate for them. The present stalemate over differences in exegesis might be transcended, at least to a degree, by rethinking our theology of ministry. Instead of focusing on restrictions, should not Christians work together in a common, positive endeavor to open new avenues of ministry to our gifted and devoted sisters in Christ?