

The Orders of Creation—Some Reflections on the History and Place of the Term in Systematic Theology

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The author is professor of systematic and historical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. In this article, he argues that the concept associated with the term “orders of creation” in current Missouri Synod discussions of the ordination of women is not Lutheran but Calvinist in origin, and not a Biblical concept.

RECENT HISTORY OF THE TERM IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD

In 1969 at its Denver convention The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod adopted the following resolve: “That the Synod adopt the following declarations as guidelines on this matter [woman suffrage]:

1. Those statements of Scripture which direct *women to keep silent in the church* and which *prohibit them to teach and exercise authority over men*, we understand to mean that *women ought not to hold the pastoral office* or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive function of this office.

2. The principles set forth in such passages, we believe, prohibit holding any other kind of office or membership on boards or committees in the institutional structures of a congregation, only if this involves women in a *violation of the order of creation.*”¹

In the preliminary study for the Denver convention on this subject prepared by the Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR),² the history of woman suffrage in the Missouri Synod is sketched from the days of Walther to the last previous synodical convention. In that historical overview the term “order of creation” does not occur until the 1956 convention at St. Paul. Previously the question of woman suffrage was answered by simple reference to the Biblical texts wherein St. Paul says that women are not to usurp authority over men and that they are to keep silent in the church. Beginning with the 1956 convention report the term “order of creation” figures prominently in the theological reasoning for continuing the Synod’s practice of no woman suffrage. From this recent tradition within the Synod the phrase at the Denver convention about violating the order of creation derives.

What does the term mean in the language of the synodical tradition? The report prepared for the St. Paul convention begins with a statement on the distinction between the two orders of creation and of redemption. The distinction between these two orders is not further specified; it is taken as self-understood. Six Biblical passages are examined. Three of them are assigned to the order of redemption (Gal. 3:26-29; 1 Cor. 12:13; and Col. 3:11). All of these proclaim the dissolution of old distinctions: Greek/Jew, slave/free, male/female. The remaining three are considered to demonstrate that St. Paul operates with a notion of the order of creation (1 Cor. 11:2-16; I Cor. 14:33-38; I Tim. 2:11-15), which order still applies to members of the body of Christ.

In discussing the order of creation the CTCR report uses the following language: “The order of redemption ought not to vitiate the proper relationship of women to men in the order of creation.” “The oneness of male and female in Christ does not obliterate the distinction given in creation.” “Woman’s subordination to man in the order of creation [is] a functional relationship, from the Creator who had chosen to structure existence along certain lines.” “Government and marriage belong to what we call the orders of creation or preservation.” “God is the Creator of certain basic relationships which keep life and society from degenerating into anarchy...and Paul’s fellow Christians in Corinth might destroy these very structures.” “Paul did not want women to upset the hierarchy of functions established at creation and especially right after the Fall.” “The subordination of a wife to her husband is part of the order of preservation.” “The apostle...[is] determined to keep his Corinthian Christians from causing wholesale disorder.” “The apostle’s conviction [is] that the church in her life ought not to undermine but to sanctify the orders of creation.” “Paul is committed to upholding the institution of matrimony as belonging to the orders of creation, where renewal is not properly accomplished by disorder and disruption but by observing and sanctifying the practice of authority on the part of the husband and subordination on the part of his spouse.” What Paul has to counter is that “Christians at Corinth believed that the gift of the Spirit must of necessity disturb the existing order.”

With reference to 1 Timothy 2 the report says “the burden of the text falls on the thought of a woman destroying the created order by getting involved in the kind of activity which would suggest a desire to lord it over men.” At this point Paul supports his position “by an argument from the sacred account of man’s creation.” “The intent of the words of Timothy is to insist that God’s order of creation is not invalidated by mankind’s fall into sin.”

In the CTCR report the term “violating” when connected with the orders of creation is used to designate what is not permissible. In order to comprehend what *violation* might entail, we must get a clear picture of what the orders of creation designate in the CTCR’s rhetoric.

It seems clear that the term is deduced from St. Paul’s own references to Adam and Eve as he himself is summarizing the data of the opening chapters of Genesis. Implicit in the report’s language is a view of God’s act of creating as an act of ordering. In the beginning God ordered the universe. He arranged the pieces of the cosmos in their places—the sun over there, the moon over here, the earth in its place, and so forth—and also gave placement to the man and the woman who live on the earth in God’s creation. But with Adam and Eve there is an additional ordering action of God perceived besides the spatial placement on the earth. These first two humans are seen by the report to be in an order of ranking with reference to each other, a placement in primordial social stratification. That is, in their common life the man and the woman relate not only locally in the same garden on the planet, but personally in terms of superordination and subordination. That is the way God made it from the very beginning, and the report affirms that this is the way God intends it to stay.

When we now bring the term “violation” into the discussion we can see one difference between the notions of spatial placement and of ranking. The sun, moon, and our planet cannot “violate” the location-placement to which the Creator has assigned them. Here the term “violate” is sense-less. But an order of ranking between the man

and the woman can indeed be violated—women can assume power and subordinate men, and men might even willingly want to be subordinated. We can visualize this “order” of rank with the picture of an organization chart with boxes—the top ones with authority over subordinate ones. Violation occurs when one refuses to stay in his box.

At this point the question must still be raised: What harm is done when this “violation” occurs? The material provided by the CTCR suggests that the harm which comes from such violation is first of all a contradiction of what God wants, since God wills from the outset that man be ranked above woman. Additional harm comes from the possibility or actuality of disruption and destruction of the very fabric of human life on the planet. The report does not carry the argument further to indicate, for example, how this would indeed occur, and leaves untouched the question about how the cosmos (and the church of Christ) would suffer disruption and destruction if a woman were to assume the preaching office in a Christian congregation. The logic that seems intended is as follows: God the Creator does not want the ranking reversed. His spokesman, St. Paul, makes that very clear. Faithful believers wish to conform to what God wants; therefore they should not reverse the ranks.

We will look again later at the fact that there is in the report no attempt to relate the question or the Pauline texts to the “truth of the Gospel,” a failure that the Lutheran confessors found fraught with danger as they saw it practiced in the exegesis of their Roman opponents in the 1530s.³

In presenting its argument against women in the pastoral office, the report does not use all of Paul’s arguments in the passages cited. Although Paul does not use such a term as “order of creation,” his references to Adam and Eve are interpreted to be such. Paul clearly concludes in his own argument with his audiences that women, even Christian women (or wives), are to remain in subordinate rank to men (or their husbands), and in the Christian gatherings at Corinth and in Timothy’s domain that means: “Silence, don’t teach, don’t exercise authority over men.”

The three texts in question yield eight reasons that Paul gave for his position:

1. Because it is shameful for a wife to speak in church.
2. Because of the angels.
3. Because even the Law says that they should be subordinate.
4. Because man was not created for woman, but woman for man.
5. Because Adam the man was chronologically first in the creation sequence.
6. Because nature itself teaches that women are to have heads covered as a sign of subordination.
7. Because man is the head of woman (or husband is the head of the wife).
8. Because woman came from man, and not vice versa—although now it is vice versa!

From these passages the CTCR report posits an order of creation that subordinates woman to man. But it does not include all the passages with all their reasoning. No reference is made to numbers 2, 4, 6, and 8. The report’s principle of selectivity is not indicated. Apparently the items selected from St. Paul are sufficient to certify the order of creation. In contrast to that order the report refers to an order of redemption, whose central quality for this question is the complete evening out of ranks among mankind. It interprets the Corinthian women to be taking their Redeemer-ordained liberation and

using it as a Christian-women's-lib resource for leveling their Creator-ordained subordination to men. The report says Paul understands the subordination status to endure; the order of redemption has not abrogated it.

The report goes on to acknowledge that our synodical fathers used to deny women suffrage because of these Biblical passages, and it cites American social structure at the time as a contributory factor for the fathers coming to that exegetical conclusion. But then it acknowledges that the *because* connection which our fathers saw can no longer be drawn as they did it, namely, the fathers' line of reasoning from these passages to a particular parish practice is no longer tenable. The conclusion lies very close to the surface that the CTCR report is not using all eight of Paul's *because*s for the selfsame reason. "Because of the angels" or "because covered heads show subordination" simply carry no compelling weight as lines of argument. Yet St. Paul in no way indicates that some of his *because*s are inferior in rank to others, nor that any one of them (for example, the covered heads) would be more or less passé just because the times had changed.⁴

Since the days of Walther it was not the line of argument that was the mark of orthodoxy; it was instead the doctrinal conclusions. But with reference to the question at hand, what is "line of argument" and what is "doctrinal conclusions"? The report views order of creation as a doctrinal conclusion and finds enough of Paul's supportive reasoning compelling, even if others of his reasons are opaque or unpersuasive. Thus we must return to the term "order" and unpack some of its meanings.

SOME OTHER MEANINGS OF THE WORD "ORDER"

The term "order" in our common language has several meanings. One is the notion of "rank" that characterizes the CTCR report's usage when it talks about the order of creation. I have compared that notion of order with an organization chart. One might also be a bit more folksy and talk about the batting order of a baseball team. Somebody is first, and then someone else follows in sequence. Disorder occurs when someone refuses to stay ranked in his slot.

We have another notion of order in mind when we say that everything is *in order* for the baseball game to get started. That notion of order means that everybody is at their appropriate place: pitcher, catcher, fielders, umpires, batter, and so forth. And even more—certain "things" are appropriately placed: the pitcher has the ball, the batter has a bat, the base bags are in place, the foul lines are marked, and so on. Here the word "order" designates the factual placement of people and things in an actually existing configuration of relationships. Disorder exists when the placements are disrupted—for example, the catcher standing behind first base, or the third baseman standing next to the pitcher's mound. But there is no ranking of the placements—the shortstop is not subordinate to the center fielder.

We have a third notion of order in mind when we talk about giving "orders." Here order is a command. Think of a policeman with a whistle blowing at a busy traffic intersection, or of the umpire back at the ball game with his: "Play ball! You're out! Get out of the ball park!" With the umpire and the traffic officer, order is not a factual state of localized placement nor a sequential ranking hierarchically or chronologically, but instead a directive, namely, the demand that certain actions under certain circumstances be followed—"When I blow the whistle, you stop. If you want to make a

left turn, you must wait until approaching traffic is out of the way.” With this order one is drawn into a configuration—neither of placement nor of rank, but one of “thou-shalts” or “thou-shalt-nots.” Disorder here is to take action contrary to the traffic law and traffic “order.”

SOME EARLIER HISTORY OF THE TERM “ORDERS OF CREATION”

We have already noted that the CTCR report in its historical review of the woman suffrage issue in the Missouri Synod does not use the term “order of creation” prior to the 1956 synodical convention. The term has no substantial history in the Synod prior to that time. The mid-1950s mark the wide-scale entry of the term into the Synod. A key factor was the 1955 publication by Concordia Publishing House of Fritz Zerbst’s *The Office of Woman in the Church* in English translation.⁵

Zerbst, a Lutheran theologian in Austria, wrote the book during World War II to address the emergency situation of parishes vacated by clergymen going off to war. He uses the terms “order of creation” and “order of redemption” throughout the book to develop a theological framework and a rhetoric that has subsequently become the tradition in the Synod for such discussions. Since he gives no references to other sources from which he drew this schema of contrasting *orders*, it may well be his own theologoumenon.

It is clear in his work that Zerbst thinks he is in harmony with the Lutheran tradition, but curiously enough he only cites Luther twice—and that for rather weak support of his position.⁶ The theologian from the 16th century who is cited over and over again is John Calvin. It is from Calvin that Zerbst gets his crucial quote about an “order” at the time of “creation” “subordinating women” generically to men.⁷ Yet even these citations from Calvin might be of little import were it not for the over-arching Calvinism that shapes Zerbst’s mode of exegesis and, above all, his notions of redemption and of the will of God. Apparently no significant voice in the Synod at that time took umbrage at this departure from Lutheranism, and Zerbst’s Crypto-Calvinism (which was actually not “crypto” at all) moved toward becoming the Synod’s public position on the subject.

In the synodical literature before the 1950s there is one reference to the term “order of creation” in Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*, namely, in the general issue of woman’s subordination in his treatment of theological anthropology. Interestingly enough the German term he uses is not “Schöpfungsordnung” but “Schöpferordnung.”⁸ Although the English translation renders this as “order of creation,” it would be better as “Creator’s order.”

It is interesting that Pieper’s term is the same one that the supposed “father” of the notion, Adolph von Harless, used. Harless was apparently the first man to put the terms “creator,” “creation,” and “order” together in the mid-19th century. However, he did not speak of *Schöpfungsordnung*, the term currently used in German theological discussion, but of *Schöpferordnung*.⁹ Regardless of how Pieper received this term, it was relatively insignificant in those days, for no controversy accompanied. He may have picked it up accidentally from Harless via C. F. W. Walther, who was quite partial to Harless’ book on ethics.¹⁰

To talk about the *Creator's* order rather than the *creation's* order may seem picayune. But in Harless's rhetoric it designated the present-tense ordering whereby God the Creator has created me. Thus the notion of order is not that of the organization chart of rankings, nor that of the traffic cop, but of the factual placement on the baseball field.

In Harless's *Christliche Ethik* the orders of the Creator are designated as "the basis in reality for all human relationships in the world."¹¹ They are the factually present givens in which the Christian life achieves concretion. He calls them "the substantive qualifications in which a man finds himself existing.... They are bestowed in God's creating of a man. It is not the law that first makes them realities, nor do they disappear with the coming of the Gospel."¹² In sum, Harless sees the Creator's orders as the substantive givens that make up a person's specific biography.

The work of Emanuel Hirsch¹³ and Robert Schultz¹⁴ draws attention to Harless's own extensive reading in Luther's theology for the decisive marks of his own theology. Whether or not this notion of Creator's order comes from his reading of Luther, I have not yet been able to show, but the substance of his position is parallel to what Luther designates with the terms "weltliche" or "goetliche" or "natuerliche Ordnung."

The explanation of the First Article of the Creed in Luther's Small Catechism is a classic expression of such localized specific placement "ordained" or "given" a person by the Creator. Perhaps the word "Ordnung" would be better translated into English with the verbal form "ordain." This makes it easier to get to the present-tense character of the notion of the Creator's order, as well as the personal quality involved in one's understanding that God has put him on earth in a particular place, with particular parents, in a particular century, as a member of a particular race and community or a particular language group or a national state, with a particular economic order, particular siblings, and so on. This is what God has ordained for him.

The same notion persists in the catechism's questions for self-examination: "Here consider your station (*Stand* in German) according to the Ten Commandments whether you are father, mother, son, daughter, householder, wife, employee...." In Luther's rhetoric, *Ordnung*, *Stand*, and even *Beruf* are interchangeable.¹⁵ They all designate placement. But with the word *Beruf* an additional element is brought into the picture of what God is doing via the orders of creation.

Beruf means calling. In the language of the Lutheran Reformation this does not refer to what a person does for a living, but it designates the multitude of placements (as son or daughter, sibling, parent, spouse, citizen, teacher), where God calls a person to be His servant. Here one is to live out the commandment to love his neighbor and is to be God's faithful person in all of the different ordainings God has made for him in his unique life.

What about possible "violations" of the orders of creation? Actually one can hardly violate the orders of creation as local placements! I cannot escape being male. I cannot escape being white. I cannot escape the fact that my particular mother and my particular father have given me my genetic heritage. To talk about violating these orders of creation is senseless. Violation might come into the picture on the one hand in terms of attempts to destroy the larger web of relationships, and on the other, if one refuses to be God's servant in all of His ordainings. And that, of course, occurs day in and day out. But at this point *order* is not being understood as creaturely placement; it is rather the other notion of being under orders, God's thou shalt, and not obeying them.

In the history of 20th century European theology the notion of orders was sharply criticized by the school of Karl Barth, precisely because the Barthians heard the Lutherans who used this notion saying that they could detect moral mandates from God from existing social and political configurations. Thus the Barthians rejected the notion of “order of creation” because they understood “order” in terms of the model of the traffic cop. Order was expected to provide revelation from God, an ethical revelation of God’s will. The situation was complicated by the fact that some were imprecise in their use of the term, as Werner Elert remarks in his book *The Christian Ethos*.¹⁶ If the European discussion needed to be clarified by focusing away from the traffic-cop image to the baseball-field image, as Elert does so brilliantly in *The Christian Ethos*, then in our Synod the needed refocusing is away from the organization-chart notion to the baseball-field image.

The Creator’s order is a person’s “fate” in the sense of the givens of his creaturely existence. The lasting quality of the orders is not that every person always has the same fatedness. Thus it is not true that all women, for example, are subordinate to any and all men; but the immutability of one’s being a man consists in the fact what is his fatedness as a male cannot be altered. Some of the orders into which one comes (factual bonds of relatedness and placement toward other people and things—for example, the Good Samaritan’s “accidental” encounter with the victim along the road) are not permanent. They come and pass away. But as long as these temporary ordainings by the Creator last, they become fateful givens of one’s ongoing biography; they are additional placements in which God calls a person to be His servant for the moment in that particular station. The element of discomfort, the ominous quality implied by the word “fate” need fuller explication. This comes when we draw the theological connection between order(s) of creation and God’s law.

ORDER OF CREATION AND GOD’S LAW

When one specifies the *Creator’s* order (*Schopfferordnung* and not *Schöpfungsordnung*) as the central term of the discussion, one is driven to the question: What is the Creator doing in these orders, these ordainings?

One of the Creator’s operations has been implied above without concretely naming it. The first thing the Creator is doing is keeping creation going as He ordains this and that placement for all human creatures. The orders preserve the given creation and bring new creatures into existence. God does not merely preserve the first creation He sponsored in Genesis 1, but continues to be the Creator who (in the 20th century) has “made me and all creatures” now existing.

But there is more. These creaturely placements and the larger webs of relatedness become the vehicles for God’s evaluation of me. The orders are the places and the vehicles for God’s critical judgment of my existence in His placements. In his explanation of the First Article of the Creed in the Large Catechism, Luther notes that it is these very givens of one’s creaturely placement which are the instruments for a person’s executing his sinfulness, and “therefore this article would humble and terrify us all if we believed it.”¹⁷ The orders of creation become the courtroom, if not even the prosecuting attorneys in God’s operation of criticism. Other human beings into whose life I am ordered also become God’s critics of me—criticizing me for not being the sort

of husband I should be, or the kind of father, or the kind of teacher to my students, or the kind of son to my own father. Criticism leveled against me from these spokesmen is not *ipso facto* the Creator's criticisms, but often enough I know that it is indeed.

According to Reformation theology there is a twofold use of the Law, *duplex usus legis*. "How does the Law relate to the orders? The two can hardly be in any competitive relationship with each other since both constitute 'God's will' for us. The distinction consists rather first of all formally in that the orders as such are voiceless organs of the divine will, while the Law speaks that will to us. The Law is God's *Word* to us. It addresses us everywhere that we encounter God's Word as *demand*."¹⁸

The concrete forms which such demands take arise inescapably from the very placements in which a person stands, and even if he should manage to stand blameless in one of the particular placements in relationship with some particular person, *vis-à-vis* the Creator Himself, the Law always accuses him, *lex semper accusat*. "God's law tells us that we are guilty before Him even when we have been steadfast within the natural orders, even when we have not broken them in the eyes of people. It demands the total person for his Creator and Lord. And it demands simultaneously that he be totally for his neighbor (Luke 10:27). It shows us that *this* demand is never fulfilled via a sum of individual acts of obedience...nor via our refraining from breaking any individual orders. It obligates us to these orders, because the existence that God has ordained for us takes place there. But it simultaneously transcends them by revealing to us what guilt we still have before God when we use our loving actions in the natural orders to give security to our own earthly existence. Thus God's law always leads back to the same point. It testifies to us the reality of that Judge before whom no one is innocent."¹⁹

The ramifications of the relationship between Law and the Creator's orders require fuller exposition than the brief paragraphs above. Yet the point to be emphasized here is that the critical work that the Creator executes on a sinner is such an ordered procedure that operates in the creation by virtue of the Creator's action. In the face of the totality of the Creator's demand "thou shalt," every sinner is caught ("stuck," placed) in that order of the Creator designated by St. Paul as "the law of sin and death." It is not accidental that the first place where a wife's rank is made explicit in the Old Testament, where she is assigned to subordination to her husband ("He shall rule over you"), is an action of critical judgment on the part of God the Creator. (Gen. 3.16)

In its own operation that criticism too is an order of creation. The "law of sin and death" is an equation that inevitably works itself out on sinners. We have it from our Lord Himself that not one iota or comma of that equation will change until heaven and earth pass away, until all is accomplished (Matt. 5.18). But of course, *mirabile dictum*, it is precisely this critical order of creation, the law of sin and death, which is broken in the redemption wrought by Christ. Talk about violating an order of creation! There's violation par excellence—and from the Creator Himself! There is no condemning criticism (from God!) for sinners who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8.1 ff.). What does this say about the orders and their immutability or violability?

THE MUTABILITY OF THE ORDES OF CREATION

When orders of creation are conceived as the localized placements assigned to a person by the Creator, mutability is almost obvious, especially when that person

compares their placements with those of any other person. Furthermore, mutability is evident in the larger webs into which his placements position him. In his *Morphologie* Elert shows how central this notion of mutability was to Luther's thought.²⁰ "For Luther...the order of *creation* is by no means in every respect an inflexible entity."²¹ How relativistic Luther is his thought about the concrete shape of all 'stations' and 'orders!' Not only are the forms of states mutable and transient, but even within the same state the operational law of the land is in the process of living evolution, to say nothing about the necessary changes in economic life, mores, and social stratification."²²

Without making Melanchthon the whipping boy for the notion of static boxes on an organizational chart, Elert shows that because of his interest in an ideal utopian society based on models from the humanists of antiquity Melanchthon was hard pressed not to have the orders become the permanent boxes of creation. In this regard the great theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy, Gerhard and Quenstedt, followed in Melanchthon's train and not Luther's. Perhaps these two theologians are the missing link for the Missouri Synod's heritage of a notion of the orders of creation that makes them resemble the boxes in an organizational chart, even though the technical term comes from Harless.

Because the orders as trans-individual patterns and configurations of a whole society are historical entities, they are subject to the "law" (that is, the Creator's law) of historical change. Cannot the same also be said about the pattern of relationship between the sexes from one age to another? In St. Paul's day it appears that womanly subordination was the Creator's order (societal placement). Today it is obvious that there has been *some* change since St. Paul's time and place in this cultural phenomenon. If the Creator has continued to be the Creator during the intervening years, why cannot we admit that the present growing "equality" station of women is a work of the Creator? Into what placement is God putting women now? He is not placing them into a societal web of subordination—at least not in the Western world—nor is He placing the males into a superordinate ranking. It is in this situation of equalization of ranks that men and women are called to be God's kind of men and women. How did such a change arise? Historians and sociologists can chronicle some of the factors in the metamorphosis. Should Christians not expect that one of the abetting factors in the West may well have been Christians living their "life under the Gospel" in the two millennia of the Gospel's history in the Western world? The CTCR report is chary about acknowledging that the "order of redemption" can bring about concrete changes in the "orders or creation," but is that perhaps not a sign of weak faith, rather than of theological precision? A sweeping generalization about all orders of creation will be of little help to anyone. Yet in the particular placement of women in Western society the new order of God's Gospel has surely helped to shape some of the changes.

"VIOLATING" THE ORDERS OF CREATION

The clear consequence of the Gospel is that the orders of creation are nonpermanent. Eventually they will pass away with "heaven and earth," when "all has been accomplished." But the apostolic conclusion is not that Christians should therefore start to junk the orders. And for good reason—life under the Gospel this side of the resurrection is life "in" the orders; they make life factually possible in the first place. The call to faith in the Gospel in no way calls a person to escape the localized placements in

which the Creator has positioned him. The primary orders of one's life are inviolable in the first place—one's parentage, race, historical location, and so forth. One cannot "violate" the physical facticity of these orders, although one may be violent in the way one lives out one's life in the various webs and thus "violate" the relational aspect of them in what one does to the others with whom one occupies the same "baseball field." But with such action one still does not "violate" the critical order of God. In fact with such action one may trigger the critical operation of the Creator's order.

It is the Creator's order that sinners are criticized and retributed for their sinfulness in the very locations where they live out their sinner-existence. But it is precisely at this point in the Creator's order that the violation par excellence occurs. This order of the Creator is "violated" by the Christian Gospel. The redemptive work of Jesus Christ "violates" (and for Biblically conscious Christians that is not too strong a word) the valid critical order of God that sinners should get their condemning come-uppance. It is the work of Christ that He took upon Himself our sinner's come-uppance, and we are forgiven sinners. That is the most incredible violation of God's order imaginable, and its incredibility grows the more a person has within himself a sharpened moral consciousness. It is that surprising violation of God's own order with sinners which constitutes St. Paul's marvel at the "mystery" of the Gospel and the incredible surprise that God was performing in Christ. (Rom. 8, 11; 2 Cor. 5; Eph. 1-3)

The church has been brought into existence by this act of violation. One favored New Testament term for it is "scandal." If the church is mandated by its Lord to continue His ministry, then at the very heart of the church's ministry will be precisely this kind of "violating" of this order of creation.

Though other arguments have been advanced against women being ordered (ordained) in the pastoral office, here we ask only, "What order would this violate?" Surely not the order of womanly subordination, for if we take our cue from Luther, then in our time and place God Himself has already brought about equalizing changes in the "weltliche, natürliche" placement of the sexes toward one another. If the current order of the Creator is already changed—and changing—though that might be debated by some, then women are not "violating" their creaturely placement in the exercise of the pastoral office. Not in principle, at least. The calling of church people is to use this current order of creation to the glory of God in the ministry of the Gospel, to make sure that that critical order of the Creator is countered by His own mysterious means—the proclamation of the Gospel. The chief concern of church leaders is to see to it that the Gospel is not violated, and then to let the Gospel do its own violating with Christ's own authority behind it.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ON THE ORDERS OF CREATION IN MISSOURI SYNOD THEOLOGY

A. It seems to the present writer that the CTCR report has not yet done all that needs to be done. It has not done what must be done with every issue of doctrine or practice—that is, to connect the issue to the Gospel itself and then draw the consistent conclusions. What we have received is a first step; amassing some Bible passages that seem to speak to the subject, and then connecting the issue with the apparent Biblical doctrine (order of creation) to show that women are not to be admitted to the pastoral

office. This first step becomes a disservice unless the issue is connected further to the *doctrina evangelii* itself. And that connection, I suggest, would change the conclusions. To date the discussion in the Missouri Synod has not dealt with this as far as I can tell.

B. Is it fair to draw an analogy between the current hubbub over women in the pastoral office and the problem of the Judaizers in the early apostolic church? When wrestling theologically with this issue in his letter to the Galatians, Paul acknowledges that all of the tradition (including that which has tremendous force in his own life, psyche, and personal heritage, even his own theology) seems to speak for the Judaizer's position ("To be a son of the Abrahamic covenant people you must be circumcised. God Himself said so."). And yet when the issue is consciously and concretely put face to face with the "truth of the Gospel," the Judaizing position is untenable.

C. The CTCR report, in this writer's judgment, needs attention yet in two areas. First, it clearly speaks in the tradition of Melancthon's boxes, not of Luther's placements. A second weakness is that it does not wish to allow the Gospel's new order to effect some change in the old orders of creation, even though at center the Gospel makes the most radical change of all in the old order by forgiving sinners.

D. Is the issue of women in the pastoral office *doctrinal* at all? If so, then according to the Lutheran Confessional heritage it must be capable of connection with the Gospel, and it must be shown that violence is done to the Gospel when women are admitted to the pastoral Office. This does not yet mean that they must be admitted to that office. Instead it is my point to say that the question seems to be a practical and not a doctrinal one. And as a *practical* question it is not necessarily the question whether women may be ordained to the pastoral office. Might we not phrase it thus: To which of the many professional ministerial roles in the church (Eph 4.11 ff) might women be "ordered" in our time and in our land? What is the best Christian wisdom about how the Lord of the church would be served in 1972 if this were done in our Christian fellowship? Are there any grounds for expecting the Lord of the church to be offended by such action? If so, then we should be able to see how it violates the "truth of the Gospel," how faith in God's promise is undermined by the action. Can such violation be shown?

E. A variation on the above would say: "If the Lord of creation is continuing His work as Creator here and now, then any consideration of the order(s) of creation in the Lutheran sense must take a hard look at the realities of life in the United States in 1972. For this is the time and place where God is doing His creational ordaining for and to us. The orders of *our* creation on this issue now are not to be seen in the ostensible ranking of male and female in Genesis 1-3, but in the particular placement where God has placed us. That does not mean turning one's back on Genesis, but like the catechisms, it means asking the Genesis questions of God's creative work with us.

F. I suspect that my male ego would have as many hang-ups as the most convinced opponent might have at the prospect of being ministered to by a woman pastor, and that might be sufficient practical grounds for not taking the step in church practice now. But the only *theological* explanation I can find for this personal discomfort on my part is not any compelling word flowing from God's law or His Gospel. It lies, I suspect, rather in the binding nature of my past tradition. Is it fair to draw the analogy here to the binding force of Jewish tradition for the Judaizing Christians? If that is so, then I need liberation; I need the Gospel to set me free; I need to have my bondage "violated" by the freedom wherewith Christ sets us free. I need His promise fulfilled for

this as yet ancient element of my old Adam, His promise to me: “Behold I make all things new!”

G. I suppose I should remind the reader of what I have tried to prove in this article. I have limited myself to examining the argument against the ordination of women based on the concept of order(s) of creation. In my judgment, it seems improper for Lutherans to use this argument. I have not tried to canvass all other reasons advanced for or against ordination of women. Perhaps further study might persuade me to change my mind. For the time being, my concern is that we relate the issue to the Gospel.

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¹ *Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (Denver, CO; July 11-18, 1969), p. 88 (italics added).

² “Woman Suffrage in the Church,” *Convention Workbook* (for the 48th regular convention of the Missouri Synod), pp. 514-522.

³ Cf. Edward Schroeder, “Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?” in *The Lively Function of the Gospel*, ed. R. W. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), pp. 81-97.

⁴ In the 1970s uncovered heads betoken nothing about subordination or insubordination. May the same be said about a woman speaking the Gospel to a Christian congregation in the seventies? If no preacher assumes his office by “seizing the pulpit,” but by being “regularly called,” does subordination or insubordination even enter the picture in our day when men and women listen to a woman speaker?

⁵ From correspondence with some of the members of the 1956 committee that made the study I learned the following: (Prof. Fred Kramer) “I can tell you how the matter of the orders of creation got into our studies. It came in via Zerbst’s book entitled *The Office of Women in the Church*. It was written in Europe, in German, and translated by Prof. Merkens, at that time a member of the St. Louis faculty. He discusses orders of creation and also...orders of redemption.” Prof. Albert Merken was also a member of the 1956 study committee. Kramer adds: “I believe that the concept penetrated into the Missouri Synod particularly through Werner Elert, but just possibly Zerbst hit more of us than Elert did.” As I shall see to show below, Elert’s use of the concept does not follow the notion of orders as hierarchical ranking, which apparently made its entrance into the Synod via Zerbst. Elert continues the Erlangen tradition of orders that Harless initiated. From another committee member came the following: (Prof. Victor Bartling) “I am not aware of any previous use of the term in our synodical literature.”

⁶ Zerbst’s two chief Luther references, cited pp. 96-98, are WA 8, 497 f. and 10 III, 170 f., and they do not really support this theological contention. In the former Luther lumps women together with children and mental defectives and thus rules them out of the

pastoral office for reasons of intellectual incompetence. The issue is not a violation of the order of creation. Later in the citation he mentions numerous Biblical instances wherein women did exercise a public office of proclaiming the Gospel. Luther's comment here is that this procedure is not to be imitated if males are around and competent to do the job. "Wann aber kein Mann predigest, so ware es von Noten, dass die Weiber predigten." Once more no reference to an order of creation. In the second Luther citation Luther allows that Christian women have the obligation to proclaim the Gospel, but St. Paul's admonition for doing things "decently and in order" restricts this practice to men. Once more there is no grounding of the practice in an order of creation.

⁷ Zerbst, *Office of Woman*, p. 98. Calvin quotes passim, e. t., pp. 34 f., 53 f., 66.

⁸ *Christliche Dogmatik*, I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), p. 267. Engl. trans. P. 524. Just how unimportant the term was at that time is signaled by the fact that it is nowhere listed in the 1,000-plus page index for Pieper's dogmatics prepared by Albrecht.

⁹ *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, V (3rd ed.), 1892.

¹⁰ "For this branch of theological study [ethics] Dr. Harless has without a doubt not only given us the best from among all the younger theologians, but he has also surpassed all his own previous accomplishments in his *Christliche Ethik*, 4th edition, 1849." C. F. W. Walther, "Lutherisch-theologische Pfarrers-Bibliothek," in *Lehre und Wehre*, III (Sept. 1857), pp. 269-272.

¹¹ Adolph von Harless, *Christliche Ethik*, 6th ed. (Stuttgart, 1864), p. 477.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹³ Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuere evangelischen Theologie*, V (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1949-1954), p. 418.

¹⁴ Robert Schultz, *Gesetz und Evangelium in der lutherischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1958), pp. 98 ff.

¹⁵ See Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, II, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1952), pp. 37-79.

¹⁶ Trans. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), pp. 77-81.

¹⁷ *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 413.

¹⁸ Werner Elert, *Blut und Boden* (Leipzig: Dorfling und Franke, 1934), p. 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35 f.

²⁰ *Morphologie*, II, pp. 49-67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 52.